

On Target

Informing Indiana About Disability Issues

Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities

April 2009

Volume 22 Number 3

Fair Housing Month: progress and next steps

April is Fair Housing Month and marks the 41st anniversary of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. In addition to making discrimination illegal in the housing market, this law requires communities and the federal government to proactively further fair housing, residential integration and equal opportunity goals. In 1988, Congress amended the legislation to add people with disabilities and families with children to the list of protected classes.

In Indiana, the Civil Rights Commission (CRC) reports that 164 fair housing complaints were filed in 2008. Of those cases, 62 reported having a disability, of which 35 alleged they were discriminated against specifically due to their disabilities. These numbers reflect only those complaints that come through the CRC, which covers the majority of the state.

The Future of Fair Housing

In 2008, the National Commission on Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity was formed by the National Fair Housing Alliance and several other organizations as a bipartisan commission to investigate the state of U.S. housing. The group traveled across the nation to collect information and held hearings in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Boston and Atlanta. The results were gathered in a report titled "The Future of Fair Housing."

Although some progress has been made in expanding housing options for people with disabilities, research has shown that discrimination is still common. In fact, according to the report, net measures of systemic discrimination against persons with disabilities are generally higher than net measures of discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity. In 2007, 47 percent of cases filed with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) were disability discrimination complaints, according to the report.

Using its findings, the commission developed several recommendations, including:

- Create an independent Fair Housing Enforcement Agency to replace the existing fair housing enforcement structure at HUD, which was the most consistent theme of the commission's hearings.
- Revive the President's Fair Housing Council, which coordinates fair housing policies and practices across agencies.
- Ensure and strengthen compliance with the "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing" Obligation, which refers to the federal government's responsibility to take proactive steps to advance fair housing opportunities, not just to avoid discrimination.

- □ Strengthen the Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) with more funding. FHIP is intended to support and fund fair housing enforcement and education across the country.
- □ Adopt a regional approach to fair housing by coordinating the efforts of all jurisdictions in a metropolitan area.
- □ Ensure that fair housing principles are emphasized in programs addressing the mortgage and financial crisis.
- □ Create a strong, consistent fair housing education campaign, backed by federal government support, that will spread the message of housing issues nationwide.
- □ Create a new collaborative approach to fair housing issues that establishes best practices and effective strategies.

The report also stressed the necessity of fair housing research, including disability data. □ As people with disabilities continue to move into communities, and housing programs are developed to meet their specific needs, assessment of the numbers of people and the types of housing they need will become increasingly important. To view the full report, visit www.nationalfairhousing.org.

Advocates meet with legislators at public □ policy forum

Indiana legislators were visited by their constituents with disabilities and other advocates March 3 at the state's Capitol. As part of a day-long public policy forum conducted by the Governor's Council for People with Disabilities, in partnership with The Arc of Indiana, advocates were given the opportunity to discuss legislation and concerns with their state representatives and senators.

Greg Meyer of Indianapolis met with House representatives John Barnes (District 89) and Greg Porter (District 96) to discuss Senate Bill (SB) 0014, legislation that would require early voting areas, such as satellite locations and clerks' offices, to be accessible.

Meyer initiated the bill by working with □ Sen. Patricia Miller and testified in the Senate on the bill's behalf. At the time of print, the legislation had passed the Senate and was referred to the House Committee on Elections and Apportionment. Meyer is also working with legislators to make two amendments to the bill: (1) Train poll workers to help people with disabilities, as well as to be sensitive to their needs; and (2) Establish a mobile voting machine that could be brought to voters with disabilities who can't leave their homes.

"Keep it simple," said Meyer, when asked about tips for testifying in the General Assembly. "Tell them how the bill affects you personally, and be prepared to answer tough questions."

The public policy forum began with panel discussions with leaders in the disability community. Sheri Caveda, executive director and founder of Fifth Freedom Network, and Betty Williams, president of Self Advocates of Indiana, provided advocates with tips for talking to legislators.

“Politeness can take you very far,” said Caveda. “NEVER get angry. The most reasonable person in the room will ultimately prevail.”

Other tips Caveda and Williams offered included:

- Make an appointment with your legislator, if possible.
- Talk about issues that directly impact your life.
- Focus on one or two issues.
- Research your legislator’s views on issues you’ll be discussing.
- Don’t overuse or abuse your legislator. When you meet with him or her, be concise and respect their time.
- Gently remind the legislator that people with disabilities are a bipartisan group of voters.
- Don’t talk in acronyms (i.e., DD for developmental disabilities).
- If the legislator voted in the way you wanted, send a thank-you note. If not, send a note asking if you can talk to him/her further about the issue and then follow up.
- If you don’t know the answer to a question, don’t guess. Say you’ll get back to them with information, and then follow up.

The forum also included a panel presentation by Kim Dodson from The Arc of Indiana; Nancy Griffin, Governor’s Council board member; and Beth Karnes, president of Indiana Mental Health Memorial Foundation. The group highlighted several bills that are in session before the General Assembly. The Arc of Indiana distributes e-newsletters on a regular basis to update Hoosiers on legislation that could impact the disability community. To keep informed and/or to subscribe to the e-newsletter, e-mail Kim Dodson at kdodson@arcind.org.

You can also track legislation by visiting the General Assembly’s Web site at www.in.gov/legislative. Click on “Bills and Resolutions,” then type in the legislation’s number or enter keywords.

Department of Labor releases employment statistics

The U.S. Department of Labor recently released the first official employment statistics about people with disabilities. As of February 2009, the unemployment rate of people with disabilities was 14 percent, compared with 8.7 percent of persons without disabilities, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

Sparked by the overall increase in the nation’s unemployment rates, the department’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) will now update and publish the data monthly. To track the monthly statistics, visit www.dol.gov/odep.

The employment-population ratio for people with disabilities was 19.8 percent, compared with 64.8 percent for people without disabilities. The employment-population ratio shows the proportion of employed individuals to the total number of civilians 16 years or older not living in institutions.

“Americans with disabilities typically experience similar employment difficulties — even when there is a robust economy,” said John Davey, deputy assistant secretary for ODEP. “The economic downturn may just exacerbate their struggle.”

ODEP is using the Current Population Survey (CPS) to collect the numbers. The CPS is a monthly survey of households, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, that supplies comprehensive information on the labor force and employment. Six disability-related questions have been added to the CPS to satisfy a requirement specified in Executive Order 13078 signed by former President Bill Clinton.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act impacts Indiana, Hoosiers with disabilities

On Feb. 17, 2009, President Barack Obama signed into law the widely discussed and anxiously awaited American Recovery and Reinvestment Act — legislation that contains \$787 billion in tax cuts and program funding designed to stimulate the U.S. economy and assist families hit hard by the recent financial crisis.

There are a number of provisions in the law that directly relate to people with disabilities, including:

- □ Education: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) State Grant Program will receive \$11.3 billion, and the IDEA Part C Early Intervention Program will receive \$500 million.
- □ Social Security: The law includes a one-time emergency payment of \$250 to people who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security. The Social Security Administration will also receive \$500 million to help reduce the backlog of disability claims.
- □ Medicaid: There will be a temporary \$87 billion increase in the federal government’s share of Medicaid spending; 65 percent of these funds will be dispersed among the states, of which Indiana will receive an estimated \$1.4 million; 35 percent of the temporary increase will assist states facing the greatest economic challenges and unemployment rates.
- □ Centers for Independent Living: \$140 million will be administered to help people with disabilities live in their communities.
- □ Housing: A number of programs will receive funding, including HOME Investment Partnerships, which will get \$2.25 billion. In addition, to help stabilize neighborhoods, \$2 billion will be allocated to communities to purchase and rehabilitate foreclosed, vacant properties.

Where does Indiana stand?

The new law provides funding to the states for a number of programs and services. The state of Indiana has created a new Web site, www.invest.in.gov, to help Hoosiers follow Indiana’s share of the stimulus act. According to the site, Indiana is expected to receive \$4.3 billion in increases to existing federal programs.

The site provides the following estimates for Indiana's share of the funds in various categories:

Medicaid.....	\$1.4 billion
Education	\$1.3 billion
Roads and bridges	\$650 million
Nutrition.....	\$400 million
Weatherization	\$100 million
Water quality	\$100 million
Housing.....	\$100 million
Public transit	\$80 million
Energy.....	\$70 million
Employment service	\$70 million
Child care.....	\$40 million
Justice.....	\$40 million

The stimulus act also includes a State Fiscal Stabilization Fund to help state and local governments avert budget cuts, particularly to education programs. The provision includes two block grants to be allocated among the states: \$39.5 billion for education and \$8.8 billion for other services, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Obama signs \$33 billion expansion of SCHIP

President Barack Obama made a significant resolution in the White House Feb. 4 as he signed into law (P.L. 111-3) an expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The law is expected to provide \$33 billion of government-subsidized insurance to an additional 4.5 million children.

As a result of the increased funding, the projected number of uninsured children in America will be reduced by about half over the next 4.5 years. The reauthorization will provide states with additional resources to ensure more eligible children, regardless of their parents' income, receive proper health care coverage. The number of children covered by the program will grow to approximately 11 million nationwide.

"The way I see it, providing coverage to 11 million children...is a down payment on my commitment to cover every single American," Obama said. "I refuse to accept that millions of our kids fail to reach their full potential because we fail to meet their basic needs."

Today, 8 million children in our nation are still uninsured, totaling over 45 million uninsured Americans overall.

The bill will primarily be funded by the substantial increase in the federal tax on cigarettes, up from 39 cents per 20-cigarette pack to \$1.0066.

In 2008, Indiana expanded its SCHIP program, Hoosier Healthwise, by raising the income eligibility from 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) to 250 percent, about \$53,000 for a family of four.

Created in the late 1990s under the Clinton administration, SCHIP was established to address the concerns of families who earned too much to qualify for public assistance through Medicaid, yet could not afford insurance for their children. For more information, visit www.schip-info.org.

To learn more about Indiana's program, visit www.healthcareforhoosiers.com or call (800) 889-9949 (toll free).

Of Note

President selects first special assistant for disability policy

President Obama has appointed Kareem Dale, lawyer and Chicago native, as our nation's first-ever special assistant to the president for disability policy. Dale, who has a visual impairment, has worked with Obama in the past, serving as the national disability director during the president's campaign and participating on the Arts Policy and Disability Policy committees during Obama's time as a senator. He is the founder and managing partner of The Dale Law Group, as well as an adjunct professor at Northwestern University School of Law. Earlier in his career, Dale spent eight years litigating in products liability, personal injury and other areas. Following the announcement, Dale said he was "just humbled and honored for the faith the president and vice president have shown in me, and I look forward to working with them."

New grant program supports families of children with disabilities

Family members of children with disabilities may be able to receive reimbursement for attending conferences, workshops, public forums or other events where they learn more about the child's disability and available services. The new Family Involvement Fund (FIF) also reimburses family members for participating in webcasts, teleconferences, online workshops or other activities. In addition, the FIF provides reimbursement for approved purchases of print materials such as books or manuals, as well as other media, including CDs and DVDs. Separate funding is also available within the FIF for parents who are asked to participate officially as members on their Local Planning and Coordinating Council (LPCC), its committees and sponsored activities. Individuals may receive up to \$250 and families up to \$500 for the grant year. Awards are per individual or family, not per child. Visit www.inf2f.org/F2F-FIF.htm or call (800) 964-4746 (toll free).