

# DISABILITY RIGHTS NEW JERSEY

ADVANCING JUSTICE. ADVOCATING INCLUSION.

GWEN ORLOWSKI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Disability Rights NJ Report to State Rehabilitation Council

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Reporting Period: 01.01.2026 – 03.31.2026

Prepared by: Gwen Orłowski, Executive Director

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## Brief introduction of CAP

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) at Disability Rights NJ (DRNJ) provides legal advocacy and education to people with disabilities applying for or receiving services funded by the Rehabilitation Act, including vocational rehabilitation. CAP also provides legal advocacy and education about Title I (employment rights) of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

This report reflects the 2026 goals and objectives for DRNJ CAP services to ensure equitable access to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services for VR applicants and recipients by providing self-advocacy assistance, limited legal assistance, and extended legal assistance as well as education emphasizing individual plan for employment (IPE) development, informed choice, and access to appeal rights. We also educate policymakers about access to VR services and engage in systemic advocacy including participation in State Rehabilitation Councils.

## CAP Goals and Objectives:

Goal 2: Protect the rights of children and adults with disabilities to access services, supports, and resources needed to be fully integrated into the community.

### A. Employment

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Provide self-advocacy assistance, limited legal assistance, extended legal assistance, and education to applicants and recipients of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services with a focus on rights to VR services, individual plan for employment (IPE) development, informed choice, and access to appeal rights.

## Individual Client Representation:

- Carry Over from FY 2026 1<sup>st</sup> quarter: 6 clients/6 SRs
- Opened: 5 clients/5 SRs
- Closed: 4 clients/4 SRs
- Carry Over into FY 2026 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter: 4 clients/4 SRs

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- Non-Case (Technical Assistance): 1 client
- Non-Case (Information & Referral): 1 client

#### Systemic Issue:

This quarter we wrote to Dr. Felicia Hopson and Dr. Bernice Davis concerning the State’s vocational rehabilitation appeal process. We highlighted a significant discrepancy in the treatment of Initial Agency Decisions and Final Agency Decisions by both agencies. Using examples of cases that have been impacted by this discrepancy, we explained that the lack of alignment in the appeals process has created substantial confusion for clients of both agencies, administrative law judges, and even the Appellate Division. We requested that DVRS and CBVI align their regulations and internal policies with the relevant law and issue new regulations and policy guidance explaining the appeals process, including the treatment of Final Agency Decisions. (Letter Attached)

#### Examples of Client cases closed in the 2nd quarter:

- Disability Rights NJ represented a 36-year-old female resident of Middlesex County diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder and depression. The client was seeking assistance concerning a denial by DVRS for financial sponsorship for an advanced degree to allow her to pursue executive and leadership positions in her organization. The rationale provided by DVRS in denying funding was that the advanced degree was not a “necessity but a preference.” We wrote to DVRS referencing the specific federal regulation that prohibit state VR agencies from making arbitrary decisions. We explained that the federal regulations are explicit in stating that VR agencies must permit exceptions so that the vocational needs of individuals are addressed. We advised DVRS that WIOA requires VR agencies to assist individuals with disabilities to prepare for, obtain, retain, and advance in the same high-quality jobs and high-demand careers as individuals without disabilities. DVRS maintained that an advanced degree was not necessary for the client to advance in her career. We reviewed the denial notice DVRS issued at our request and informed DVRS that the letter contained inaccuracies and failed to include the client’s full appeal rights. In response, DVRS amended the notice and included the client’s appeal rights.
- Disability Rights NJ provided technical assistance to the parent of a 21-year-old male diagnosed with autism concerning problems securing transportation services from DVRS. We advised the parent to contact the supervisor or manager of their local DVRS office, and if unsuccessful to contact DVRS Central Office and request to speak with the Field Chief assigned to that office. We advised the parent to call us back if the matter was not resolved and provided the parent with a copy of our publication, *Navigating Your Rights to Vocational Rehabilitation Services*.

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- **OBJECTIVE 2:** Educate policymakers about access to VR services, outreach to increase awareness of the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) and engage in systemic advocacy.

Disability Rights NJ attends regular meetings with the State Rehabilitation Councils, providing information and updates on activities and systemic concerns that have been identified through our work.

### **Outreach/Education/Training:**

Staff from DRNJs Richard West Assistive Technology Advocacy Center (ATAC) hosted the webinar, Get Ready: "What AT Are Colleges Using Now?". Students with disabilities preparing for college benefit from learning about the types of assistive technology typically used in college. This information is also helpful for teachers, child study teams, families, vocational counselors, and others assisting students with disabilities transitioning from high school. The assistive technology that was covered focused on reading, writing, time management and organization. Information provided served as a guide on how to use the tools highlighted to prepare for a variety of needs in college courses and when studying. 44 people registered for this webinar and the recorded session was uploaded to the agency's YouTube channel.

DRNJs resources were disseminated at the Congregation Beth El Disability Awareness & Inclusion Fair event. Information about the agency's programs and services, voting, CAP, Navigating VR, and AT were provided. Approximately 50 individuals with disabilities, family members and professionals attended this event.

- **OBJECTIVE 3:** Educate policymakers for an end to subminimum wage and for equitable access to competitive, integrated employment for people with disabilities.

We continue to monitor S4004, a bill regarding extended employment as we have serious concerns about the changes this bill proposes and the negative impact it would have on individuals with disabilities. We are also monitoring developments in other states which have passed legislation that has or will end the practice of sub-minimum wages.

### E. Education and Transition Services for Youth

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Provide self-advocacy assistance, limited legal assistance, and education to promote greater involvement of youth with disabilities between the ages of 14-21 in transition planning and obtaining appropriate transition services from school districts and/or VR agencies. Educate policymakers and collaborate with partners to ensure youth have timely access to transition services.

### **Outreach/Education/Training:**

DRNJ staff distributed resources about the agency's programs and services at the Spring Resource Fair hosted by Burlington County Special Services School Transition Campus with an

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emphasis on information about assistive technology, transition, voting, CAP, VR services and ASPYIR. There were 65 vendors and 150 families in attendance.

DRNJ staff distributed resources at the Somerset County Transition Fair hosted by Caregivers of New Jersey and Family Resource Network. Information about DRNJ programs and services, including CAP, assistive technology, education and the ASPYIR transition tool were shared. Approximately 25 individuals with disabilities attended the event.

Disability Rights New Jersey resources were disseminated at the Greater Brunswick Charter School Resource and Transition Fair. Information about our programs and services, transition including the ASPYIR tool, CAP, navigating VR, and AT were provided. The event was attended by approximately 40 high school students with disabilities and their families.

The Assistive Technology Advocate from DRNJ's ATAC team presented to members of the North Jersey Transition Partnership about DRNJ programs and services, including information about transition, ASPYIR and AT. During the presentation, the ASPYIR Transition Tool was highlighted and how to effectively utilize APYIR to assist transition-aged students. The North Jersey Transition Partnership is comprised of transition coordinators from multiple school districts and agencies working with individuals with disabilities in Northern New Jersey. Fourteen (14) professionals attended the presentation.

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