



Washington State Community Advocacy Coalition 2026 Federal Issue Paper



Civil Rights: Foundational Disability Laws and Pillars of Support

People with disabilities need reliable, longstanding systems of support. We rely on the Federal Government to provide the services and supports we need to live in the community. There are no other options. Various laws and systems for people with disabilities have been created over the last several decades so that people with disabilities have the supports and protections to live in the community.

Influential Pieces of Legislation:

- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**: protects people with disabilities from discrimination. It was signed by President George H.W. Bush in 1990, was a landmark, bipartisan achievement.
- **The Rehabilitation Act of 1973**: is a federal law designed to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities and **Section 504** is the provision that ensures no qualified individual with a disability is excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance (**29 U.S.C. §794**). Essentially, Section 504 operationalized the anti-discrimination principles of the Rehabilitation Act in education, health, housing and other federally funded programs.

Longstanding Disability Pillars in Our Community:

These programs are within the **Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (DD Act)**. The purpose is to “assure that individuals with developmental disabilities and their families participate in the design of and have access to needed community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all facets of community life...” (Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, 42 U.S.C. § 15001(b))

- The **Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council** (WADDC) supports self-determination, independence, inclusion, integration, and productivity for people with disabilities. WADDC advocates for better services



Washington State Community Advocacy Coalition 2026 Federal Issue Paper



and supports for people with disabilities in Washington state. They are critical to the advocacy that provides the community with information and resources needed to navigate the developmental disabilities system. The Council provides essential funding for many community organizations that have far-reaching impacts in our community.

- [University of Washington Center on Excellence in Developmental Disabilities](#) supports four core functions including: interdisciplinary training, community service, information dissemination, research and evaluation.
- [Disability Rights Washington](#) is part the Protection and Advocacy network. It is a private non-profit organization that protects the rights of people with disabilities statewide. Their mission is to advance the dignity, equality, and self-determination of people with disabilities. They work to pursue justice on matters related to human and legal rights.

These disability laws and organizations represent decades of progress and hard-won victories. The federal government must focus on strengthening the systems that protect us.

Additional Resources:

- [What is the Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)? | ADA National Network](#)
- [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act - National Center for Learning Disabilities](#)
- [NACDD – National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities](#)
- [AUCD | UCEDDs](#)
- [National Disability Rights Network - P&A - CAP | NDRN](#)

Contact:

Emily Rogers, Public Policy Director, Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council, Emily.rogers@ddc.wa.gov