

DISABILITY RIGHTS NEW JERSEY

ADVANCING JUSTICE. ADVOCATING INCLUSION.

GWEN ORLOWSKI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Disability Rights NJ Report to State Rehabilitation Council

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Reporting Period: 04.01.2026 – 06.30.2026

Prepared by: Gwen Orlowski, Executive Director

Brief introduction of CAP

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) at Disability Rights NJ (DRNJ) provides legal advocacy and education to people with disabilities applying for or receiving services funded by the Rehabilitation Act, including vocational rehabilitation. CAP also provides legal advocacy and education about Title I (employment rights) of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

This report reflects the 2026 goals and objectives for DRNJ CAP services to ensure equitable access to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services for VR applicants and recipients by providing self-advocacy assistance, limited legal assistance, and extended legal assistance as well as education emphasizing individual plan for employment (IPE) development, informed choice, and access to appeal rights. We also educate policymakers about access to VR services and engage in systemic advocacy including participation in State Rehabilitation Councils.

This quarter, following a community needs assessment, we completed the agency's priority setting process, and subject to approval by the Board, finalized the FY 2027 goals and objectives,

CAP Goals and Objectives:

Goal 2: Protect the rights of children and adults with disabilities to access services, supports, and resources needed to be fully integrated into the community.

A. Employment

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Provide self-advocacy assistance, limited legal assistance, extended legal assistance, and education to applicants and recipients of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services with a focus on rights to VR services, individual plan for employment (IPE) development, informed choice, and access to appeal rights.

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Individual Client Representation:

- Carry Over from FY 2026 2nd quarter: 9 clients/9 SRs
- Opened: 14 clients/14 SRs
- Closed: 8 clients/8 SRs
- Carry Over into FY 2026 3rd quarter: 9 clients/9 SRs
- Non-Case (Technical Assistance): 0 clients
- Non-Case (Information & Referral): 0 clients

Systemic Issue:

Disability Rights NJ attends regular meetings with the DVRS and CBVI leadership teams to provide updates on activities, as well as discuss systemic issues in VR service delivery identified through our work.

Examples of Client cases closed in the 3rd quarter:

- Disability Rights NJ represented a 44-year-old male resident in Burlington County diagnosed with major depressive disorder, and tardive dyskinesia concerning access to an assistive technology assessment. The client had been informed by DVRS during a survey interview that DVRS did not provide assistive technological assessments or devices to individuals pursuing educational training. The client, who receives SSDI benefits, Medicare and Medicaid explained he had enrolled in an associate degree program at his local community college. The client explained that tuition costs were covered by Pell grants, but he needed an assistive technology assessment because of hand tremors which impacted his ability to take notes and type school assignments. We represented the client by ordering and reviewing documentation from his DVRS case file and speaking with DVRS personnel. DVRS subsequently authorized an assistive technology assessment which recommended software and devices. We then represented the client by requesting that DVRS develop an IPE to include the technology recommended in the AT assessment. DVRS agreed to the request and authorized the recommended technology which the client received and is currently using to pursue an associate degree in electrical engineering technology.
- Disability Rights NJ represented a 40-year-old female resident of Passaic County diagnosed with deafness and learning disabilities by providing limited legal representation concerning access to appropriate individualized VR services. A review of DVRS documentation supported the client's statements that she had been unable to maintain employment when the contracted job coaching services, she was receiving failed to provide her with adequate support. The documentation further indicated that when the client struggled to maintain employment, DVRS recommended that they terminate services and she pursue employment services through DDD. When DDD questioned this recommendation, DVRS recommended the client seek employment in a sheltered workshop. DVRS made this recommendation despite the availability of funding for supported employment services designed to assist individuals with the most significant disabilities maintain employment for up to 24 months.

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We attended a meeting at the DVRS office with the client and her mother and after consultation with the client requested that DVRS implement the vocational recommendations documented in the psychological assessment DVRS had previously authorized. DVRS approved intensive job coach services with a coach fluent in ASL and agreed that the purpose of these services was to help the client maintain employment in work sites that align with her interests and abilities per the psychological assessment. An IPE was developed and signed.

- Disability Rights NJ represented a 58-year-old male resident of Gloucester County diagnosed with physical and muscular impairment. The client explained that despite working with a DVRS contracted job coach for two years he had not received any job offers and was not interested in applying for the positions the job coach recommended, specifically janitorial jobs. The client explained that he wanted to pursue employment in the food industry and requested sponsorship to pursue a ServSafe certification. We ordered and reviewed documentation from the client's DVRS case file and attended meetings with DVRS and the client. DVRS subsequently agreed to fund a ServSafe certification and developed an IPE documenting this agreement.
- Disability Rights NJ provided self-advocacy assistance to a 31-year-old male resident of Gloucester County diagnosed with PTSD and Schizotypal Personality Disorder. The client who receives SSDI benefits, and Medicaid contacted DRNJ concerning VR service delivery. Specifically, DVRS had repeatedly ignored his selected employment goal and instead drafted IPEs that included employment goals selected by DVRS. Prior to contacting DRNJ, the client had informed DVRS that he wanted to appeal DVRS service delivery at an Administrative Review. In response to the client's request for an appeal, DVRS drafted an IPE that reflected the client's employment goal of licensed social worker, subject to him being accepted into the master's degree social work program. Based on the client's request for assistance, we reviewed the IPE DVRS developed with the client and provided information about the DVRS college fee schedule. We explained that it was his choice whether to activate the student loans on the FAFSA form but advised the client that student loans are not a comparable benefit for the purposes of DVRS financial sponsorship.
- **OBJECTIVE 2:** Educate policymakers about access to VR services, outreach to increase awareness of the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) and engage in systemic advocacy.

Disability Rights NJ attends regular meetings with the State Rehabilitation Councils, providing information and updates on activities and systemic concerns that have been identified through our work.

Outreach/Education/Training:

Staff from Disability Rights New Jersey hosted a webinar titled "College Tuition Sponsorship: Tools to Advance Your Education". The webinar provided rights-based advice and tips for individuals seeking college sponsorship from the Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, including an introduction to a Reasonable Fee schedule and how it can impact financial sponsorship. 54 individuals registered for the webinar and the recording was uploaded to agency YouTube

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channel and website for future access.

Staff from Disability Rights New Jersey hosted a webinar titled "Informed Choice In the VR Process: Tools to Advance Employment Goals". One of the core tenets of the Rehabilitation Act is the informed choice of the person seeking services; however, that concept is not clearly defined or explained in the VR process. The webinar focused on what informed choice means and how individuals with disabilities can feel empowered to make decisions and be active participants as they realize their employment goals. The webinar also highlighted the role of VR counselors and agencies in this process. 27 individuals registered for the webinar and the recording was uploaded to agency YouTube channel and website for future access.

Staff from DRNJ participated in the 3-day Annual Abilities Expo in Edison. The Expo offered an opportunity to provide information and resources about all programs and services available from DRNJ to people with disabilities, family members and professionals. The Abilities Expo is one of the largest events for people with disabilities in the tri-state area. During this 3-day event, DRNJ staff provided information about ATAC, VR, Rep Payee, voting, special education including transition services, as well as an opportunity to distribute priority setting surveys. Approximately 5000 individuals attended the Expo including Senator Andy Kim who stopped by our table to discuss disability issues with staff.

Staff provided an overview of DRNJ programs and services including information about AT, voting, CAP program and the current priority setting initiative. The event was hosted by St. John of God Community Service which provides Adult Job Training and Day Services, Adult Therapeutic Recreation, Ticket to Work, and Clinic Services. Priority setting surveys and cards with online QR code to survey were distributed and attendees were encouraged to submit. Approximately 28 individuals with disabilities and staff were in attendance.

- **OBJECTIVE 3:** Educate policymakers for an end to subminimum wage and for equitable access to competitive, integrated employment for people with disabilities.

We continue to monitor S4004, a bill regarding extended employment as we have serious concerns about the changes this bill proposes and the negative impact it would have on individuals with disabilities. We are also monitoring developments in other states which have passed legislation that has or will end the practice of sub-minimum wages.

E. Education and Transition Services for Youth

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Provide self-advocacy assistance, limited legal assistance, and education to promote greater involvement of youth with disabilities between the ages of 14-21 in transition planning and obtaining appropriate transition services from school districts and/or VR agencies. Educate policymakers and collaborate with partners to ensure youth have timely access to transition services.

Outreach/Education/Training:

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Disability Rights NJ hosted the 2nd Annual Classroom to Careers: Transition Services and Vocational Rehabilitation Conference at the NJ Bar Law Center in New Brunswick. The event, titled “Serving Our Youth: Where We’ve Been and Roadways on Moving Forward Together” opened with a keynote address from Dr. Felicia Hopson, Director of DVRS. The event offered participants an opportunity to attend six individual educational breakout sessions. The three morning sessions included: Alternatives to Guardianship: Empowering Individuals Through Supported Decision Making; Exploring Employment Avenues; and Empowering Transition: Resources and Supports. The morning session evaluation results indicated that 100% of attendees rated the content from the presentations as excellent or good. The three afternoon sessions included: Futures in Focus: Ensuring Transition Services for Justice-Impacted Youth with Disabilities; Navigating Employment and Benefits; and Utilizing AT to Promote Inclusive Transition Process to Support Employment. The afternoon session evaluation results indicated that 95% of attendees rated the content of the presentations as excellent or good. The conference also offered a lunch-time panel discussion with representatives for DVRS, CBVI, and the Department of Education. The conference was attended by 88 individuals with disabilities, family members and professionals. Conference evaluation results indicated 87% of attendees rated the overall usefulness of the conference as “Very Useful” and 83% of attendees indicated that the conference met their needs. Individual comments from the evaluation included: "Thank you for holding this conference! I appreciated having representatives from DDD, DOE, and DVR in attendance. It was also a great networking opportunity. I am hopeful that I can attend next year"; “I look forward to this conference each year. It surpasses my expectations each time. I left with great information to pass along to the parents in my classroom as well as members of my professional learning community.” “The Conference was well organized and the different formats throughout the day (keynote speaker, sessions & discussion panel) kept the momentum and interest.” “Needs to be a whole day event 8:30am-4:30pm lots of major topics such as school related issues regarding transition and many local districts still pushing students to graduate at 18 this is a problem that should be discussed in depth next year.”

Staff from DRNJ's Children and Youth Practice Group participated in the Orange Public School District's Transition Resource Fair. Staff distributed information about DRNJ programs and services, transition toolkit, assistive technology, VR and CAP program, as well as priority surveys. Approximately 20 students and parents attended the event.

DRNJ resources were disseminated at the Willingboro Education Resource Fair. Information about DRNJ programs and services, transition, ASPYIR, CAP, Navigating VR, and AT were provided. The event was attended by approximately 100 students with disabilities and their families.

Staff from DRNJ’s Richard West Assistive Technology Advocacy Center (ATAC) hosted the webinar, AT to Promote an Inclusive Transition Process to Support Employment. This session focused on how to incorporate assistive technology into the transition process to support employment. Using the Principles of Universal Design, the session explored how to promote an inclusive employment environment for student success using no-tech, low tech and high-tech AT across all areas of disability. 22 individuals registered for the session and the recording was uploaded to agency YouTube channel.

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