2026 ANNUAL REPORT

DISABILITY RIGHTS MISSISSIPPI



www.drms.ms @DisRightsMS

A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Every day, people with disabilities across Mississippi encounter barriers that can affect their education, health, safety, employment, and ability to participate in their communities. Disability Rights Mississippi works to address those barriers: one person, one issue, and one system at a time.

Throughout 2026, DRMS continued to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities in workplaces, schools, healthcare settings, facilities, public spaces, and communities across the state. Our work ranged from helping individuals resolve immediate concerns to identifying systemic problems to bring about lasting improvements.

The results of this work can be seen in many ways: students receiving the instruction and support they need, individuals gaining access to safer living conditions, public spaces becoming more accessible, and agencies working to improve the services they provide. Each outcome represents an opportunity for someone with a disability to exercise their rights and participate more fully in everyday life.

This work continued amid funding uncertainty. Our staff remained committed to the people we serve, continuing individual advocacy, monitoring, legal work, education, and collaboration with partners throughout Mississippi.

We are grateful to our Board of Directors, community partners, supporters, and the people with disabilities who share their experiences and help guide our work. Their contributions strengthen our efforts to identify barriers, address violations, and pursue practical solutions.

As we look ahead, DRMS remains focused on protecting the health, safety, dignity, and legal rights of people with disabilities. We are proud of the progress made this year and remain committed to a Mississippi where disability does not prevent anyone from accessing the services, opportunities, and protections they are entitled to receive.



Polly Tribble
Executive Director

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Disability Rights Mississippi Board of Directors provides important leadership and oversight in support of our mission. We appreciate their time, experience, and continued commitment to protecting the rights of people with disabilities throughout Mississippi.

Their guidance helps DRMS remain focused on its responsibilities and the needs of the people and communities we serve.

2026 DRMS Board of Directors

Kevin Frye
Gwendolyn Gray
Charlene Gressett
Gwen Hardaway
Hal Holbrook
Akwete Muhammad
Beverly Pettigrew
Dr. Tiffany Ross
Kristie Speights
LaToye Sullivan-Zinn
Wendy Wilson-White
Lawerance Williams



FY 2026 *YEAR IN REVIEW*

176 Cases

613 Additional Individuals Assisted

through technical assistance

6,417

People with disabilities trained to become active participants in making decisions that affect their lives.

4,459

People with disabilities whose rights were enforced, protected, or restored as a result of non-litigation group advocacy.

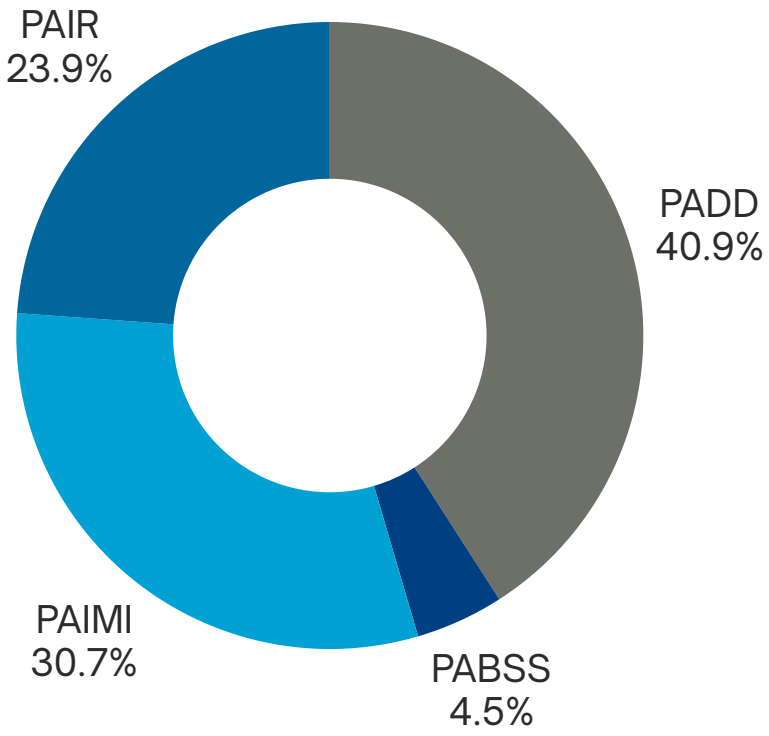
42

Polling sites surveyed for accessibility across four Mississippi counties.

74

Students who stayed in school.

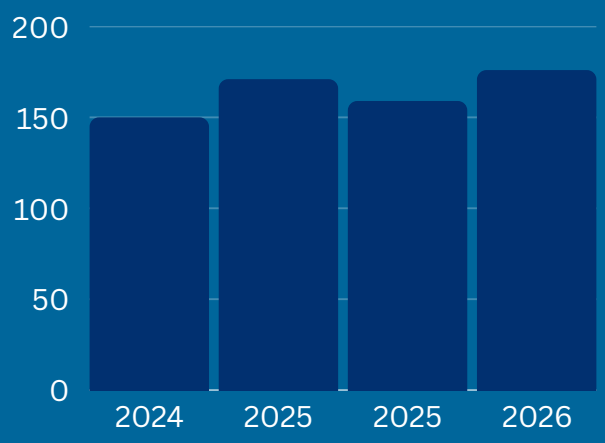
CASES BY PROGRAM



REP PAYEE

The Rep Payee team completed 76 reviews during Grant Year 8. The Mississippi Rep Payee Team completed more reviews that any other team in the National Disability Rights Network.

YEAR VS. YEAR



OUR IMPACT

Education: Making Sure Students Have Access to Learning
When educational barriers are identified, DRMS works to make sure students with disabilities have access to the instruction, services, and accommodations they need.

In 2026, DRMS continued its work to improve educational access for students with disabilities, including young people involved in the juvenile justice system.

Monitoring and advocacy in juvenile detention settings helped bring attention to longstanding gaps in educational services. These included limited instructional time, inadequate staffing, and the need for better access to appropriate coursework and behavioral supports.

Following ongoing advocacy and collaboration, educational services for youth in Mississippi's juvenile justice system showed meaningful improvements. Instruction expanded from approximately three hours a day on two to three days a week to five days a week, with a goal of 330 minutes of instruction each day. Educational opportunities also expanded to include instruction in maximum-security settings, online coursework through Edgenuity, and life skills and coping skills education.

These changes represent an important step toward ensuring that detention does not mean losing access to education. For young people with disabilities, consistent instruction and appropriate support can help preserve educational progress and prepare them for their return to school and community life.

DRMS will continue to monitor educational access and advocate for services that meet students' needs.

OUR IMPACT

Access to Public Services: Addressing Barriers in the Community

Accessibility affects whether people can safely and independently participate in everyday life. In 2026, DRMS continued to address barriers that limited access to public spaces and services. This included work related to accessible parking, transportation, voting, and physical access in the community.

DRMS provided training to law enforcement on accessible parking, helping officers better understand disability-related parking requirements and the importance of maintaining access for people who rely on designated spaces.

DRMS also continued to monitor polling locations and identify barriers that could prevent voters with disabilities from participating independently. During monitoring in Hinds County in March 2026, advocates visited 15 polling locations to assess accessibility and identify concerns requiring attention.

These efforts are part of DRMS's broader work to ensure that public spaces, government services, and civic participation are accessible to people with disabilities. Identifying a barrier is an important first step; working with responsible agencies to correct it helps make access more consistent for others who may encounter the same problem.

Housing and Independent Living: Removing Barriers to Safe Access

A person's home and neighborhood should support independence, not create unnecessary obstacles.

When a person with a disability encountered a problem with sidewalk access at their apartment complex, DRMS worked to address the barrier with the responsible parties. Within weeks, the sidewalk issue was resolved.

Although the physical change may have appeared small, accessible routes can make a significant difference in whether a person can safely leave home, reach transportation, and participate in community life.

By addressing barriers where people live, DRMS helps support greater independence and participation in everyday activities.

OUR IMPACT

Health and Safety: Protecting Rights in Institutional Settings

People with disabilities have the right to receive appropriate care and to live in settings that protect their health, safety, and dignity.

DRMS continued its monitoring and advocacy work in settings where people with disabilities may face significant barriers to reporting concerns or obtaining needed services. This work includes identifying problems, communicating with responsible agencies, and seeking corrective action when conditions threaten residents' rights.

During 2026, DRMS continued work related to health and safety in residential and institutional settings, including concerns involving personal care homes and access to appropriate services. Collaboration with state agencies, service providers, and other partners remained an important part of these efforts.

DRMS also continued work to improve access to communication in correctional settings. Following advocacy concerning telecommunications access, one correctional facility had a working teletypewriter (TTY), while a TTY had been ordered for another facility. These devices are important for people who are deaf or hard of hearing and rely on text-based telephone communication.

Access to communication is essential to maintaining contact with others, addressing personal needs, and exercising basic rights. DRMS will continue to follow these issues and advocate for practical solutions that help ensure people with disabilities can communicate and access services.

Employment: From Goals to Job Offers

After a DRMS rights and employment training, two individuals at a sheltered workshop expressed interest in community employment. A DRMS advocate connected them with Vocational Rehabilitation and helped coordinate support with their service providers.

Within weeks, both individuals interviewed for jobs—and both were hired.

This outcome highlights how DRMS's PABSS program helps Social Security beneficiaries overcome employment barriers and pursue greater independence through work.

OUR IMPACT

Building Awareness Through Education and Partnerships

Disability rights are most effective when people understand them and know how to put them into practice.

DRMS continued to provide education and outreach to professionals, families, service providers, students, and community organizations throughout 2026.

Through presentations, trainings, and community partnerships, staff addressed topics including educational rights, postsecondary accommodations, employment, fair housing, healthcare access, and disability-related barriers in public services.

DRMS also helped lead planning for the Mississippi disAbility MegaConference, bringing together people with disabilities, family members, service providers, and other stakeholders to share information and discuss issues affecting people with disabilities. Sessions addressed assistive technology, early intervention, employment for people with developmental disabilities, communication supports in classrooms, Medicaid, and postsecondary options.

Other outreach included education on the Americans with Disabilities Act, fair housing and accessibility, disability rights in healthcare, and postsecondary disability services.
These efforts help people recognize disability-related barriers, better understand their rights, and identify practical ways to improve access. They also strengthen relationships with professionals and organizations that play an important role in making services and communities more accessible.

Systemic Advocacy: Turning Individual Concerns Into Lasting Change

DRMS uses individual concerns to identify broader barriers and pursue changes that can benefit people with disabilities across Mississippi.

In 2026, DRMS continued systemic advocacy related to higher education, conditions in facilities, unlicensed personal care homes, transportation, voting, education, healthcare, and community services. This included work on JTRAN consent decree implementation and efforts to improve hospital communication access, including planning for American Sign Language (ASL) access.

By addressing barriers at their source, DRMS works toward lasting improvements that extend beyond individual cases.

LOOKING AHEAD

The work of disability rights advocacy is ongoing and evolving. In the last year, we've seen threats to established laws and important disability rights tenets, including community integration. Laws and policies provide important protections, but those protections must be understood, implemented, and enforced to make a difference in people's lives.

In the year ahead, DRMS will continue to focus on issues that affect the health, safety, dignity, and independence of Mississippians with disabilities. We will build on our individual advocacy, monitoring, legal work, education, and partnerships while pursuing practical solutions to barriers that affect people across the state.

Thank you for supporting Disability Rights Mississippi and the people whose rights we work to protect. Together, we can continue working toward a Mississippi where people with disabilities have meaningful access to education, employment, healthcare, housing, public services, and community life.



SUPPORT OUR WORK

Your support helps make this work possible.

To learn more or support our work, visit www.drms.ms.

KEEP IN TOUCH

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