



# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2023

DISABILITY RIGHTS MISSISSIPPI

# OUR PROGRAMS

Protection and Advocacy for Assistive Technology (PAAT)

Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with  
Developmental Disabilities (PADD)

Protection and Advocacy for Voting Accessibility (PAVA)

Protection and Advocacy for Individual Rights (PAIR)

Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental  
Illness (PAIMI)

Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social  
Security (PABSS)

Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Traumatic  
Brain Injuries (PATBI)

Strengthening Protections for Social Security  
Beneficiaries Act (Rep Payee)



# OUR CASES

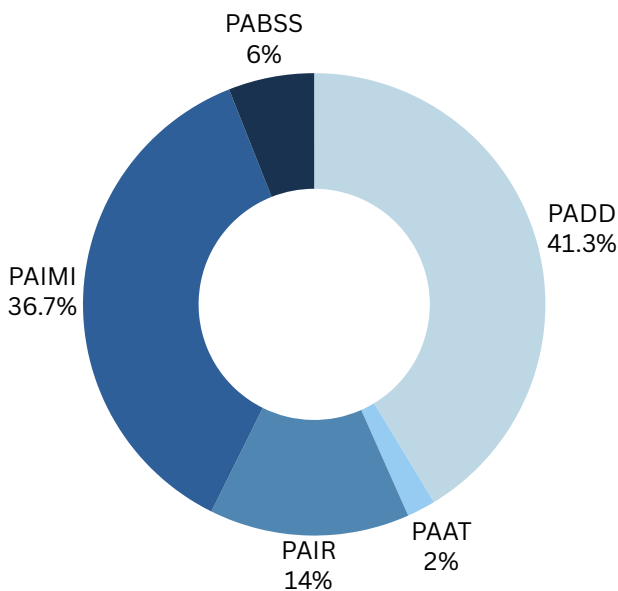
## 658 Total Service Requests

Service Requests include instances in which DRMS provided information and referrals, technical assistance, or case services, individual advocacy, or investigations.

## 150 Individuals Served

Service Requests in which a case was opened.

### Cases by Program



### Rep Payee Program

During FY2023, the Rep Payee Team completed 56 Periodic, 8 State, and 9 Individual reviews. The team was able to completely close out 58 of these reviews successfully. Over the course of the fiscal year, the team was able to interview and see an average of 370 individuals with disabilities, as well as share about DRMS and its services, ensure their financial rights, and make sure their health and safety was being protected.

# SUCCESS STORIES

## PERSONAL CARE HOME LITIGATION

In the current year, Disability Rights MS initiated 13 legal actions in different counties across the state targeting unlicensed operators of personal care homes. This strategic initiative was launched subsequent to the identification of a critical regulatory loophole in the licensure framework for personal care homes, specifically the absence of mechanisms to enforce licensure compliance among operators.

The outcomes achieved thus far have been promising, with a favorable resolution attained in more than half of the cases that were pursued. At present, three cases remain pending, awaiting resolution. Notably, Disability Rights MS has attained an impeccable record of success, securing victories in all cases pursued to date. This impacts thousands across our state who require this form of housing, but are entitled to it being appropriate and safe.


Leveraging the compelling success rate from these legal proceedings, Disability Rights MS intends to leverage this data as a foundation for engagement with the Mississippi Legislature. The organization's objective is to advocate for legislative measures that address the existing gap in licensure enforcement. It is anticipated that these efforts will contribute to the formulation of proposed legal reforms aimed at bolstering licensure enforcement within the personal care home sector.

## MDOC LITIGATION

Throughout this year, Disability Rights MS (DRMS) has maintained its pursuit of class action litigation against the Mississippi Department of Corrections. The focal points of this legal action encompass the inadequacies in mental health care, medical care, and compliance with ADA accessibility standards within the correctional system.

The ongoing litigation has entered its crucial class certification phase, slated to extend throughout the entirety of 2023 and spanning into 2024. An imminent deadline within this phase is set for November 2023, by which experts will be designated to contribute to the delineation of the class. This phase's primary aim is to formally certify a collective class of incarcerated individuals. This certification is pivotal, as it paves the way for the subsequent progression of the case into the phase of substantive adjudication on its merits.

Currently, there are around 22,000 incarcerated individuals in MDOC custody and improving the medical/mental health care would be a triumph for all residing in these facilities. This will be ongoing for quite some time and will likely be trifurcated when the merits phase is reached.





# SUCCESS STORIES

## BALLOT HARVESTING LITIGATION


DRMS, alongside other stakeholder organizations, initiated legal action in response to Senate Bill 2358. This legislation, enacted earlier this year, imposed constraints on individuals who offer assistance to others during mail-in voting processes. Specifically, SB 2358 outlined new limitations on those eligible to gather and transmit ballots sent to individuals other than the intended recipients. In the state of Mississippi, the absentee-by-mail voting system caters to select categories of voters, encompassing individuals who are absent from the locality on Election Day, those aged 65 or older, and individuals with temporary or permanent physical disabilities.

Judge Henry Wingate issued a preliminary injunction that effectively suspended the implementation of this law. This injunction facilitated the continuation of primary voting by mail in a manner consistent with prior practices. Despite this development, the Mississippi Attorney General has pursued an appeal against Judge Wingate's ruling. However, the ramifications of this appeal are unlikely to influence the imminent voting proceedings scheduled for November.

As the appeal process unfolds, the impending phase of the litigation will center on the substantive aspects of the case. This phase will be dedicated to determining the appropriateness of upholding the law in question and assessing its constitutionality.

## OPENING DOORS TO SUCCESS THROUGH ACCOMMODATIONS

This client with depression, ADD/ADHD, and severe anxiety was also denied her reasonable accommodations when attempting to take the MS BAR exam. She not only was not allowed her accommodations but was given the notice in such short a period of time that she was scrambling to appeal the decision instead of studying, all of which resulted in her failing the first attempt at the exam. With self-advocacy as well as educating materials provided to the MS BAR along with a letter from our Litigation Director, we were able to ensure that her accommodations were indeed approved for her second exam attempt and she successfully passed, and was able to move forward in her chosen career path.



# SUCCESS STORIES

## HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT STAYS IN SCHOOL

This client with Autism and anxiety disorder was having major difficulties in the higher education setting that created a unique set of circumstances and barriers for him as a student. After much advocacy, education, many talks, and interventions with the ADA department at the school, DRMS was able to help adjust his approved accommodations, assisted in his obtaining some assistive technology from Voc. Rehab, intercede with a couple of his instructors to help facilitate better relationships and understanding between them, and help come up with solutions for some of the scheduling complications he'd encountered. Overall, he improved his grades and was then accepted into the culinary program of his choice. Even though he had a bumpy start, to begin with, our established rapport with the ADA dept. helped to ensure that they were all able to work together with a better understanding of his needs and how they could accommodate him.

## DRMS JOINS SPECIAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE

The task force was created to empower parents, special education advocates, and paraprofessionals as well as seek better practices, support and opportunities to help students with disabilities reach their full potential. The group is working on solutions for the following challenges:

- Early intervention supports and transition
- School age students determined ineligible for SPED services
- Deaf and hearing impaired mainstreamed students
- Lack of vocational opportunities
- Lack of appropriate academic and behavioral supports

## SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW COLLABORATION

The purpose of this collaboration is to educate and recruit attorneys to the area of special education law as well as educate and advise parents and caregivers of individuals with disabilities. The first special education workshop was held in Oxford, MS.

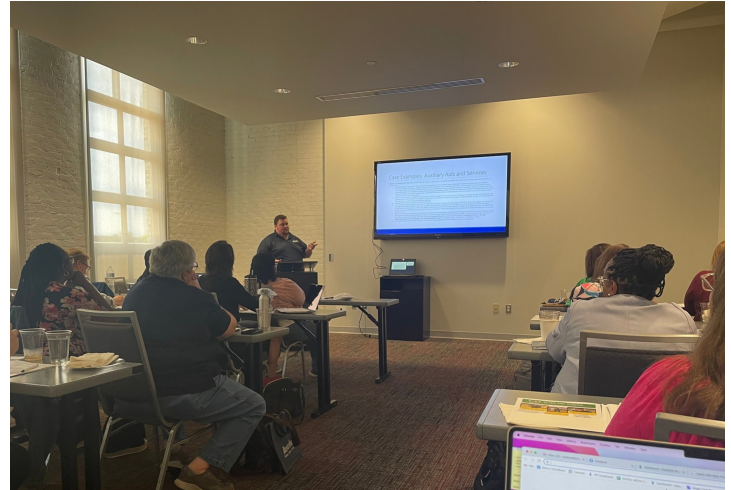
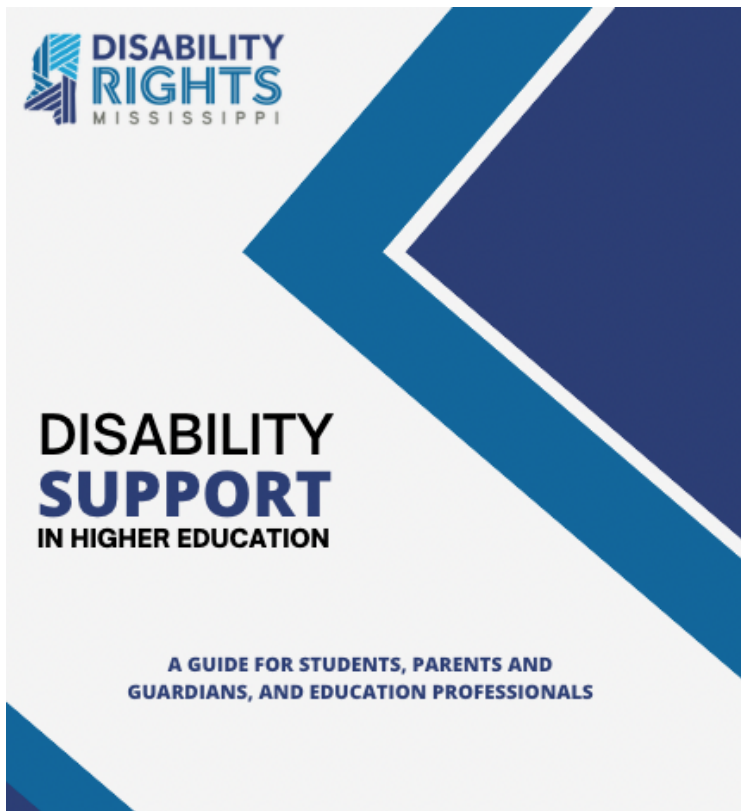
## VOTING ACCESSIBILITY SURVEYS

DRMS visited 66 polling locations in Hinds County on Primary Election Day (August 8, 2023). DRMS surveyed each location utilizing information from the Department of Justice's Consent Decree regarding Hinds County polling accessibility. DRMS took photos and documented all inaccessible locations and access issues. These issues were presented to the Hinds County Election Commission on September 11, 2023 to allow the Commission to be aware of issues and remedy them prior to the General Election. This issue is ongoing and updates will be provided in the FY24 report.

# SUCCESS STORIES

## DISABILITY SUPPORT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In FY23 DRMS collaborated with IDS and MSCDD to hold three “Disability Support in Higher Education” trainings for college ADA coordinator/staff from all of the Mississippi colleges and community colleges that fall under the ADA provisions. Approximately 40 individuals attended the trainings. DRMS also created a Higher Education Booklet that details for students with disabilities what their responsibilities and rights are from the age of transition through higher education. The book further details the responsibilities of educators and parents and provides explanations and resources.





# SUCCESS STORIES

## DRMS IN THE COMMUNITY





# DRMS IN THE NEWS

21618

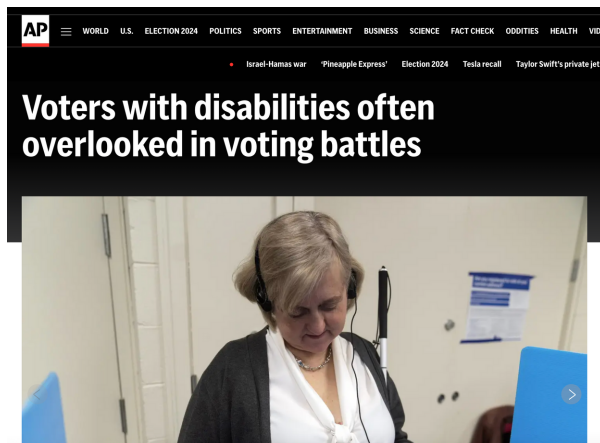
Website Visits

13.6k

Facebook Reach

1.1k

Facebook Content Interactions

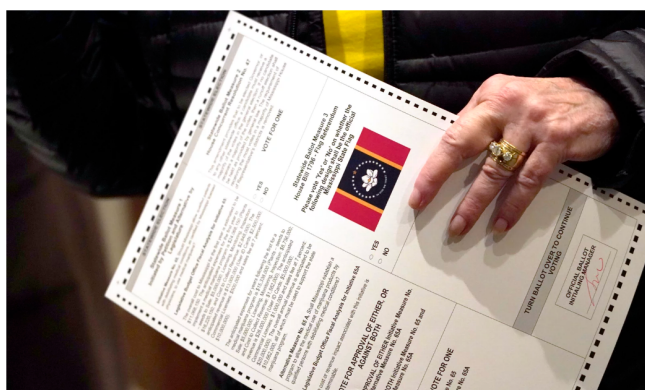


ELECTIONS

## A Mississippi law limits who can help mail-in voters. A federal court struck it down

JULY 26, 2023 · 3:57 PM ET

Ashley Lopez



# LOOKING AHEAD

Our agency is bustling - our staff calendar is filled with trainings, conferences, monitoring visits, hearings, education related meetings, outreach and more. As we launch into a new year of advocacy, the driving force behind our work remains the same: to protect the rights of people with disabilities and to help them live full, meaningful lives.

As our agency expands, so does our reach and our vision for DRMS work. We have newly established our Benefits Team and have created new, in-demand resources like our Disability Support in Higher Education booklet. We will be preparing to monitor polling accessibility and prepare voters with disabilities for the Presidential Election. We will be seeking to adopt the CAP program this year upon its redesignation.



# OUR VISION FOR MISSISSIPPI

## MISSION

The mission of Disability Rights Mississippi is to promote, protect and advocate for the rights of all people with disabilities, and to assist them with full inclusion in home, community, education and employment.