

Disability Rights NJ Report to State Rehabilitation Council

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Reporting Period: 10.01.2025 – 12.31.2025

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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 clients 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 2025 4th quarter: 9 clients/9 SRs
- Opened: 6 clients/6 SRs
- Closed: 9 clients/9 SRs
- Carry over into FY 2026 1st quarter: 6 clients/ 6 SRs

Examples of Client cases closed in the 1st quarter:

Disability Rights NJ represented a 49-year-old woman diagnosed with blindness concerning a denial by CBVI for AI wearable glasses, which the client needed to complete environmental field work for the graduate degree she is pursuing. In addition, CBVI was asking the client to sign documents, including IPE's she had not had an opportunity to review, and providing financial sponsorship for the graduate program that did not meet the cost of the program. We ordered and reviewed documentation from the client's CBVI case file and based on our findings wrote to CBVI regarding the service deficits we observed in service provision citing the relevant federal regulation. These deficits included a denial of assistive technology without assessing the client's rehabilitation needs; failure to provide documents in an accessible format; and failure to inform the client that as an SSDI beneficiary she was not required to contribute to the cost of the VR services in her IPE. We attended a meeting with CBVI and the client to explain CBVI's responsibility to provide services based on the client's individual vocational rehabilitation needs. CBVI subsequently authorized AI glasses following an assessment and confirmed any document provided to the client would be in an accessible format. CBVI approved financial sponsorship for the client's master's degree for academic year 2025 – 2026, based on the school's graduate fee schedule and documented these services in an amended IPE.

Disability Rights NJ represented a 44-year-old man diagnosed with bi-polar concerning the transfer of his DVRS case file to an alternate DVRS office. We also represented the client concerning delays in the eligibility determination. The client contacted CAP after he had been unsuccessful in accessing vocational training from the DVRS office for over two years. When he reapplied for services, DVRS delayed the eligibility determination beyond the 60-day deadline. We requested and reviewed documentation from the client's DVRS file which confirmed the client's account of service delays and his statements that his working relationship with the assigned DVRS office was vocationally unproductive. The documentation also confirmed that despite the client's status as an SSDI beneficiary the DVRS office had not made an eligibility determination within the required 60-day timeframe. The reason provided by DVRS for the delay was that the client had not provided confirmation that he was in a mental health treatment program. We wrote to DVRS and explained that the client had not consented to an extension of the eligibility determination timeline as required by 34 C.F.R. § 361.41(b). We also explained that neither the federal regulations; the New Jersey Administrative Code (N.J.A.C. 12:45); nor the DVRS *Case Services Policy Manual* provide that the eligibility determination can be delayed beyond the 60-day deadline while the VR office determines whether an applicant is in treatment. At the client's request, we asked the DVRS office to transfer the client's case file to an alternate DVRS office. We were initially informed by DVRS that this was not possible because the client had to reside in the same county as the office where they receive services. When DVRS did not provide a policy to support this position we escalated this matter to the assigned DVRS field chief who authorized the transfer of the client's case file to an alternate DVRS office.

Disability Rights NJ represented a 27-year-old woman diagnosed with anxiety, TBI, visual

impairment and vestibular migraines concerning revisions to her IPE. The revisions were necessary because the vision therapy vendor documented on her IPE failed to complete the administrative processes necessary to remain a registered vendor with the State of New Jersey. We intervened in this case when DVRS indicated they may not be able to move forward with an alternate vendor. We requested and reviewed documentation from the client's DVRS case file and represented her at two virtual DVRS meetings. DVRS agreed to pay for vision therapy services with a new vendor provided the vendor agreed to accept payment through the DVRS voucher system and complete the NJSTART registration process. The client is presently working with DVRS and the new vendor to complete the registration process.

Disability Rights NJ represented a 33-year-old man diagnosed with a learning disability by assisting the client access to appropriate DVRS services. The client, who has a bachelor's degree in business administration, worked as a city carrier assistant for the USPS but found this role too physically and mentally demanding. He contacted DVRS in January 2025 to request assistance finding a more appropriate job. DVRS determined him eligible in March and sent him an IPE with the employment goal of postal worker. The client reminded DVRS that he did not want to work for the post office and wanted to change the employment goal on the IPE to pursue a career in project management. The counselor advised the client that the IPE was to reflect his current job status as a postal worker. When the client refused to sign the IPE and advised the counselor to close his case, the counselor revised the IPE to include the employment goal of administrative services manager. However, the IPE included no services, other than counseling and guidance to assist the client achieve the employment goal documented on the IPE. In September at the request of the client the counselor authorized preplacement job coach services. The client contacted CAP in mid-November when neither DVRS nor the pre-placement coach agency had contacted him. We reviewed documentation from the client's DVRS file which corroborated the client's account. We contacted DVRS staff and requested they contact the client without further delay and facilitate the provision of job coach services. In mid-December the client confirmed the job coach agency had contacted him, which was the first service provided by DVRS since he contacted DVRS in January.

- **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:

Disability Rights NJ was the keynote speaker at a virtual event, titled Community Connection Call hosted by CBVI. The purpose of this event was to inform CBVI staff and consumers about Disability Rights NJ programs and services, and how individuals needing assistance can contact the agency. Approximately 50 attendees joined the call virtually while

many more participated by phone.

Disability Rights NJ provided training to approximately 50 sheltered workshop participants at the Arc Employment Center about the agency's programs/services. We explained how CAP and PABSS services can assist individuals interested in pursuing competitive integrated employment. We provided attendees with materials on the agency's programs and services and how they can contact the agency.

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

With the reduction in staff, this objective and the public report is on hold. We continue to monitor S4004, a bill regarding extended employment as we have serious concerns the changes this bill proposes and the negative impact it would have on individuals with disabilities.

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:

Disability Rights NJ participated in the 2025 Facing the Future conference sponsored by The Boggs Center on Disability and Human Development and NJ APSE. The conference highlights best practices in supporting people with disabilities in career planning, supported and customized employment, and transition from school to work. Staff from DRNJ provided information and resources about the organization's programs and services, including voting, assistive technology, employment, and the ASPYIR transition tool. Approximately 375 individuals with disabilities, family members and professionals attended the conference.

Disability Rights NJ participated in a panel discussion with representatives from DVRS and the Commission on Higher Education to the NJ AHEAD board and staff members who work in college/university disability services offices throughout New Jersey. Disability Rights NJ provided information about the agency's programs and services and how these services may be helpful to students with disabilities pursuing higher education in NJ. Approximately 34 professionals attended this training.