

## **Disability Rights Connecticut to Focus on Seven Priority Areas in 2023 - Problems Adversely Impacting People with Disabilities That Are Most Widespread, Pose Greatest Risk**

*Areas of Focus: Abuse and Neglect, Healthcare, Education, Employment,  
Individual Rights, Housing and Opportunities to Live in the Community*

Disability Rights Connecticut, an independent statewide non-profit organization which advocates for the human, civil, and legal rights of people with disabilities in Connecticut, has announced seven areas of priority focus for 2023, which include a total of 37 objectives for action during the year.

The seven overarching priorities, described as current problems that have a significant adverse impact on people with disabilities and/or are the most widespread, have been identified by the organization's leadership, and plans are underway to tackle them in earnest during the year, building on past work. The seven priority areas are:

- Abuse and Neglect
- Healthcare
- Education
- Employment
- Individual Rights
- Opportunities to Live in the Community
- Housing

“Our focus areas are the goals we work on every day to achieve full equality and justice for people with disabilities in Connecticut,” explained Deborah Dorfman, Executive Director of Disability Rights Connecticut. “They are developed through extensive public involvement and our day-to-day work with clients and constituents, as well as input from DRCT staff, our Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) Advisory Council, and DRCT’s Board of Directors.”

DRCT’s mission is to advocate, educate, investigate and pursue legal, administrative, and other appropriate remedies to advance and protect the civil rights of individuals with disabilities to participate equally and fully in all facets of community life in Connecticut. DRCT is the Protection & Advocacy System for Connecticut, having replaced the state Office of Protection & Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities in 2017.

DRCT has outlined a series of objectives in each of the seven priority areas, which provide direction and clear goals for the organization in their efforts throughout the year. In the newest priority area, Housing, DRCT will advocate for people with disabilities facing discrimination in housing, with three specific objectives:

- to participate in periodic housing clinics to provide individuals with disabilities with counsel and advice, short-term advocacy and self-advocacy assistance to combat disability discrimination, including but not limited to, obtaining reasonable modifications and/or accommodations in housing.



- to provide self-advocacy assistance and systemic advocacy to advocate for people with disabilities denied reasonable accommodations/modifications in public housing, and
- to conduct in-person and virtual outreach and community engagement to people with disabilities via multiple-media platforms to educate and inform them of their rights as well as to promote self-advocacy related to the right to be free from disability discrimination in housing.

In the area of healthcare, DRCT has outlined seven objectives, including to “provide self-advocacy assistance, systemic and limited individual legal advocacy to people with disabilities to ensure that they have timely access to medically necessary medical and mental health care that is free from discriminatory limitations and restrictions on access to care.”

In the priority area Abuse and Neglect, DRCT plans to pursue nine objectives, including to “respond to abuse and neglect allegations and patient’s rights violations” and to “investigate and remediate abuse and neglect of individuals with disabilities including people who are in nursing homes, residential care homes, group homes, correctional, juvenile justice, public and private psychiatric facilities, ICF-IDDs, schools, and other facilities or who reside in a community residential setting.

In the area of education, DRCT describes six objectives, including to “provide self-advocacy assistance and limited individual advocacy that supports systemic reform, and systemic advocacy to ensure that students ages 14 to 22 with disabilities have appropriate transition and vocational services under IDEA,” as well as to “to ensure that preschool, elementary, and secondary students are not suspended, expelled, arrested, and/or otherwise pushed out of their neighborhood school as a result of behavior relating to their disabilities and instead receive school-based mental health and other behavioral services in order to receive equal educational opportunities in the most integrated setting within their local education agency.”

DRCT will also work to “educate policymakers, judges, public agencies and staff, and the public and provide advocacy and legal representation when needed to create Supported Decision-Making plans for people with disabilities, including, but not limited to, individuals transition to adulthood.” In addition, DRCT plans to “challenge discrimination to eliminate barriers to physical accessibility in public and private entities for people with disabilities.”

The full list of DRCT priorities and objectives for 2023 is available on the DRCT website, [www.disrightsct.org](http://www.disrightsct.org).

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