

A

Communication
from the Policy
Information Exchange

Slice of Pie

A *Slice of Pie* is an ongoing publication keeping our readers informed about important public policy issues. It is the mission of the Policy Information Exchange to **educate and inform Pennsylvanians with disabilities, their families and advocates, and the general public, regarding public policy issues and to further the exchange of policy information between the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council and federal, state and local policy makers.**

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State News

Election Results

In the PA Senate, 2 seats flipped evenly between party affiliation. 4 new State Senators are expected in 2025. We welcome the chance to work with Joe Picozzi, Patty Kim, Dawn Keefer, and Nick Pisciotanno as they assume their new roles. While there are no changes in the makeup of the PA House party alignment, 16 new members of the General Assembly are expected for 2025.

PA House leadership will see several new faces take over. The Majority Whip will be Mike Schlossberg (Lehigh), and Rob Matzie (Beaver) will assume the role of Majority Caucus Chair. The new Leader of the minority party will be Jesse Topper (Bedford/Fulton). Minority

Appropriations Chair is now Jim Struzzi (Indiana), Minority Caucus Chair Martina White (Philadelphia), Minority Caucus Secretary: Clint Owlett (Tioga/Bradford), and Minority Policy Chair: David Rowe (Union/Juniata/Mifflin/Snyder).

PA Senate leadership will change only on the minority side. The Senate Democrats have selected Maria Collett (Montgomery) to become Caucus Chair, Steven Santarsiero (Bucks) for Caucus Secretary, and Nick Miller (Lehigh/

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Northampton) for Minority Policy Committee Chair.

Dave Sunday will be Pennsylvania's new Attorney General, Tim Defoor our Auditor General, and Stacy Garrity will remain our Treasurer. We wish those Senators, Representatives, and row officers who have retired the very best and thanks for efforts you have made to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Arc of Pennsylvania looks forward to connecting with all those who have been newly elected across the state to inform them on our legislative and systems priorities.

The Pennsylvania congressional delegation will look different. Ryan Mackenzie and Robert Bresnahan have flipped two Northeast PA districts defeating incumbents there. Additionally, in a tight race, Dave McCormick will be the Junior U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania, having edged out the long-time incumbent and disabilities champion Senator Bob Casey.

[Read more about the election's potential effects on Medicaid and disability programs.](#)

Share Your Story

The Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) Technology Taskforce is looking for more individuals with disabilities to provide personal stories. They want to know how supportive technology has made a positive impact on your life. These personal stories can be in the form of videos, blogs, or written essays. If you're interested or want to know more, reach out to: **ra-PWODP_Outreach@pa.gov**

PA Department of Labor and Industry

Pennsylvania's workforce development system prepares Pennsylvanians for well-paying jobs. PA CareerLink can help job seekers find jobs and apprenticeships.

PA CareerLink offers a variety of services, including:

Job seekers: Access support and benefits, tailor resumes, prepare for interviews, and find job openings

Youth: Services to help young people gain experience and enter the labor market

Online learning: Find apprenticeship and training opportunities, learn how the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) helps individuals with disabilities, and file an unemployment claim.

[Pennsylvania's workforce development system](#)

[PA CareerLink](#)

[Office of Vocational Rehabilitation](#)

Competitive Integrated Employment

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services reports the following employment data as of January 2024:

8,239 individuals, ages 18-64, enrolled with the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) had Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)

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4,548 individuals enrolled with ODP were utilizing ODP's employment services.

The new Integrated Vocational Engagement & Support Team (InVEST) program is already helping individuals with disabilities secure jobs. Sheetz is committing to InVEST to pay people who would earn subminimum wage a competitive, integrated employment wage instead.

Read about it

Intellectual Disability and Autism Waiver Updates

The Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) met with stakeholders October 30, 2024, to discuss waiver amendments and to provide an overview of Performance-Based Contracting. Amendments were made to waiver capacity, assistive technology, community participation support, English interpreter services for American Sign Language, music, art and equine assisted therapy, the Specialty Telehealth and Assessment Team, life sharing, supported living, and benefits counseling.

See the updates

Pennsylvania's Housing Action Plan

Governor Shapiro announced a housing action plan which is to increase affordable housing, address homelessness, and make our commonwealth more competitive. There will be a group of appointed stakeholders which are to complete recommendations over a one-year period. You can provide individual

comments by clicking on and completing the survey:

Pennsylvania Housing Action Plan - PA Department of Community & Economic Development

To learn more about his housing action plan to increase affordable (and accessible) housing, address homelessness and make PA more competitive here:

Press Release: Governor Shapiro Signs Pennsylvania First EO Housing Action Plan | Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Executive Order: Executive Order 2024-03 – Housing Action Plan and Addressing Homelessness

The U.S. Department of Justice Sued Pennsylvania

A lawsuit was filed against the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry and Pennsylvania Department of Human Services to challenge discriminatory building code requirements that deny or limit the availability of community-based housing for people with intellectual disabilities and autism.

Under the Commonwealth's Uniform Construction Code, which all local governments must follow, all community-based housing for persons with intellectual disabilities and autism must install, at their own expense, an automatic sprinkler system. Community-based housing in Pennsylvania has an average of 2.3 residents and may have no more than four residents.

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Pennsylvania also requires community homes to comply with numerous fire and safety regulations, including regular fire drills verifying that the residents are able to evacuate in under two and one-half minutes. The building code for these homes for persons with intellectual disabilities and autism requires them to install automatic sprinkler systems, regardless of how old the home is or how capable the residents are to evacuate.

The lawsuit indicates that sprinkler system requirements limit the availability of housing in several ways. First, landlords in rental housing may refuse to allow sprinkler systems to be installed because their appearance, which includes long, exposed metal pipes, may render a home less marketable to future tenants and is reminiscent of the institutional facilities community homes were intended to replace. Second, sprinkler systems often cannot feasibly be installed in individual apartments, thus eliminating their ability to be used as community homes. Finally, as the U.S. Department of Justice's investigation found, sprinkler systems cost, at a minimum, nearly \$10,000 to install in a small, single-family home, but these costs may triple when local water utilities require sprinkler systems to have their own water line. These costs may exceed the financial means of many operators of community-based housing and may force less individualization for those with intellectual disabilities and autism.

[Read more about this lawsuit from the Department](#)

SEPTA Service Cuts

The Southeast Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA) faces a \$240 million structural deficit and warns of major cuts. Governor Shapiro stated that he will not let the agency fail, and to that he redirected \$153 million in federal highway funding to SEPTA. Maneuvers to transfer or flex this funding have been used in the past to uphold SEPTA, though it is not historically popular with legislative Republicans. As federal stimulus funds were used since COVID-19 to pad budgets, the use of one-time funds is not a sustainable resource. Deals are on the table between the state legislature and Governor Shapiro to regulate and tax the growing industry of skill-games in Pennsylvania. Service cuts however would severely affect individuals with disabilities, low-income citizens of southeastern counties, and seniors.

[Learn more about the shortfall](#)

Issues in the Affordable Care Act Marketplace

In 2023, the Pennsylvania Insurance Department utilized federal grant funds to study barriers to accessing healthcare. The biggest issue found was the inaccuracy of health insurer provider directories, which can delay care, delay scheduling and result in surprise out-of-network billing. Only 13% of the provider listings had accurate contact information, and up to 44% of providers were unreachable because of incorrect information. The Department intends to work with insurance

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providers to address the issues and develop solutions that reduce inaccuracies.

Read the report

Applications for Equity in Early Childhood Education Champion Awards

The Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) is accepting applications for Pennsylvania's fourth annual Equity in Early Childhood Education Champion Awards. This award brings awareness to and highlights the equity work being done within Pennsylvania's early childhood education settings, including early intervention programs. Pennsylvania recognizes outstanding achievements in advancing equity by individuals and early childhood education and/or after-school programs. Nominees should have a demonstrated history of support to children and their families by embracing diversity and full inclusion as strengths, upholding fundamental principles of fairness and justice, and/or working to eliminate structural inequities that limit equitable learning opportunities.

Apply or nominate your provider or organization

Federal News

Tools for Contacting Your Members of Congress

Created by The Arc's National Council of Self-Advocates, this toolkit empowers advocates to know who their members of Congress

are, how to tell stories effectively, and create powerful social media advocacy posts.

View the resource

Federal Penalties on Airlines

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg announced \$50 million in penalties on American Airlines for violating the rights of passengers with disabilities and are looking into violations in other airlines. The Department of Transportation says American Airlines has failed on multiple occasions to assist passengers with disabilities between 2019 and 2023. Violations included a lack of wheelchair assistance, unsafe physical assistance of wheelchair users, and mishandling of wheelchairs.

Find out more about these accountability measures

Presidential Report

The President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities (PCPID) delivered its 2024 report to President Biden, focusing on critical issues impacting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The Advancing Independence and Community Integration for All: Supporting Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities Through High Quality Home and Community Based Services report urges the government to act for people with IDD.

Read the report

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Filling Special Education Vacancies

A report from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics finds that special education positions remain some of the hardest to staff. Three-quarters of elementary and middle schools and two-thirds of high schools are struggling with job fulfillment in Special Education. The Department surveyed schools in August 2024 and showed that just 79 percent of vacancies were filled when the school year began. The good news is there has been a five percent improvement in successfully filling vacancies over the previous school year.

[Read more](#)

Problems with Retention in Federal Employment

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission found that in fiscal year 2018 people with disabilities were 27 percent more likely to leave federal employment than people without disabilities. Agencies which ensure compliance of reasonable accommodations and personal assistance services have significantly fewer voluntary separations of employees with disabilities. Additionally, people with disabilities were 53 percent more likely to have their federal employment terminated by their employer than people without disabilities.

[Learn more](#)

Rules from The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)

CMS is requiring states to launch Beneficiary Advisory Councils (BAC) by July 2025 and to publicly report the number of people on waiting lists for home and community-based services (HCBS), along with average wait times, beginning in July 2027. Also, the Medical Care Advisory Committee (MCAC) will now be known as the Medicaid Advisory Committee (MAC) and continue to be tasked with advising CMS on health care services. To ensure the inclusion of lived experience, a new rule will require BACs to include those who are or have been enrolled in Medicaid, family members, or caregivers. The BAC will meet separately from the MAC to ensure this diverse input.

[Learn more about BAC](#)

[Learn more about waiting lists](#)

Additionally, CMS has finalized rules within Medicare's physician fee schedule, dental services, health-related social needs, telehealth, cardiovascular risk, behavioral health, opioid treatment, supervision of physical and occupational therapists, rural health clinics, Part B payment for preventative services, colorectal cancer screening, and prescription drug price control.

[Read the rule updates](#)

President-elect Donald Trump has nominated Dr. Mehmet Oz to lead CMS. Trump said that Oz will tackle

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what he calls the illness industrial complex, alongside the nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. If confirmed by the Senate, Dr. Oz will manage the country's largest health care programs, including Medicare (67.7 million participants), Medicaid (72.4 million participants), the Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP (7.1 million participants), and the health insurance marketplaces created by the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare (21.3 million participants). In addition, Dr. Oz would oversee a \$1.516 trillion budget and more than 6,700 federal employees and all related contractors. Dr. Oz's former opponent for the U.S. Senate seat, Senator John Fetterman indicates he will vote for confirmation if Dr. Oz is about protecting and preserving Medicare and Medicaid.

[Learn more about Dr. Mehmet Oz's nomination](#)

[Learn more about Robert F. Kennedy Jr's nomination](#)

Approved Treatment of Developmental and Epileptic Encephalopathy

The Food and Drug Administration has granted Orphan Drug designation to CAP-002 for syntaxin-binding protein 1 (STXBP1) mutations. STXBP1 mutations can cause treatment-resistant seizures, severe developmental delay and intellectual disabilities, motor abnormalities, and sudden unexpected death in epilepsy. Data from the developer displayed continuing improvements

in neurological symptoms through animal testing. This status would allow clinical studies to advance and are planned to begin in 2025.

[Learn about this approval and condition](#)

Federal Lawsuit Over State Funding for Private Religious School Special Education Continues

Two religious schools and three Orthodox Jewish parents whose children have autism filed a federal lawsuit in 2023. The parents sought to send their children to Orthodox Jewish schools and argued that California's policy of barring funding for private religious schools was discriminatory. An appeals court ruled such restrictions burden a family's free exercise of religion, sending the case back for reconsideration to the federal district court.

[Learn more](#)

Ending the U.S. Department of Education and the Impact

On the campaign trail, President-elect Trump pledged to close the federal agency responsible for overseeing implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and enforcing it. Republican presidents and presidential candidates have threatened to end the U.S. Department of Education since it was first established as a cabinet-level agency under former President Jimmy Carter in 1979. Ending the Education Department might lead to less emphasis on special education if it were tucked into a larger federal agency with other priorities and such changes could compromise the collection of data and the

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research role of the agency. The Department manages requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA,—a \$14.2 billion program that helps schools pay for special education services for students with disabilities.

Details on the concept have not been developed by the incoming administration while on the campaign side, so we do not know what will remain intact and absorbed by other federal agencies. Ronald Reagan’s Education Secretary Terrel H. Bell once wanted to transform the Department into a small foundation that would conduct research and provide support but “avoid direction and control.” Later Bell would change his tune and believe the federal government did have a need for involvement. The late Senator Bob Dole ran on ending the Department in 1996, but former President George W. Bush would advance regulation of education at a federal level. There is a myth that the Department dictates what educators teach, or that they have a controlling amount of funding in local schools. Neither of these are true, as these powers and most funding already fall to the state and local bodies.

Incoming Education Secretary nominee, Linda McMahon, previously served as the head of President Trump’s Small Business Administration until 2019. While her experience with education is limited and scattered, her priority would be to expand school choice. Whether ending the Department of Education or supporting private and charter schooling, McMahon’s nomination is already

being protested by local school officials and unions across the nation.

[Read more thoughts on this](#)

[Additional considerations](#)

[More on Linda McMahon](#)

Medicare Premiums for 2025

2025 premium, deductible, and coinsurance amounts for Medicare have been announced. Beginning January 1, 2025, the Medicare Part B standard monthly premium will be \$185, an increase of \$10.30 from the 2024 amount. The Part B deductible will be \$257, a \$17 increase from 2024. The 2025 Part A inpatient hospital deductible will be \$1,676.

If you are having difficulty paying for these costs, you may want to apply for the Qualified Disabled & Working Individual (QDWI) Program. Qualification requires individuals to have a disability, be working, and have lost Social Security disability benefits and Medicare premium-free Part A because you returned to work. This program can help you pay for Part A premiums only. This and other low-income assistance programs to help pay for Medicare are run by the state. You can reach the Department of Human Services to inquire what you may qualify for at **[800-692-7462](tel:800-692-7462)**.

[Check out other Medicare Savings Programs](#)

Go to our digital version of Slice at <https://www.paddc.org/publications/slice-of-pie/> to access the links.

National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C)

NTACT:C provides information, tools, and support to assist multiple stakeholders to provide effective services and instruction for students and out-of-school youth with disabilities. Dr. Jim Martin provides a 1-hour overview of transition planning organized in 8 major categories. His Transition 101 video is a good introduction to transition planning overall and can be used to provide a basis of understanding primarily, with school, agency or other personnel new to secondary transition. For those who are more familiar with student transition, the Collaborative offers many training opportunities.

Transition 101

Training Resource Library.

U.S. Census Bureau

No changes will be made in the way the Bureau counts those with disabilities for the American Community Survey in 2025 and 2026 under fear that the proposed method will continue to undercount. Input from the disability community will continue to be sought. The pause in implementing the changes occurs after receiving mostly comments of concern out of 12,000 received, with an estimated 40 percent estimated drop in who would be considered to have a disability. Other federal surveys are already using the questions as worded and ordered for the American Community Survey

proposal, such as the National Health Interview Survey, and the concerns from respondents carry over to all places already in use.

Read more comments

Critical Resources

The Disability Information and Access Line (DIAL) helps people with disabilities get connected to information about local community resources that support independent living. Launched in 2021 to help disabled people access COVID-19 vaccinations, DIAL also provides information about essential services such as transportation, housing support, disability rights, and more. DIAL's staff are trained to work with people of various communication abilities and will spend as much time as needed to ensure effective communication.

Established through a partnership between the Administration for Community Living (ACL) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, DIAL is operated as a collaboration between a consortium of organizations serving people with disabilities and USAging. This collaboration benefits from the disability networks' extensive knowledge and expertise in meeting the needs of people with disabilities across the U.S. and USAging's decades of experience operating the Eldercare Locator, the only federally funded national information and referral resource that supports consumers across the spectrum of issues affecting older Americans.

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If you need resources, you can connect with DIAL by calling or texting trained staff at 1-888-677-1199. For Deaf and hard-of-hearing callers who use American Sign Language connect directly through ASL Now.

[Learn more](#)

Congresswoman Lori Chavez-DeRemer Nominated to lead the U.S. Department of Labor

Having lost her reelection bid this year, Representative Chavez-DeRemer of Oregon, a pro-union Republican, was selected to lead the Labor Department. One of the main focuses of the Trump administration as it relates to Labor is overtime rules. President-elect Trump's first term saw a large impact on worker wages due to lowering the income ceiling for employees to receive overtime pay after 40 hours. About 8 million workers lost protections related to overtime compensation. Additionally, his past Labor Department rolled back policies that helped to close the gender pay gap.

The Department of Labor is charged with enforcing wage and hour laws, health and safety protections, unemployment insurance, workforce development programs, and retirement security. The Department's mission is to, "foster, promote, and develop the welfare of the wage earners, job seekers, and retirees of the United States; improve working conditions; advance opportunities for profitable employment; and assure work-related benefits and rights." However, policies

outlined in Project 2025 seek roll back wage and overtime protections, weaken workplace safety standards, install anti-worker judges and Justices, reduce the federal workforce, and erode the right to organize. The FY 2025 request for the Department of Labor (DOL or Department) is \$13.9 billion in discretionary budget authority and 15,762 full-time equivalent employees (FTE), with additional mandatory funding and supplemental FTE.

In February 2024, Representative Chavez-DeRemer supported [House Resolution 485](#), the Protecting Health Care for All Patients Act, which would prevent a practice that health care programs utilize to discriminate against people with disabilities. That legislation stalled in the U.S. Senate. She was not a cosponsor of Senator Casey's [Senate Bill 3076](#), the Disability Employment Incentive Act. The bill would have expanded the work opportunity tax credit to include the hiring of employees who receive disability insurance benefits under the Social Security Act, and the tax deduction for expenditures to remove architectural and transportation barriers to the handicapped and elderly. Therefore, it is unclear how Lori Chavez-DeRemer will ensure the rights of working individuals with disabilities are protected or expanded as a member of the incoming administration.

[More about the U.S. Department of Labor](#)

[More about the nominee](#)

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2023-24 Pennsylvania Legislative Enactment Review

Senate Bill 506 became Act 61 of 2023. This law will help prevent fraud, abuse, and exploitation while increasing representation. The law will require the appointment of counsel for alleged incapacitated persons when none have already been retained, certifying professional guardians, ensuring the courts first explore alternatives to guardianship, and requiring the petition for guardianship demonstrate the less restrictive alternatives were considered and why they were insufficient.

Senate Bill 1274 became Act 143 of 2024 to allow for exceptions from requiring the use of certified sign language interpreters.

Other legislation we have been bringing forward for you between 2023-24 will need to be reintroduced and we will keep you apprised throughout the 2025-26 session. Other areas of victory for individuals with disabilities include education funding increases in the 2024 budget, **Act 42 of 2024** to expand telemedicine, and the expansion of the **state's Property Tax and Rent Rebate** program.

Contact PIE

Contact the PIE Team with any questions, comments, suggestions, or information to share at PIE, c/o The Arc of Pennsylvania, 1007 Mumma Road, Suite 100, Lemoyne, PA 17043, by email at pie@thearcpcpa.org or by phone at 800-692-7258.

- o **A Slice of Pie** is available by email and contains hyperlinks for ease of accessing websites and internet documents and resources.
- o PIE Alerts, PIE Information, and PIE Job Postings are available by email to keep people informed about disability issues between newsletters.
- o Sign up for A Slice of Pie or PIE electronic messages by phone at 800-692-7258 or by emailing pie@thearcpcpa.org.
- o Individuals who already get A Slice of Pie and/or PIE electronic messages can make changes at any time by clicking "Update Profile/Email Address" at the end of any PIE email message.
- o A Slice of Pie is available at the Developmental Disabilities Council website www.paddc.org, by clicking on "Publications" and "Slice of Pie". Archived editions can also be found there.
- o **A Slice of Pie** is available in alternate format upon request.
- o The PIE office will download, copy, and mail information mentioned in A Slice of Pie upon request.

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Change of Information?

We want to be certain that you do not miss an issue of *A Slice of Pie*, so please send name or address changes either by phone 800-692-7258 or by email to pie@thearcpcpa.org. Thank you.

The PIE Team

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