

# A Slice of Pie

Communication  
from the Policy  
Information Exchange

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

### Advocacy Opportunities

The Arc of Pennsylvania will hold its Advocacy Day on May 5th, focusing on key issues for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Pennsylvania School Works (PASW) will hold its Advocacy Day and Rally on May 6th, focusing on education funding, including adequacy funding and special education..

[Arc registration](#)

[PASW registration](#)

### Capitol Improvements

Pennsylvania examined how accessible the State Capitol is for people with disabilities. The study identified many issues, including confusing

signs and unclear hallways and rooms. State leaders plan to spend \$16.5 million on small projects to address some problems. However, fixing all accessibility issues would cost significantly more, so many improvements might be delayed.

Disability advocates say accessibility goes beyond adding ramps. It also includes clear signage, simple layouts, quiet and calming spaces, and meeting rooms that suit everyone. They are concerned that people with developmental disabilities are not fully included in

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decision-making. Advocates want clear plans, timelines, and funding so people with disabilities can participate fully. One improvement has already been made: an adult-changing table was added to a large, accessible bathroom. The Pennsylvania Developmental Disability Council [praised](#) this change.

## Early Intervention

The Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) has opened the public review period for the federal IDEA Part C grant application for Fiscal Year 2026. Review begins on March 30, 2026, with public comments accepted from April 1 to May 8, 2026. Families, providers, and stakeholders can review online via Pennsylvania's Early Intervention webpages or request a hard copy by emailing [ra-ocdintervention@pa.gov](mailto:ra-ocdintervention@pa.gov) or calling 717-346-9320. Comments can be submitted [online](#) or by email/mail to OCDEL's Bureau of Early Intervention Services and Family Supports in Harrisburg. Accommodations are available, and all comments received by May 8, 2026, will be considered before the grant is finalized. The Department of Education invites comments on the IDEA-B regulation until May 19, 2026, and may be directed to Samantha Pudloski or Lisa Hauswirth at 607 South Drive, Harrisburg, PA, or to [RA-EDIDEABgrant@pa.gov](mailto:RA-EDIDEABgrant@pa.gov). Verbal comments can be made on April 29, 2026, from 3 to 6 p.m., with prior contact to Aaron loos at (717) 772-3500 or [aioos@pa.gov](mailto:aioos@pa.gov) by April 22, 2026. More details are in the Pennsylvania Bulletin.

## Event Guides

The Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) shared a Sensory-Friendly Preparedness Guide to help people with

developmental disabilities feel safe at large events. These events include parades, festivals, fireworks, and Pennsylvania's 250th anniversary celebrations. Big events can be challenging because they often have loud noises, large crowds, traffic disruptions, and more police officers, which can feel overwhelming for some individuals.

[The guide](#) encourages providers and caregivers to plan ahead. Planning can help people stay calm, safe, and comfortable during events. It offers simple ideas, such as preparing for loud sounds, planning rides and transportation, knowing where to leave if needed, and using social stories to explain what will happen. These steps can help everyone know what to expect and enjoy the event more.

Other helpful tools can be found [here](#).

## Immigration Enforcement Changes

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services is alerting health care and social service providers about a new federal change. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has ended policies that prevented immigration enforcement in certain locations. These locations include medical offices, behavioral health centers, and social service agencies. Federal immigration agents may now perform actions, such as making arrests, in these settings, so organizations are advised to prepare.

The Departments of Human Services, Aging, Drug and Alcohol Programs, and Health have shared guidance to help keep people safe. They want facilities to have clear policies that protect people's rights and safety. Organizations should designate staff

to communicate with immigration agents, plan responses to requests for information, and collaborate with legal and community partners. They should also aim to reduce stress and disruption, especially for individuals with disabilities who may be more vulnerable in these situations.

## Teacher Shortages

Pennsylvania is investing nearly \$1 million to address the shortage of special education teachers. The funding will support an Accelerated Special Education Teacher Certification Program at 11 colleges and universities across the state. This program enables current school employees, such as paraprofessionals or teachers with temporary permits, to earn their special education teaching certificates more quickly.

The goal is to bring more trained and qualified special education teachers into classrooms. Students with disabilities perform better when they have teachers who are well prepared and understand their needs. When there are not enough teachers, class sizes can increase, staff may experience burnout, and students might miss essential services. Programs like this help strengthen the workforce and improve special education throughout Pennsylvania.

## Transportation

The State Transportation Commission is announcing public comment periods for the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Each Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organization across Pennsylvania will hold its own public comment period between March and July 2026. During this time, people can review and share feedback on transportation projects

planned for their region.

Your feedback is important because it helps determine which projects receive funding and progress in your area. Use the interactive map to locate your area, planning region, and the dates of your public comment period.

[To comment](#)

# Federal News

## Accessible Airports

A new federal rule mandates that large and medium airports in the United States provide adult changing tables. These tables are intended for teenagers and adults who need assistance using the restroom, including many people with disabilities. The rule, enacted by the Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act of 2024, requires each airport terminal to have at least one private room equipped with a large changing table.

Federal officials are working on design standards and seeking public input. These updates aim to protect dignity, health, and safety by preventing people from needing to change on bathroom floors or avoiding travel altogether. [Disability advocates](#) emphasize that the rooms should be easy to find, private, clean, and large enough for caregivers to assist safely. They encourage families, self-advocates, and caregivers to share their experiences so airports can better meet the needs of people with disabilities and promote respectful, independent travel.

## Autism Committees

A federal group called the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC) canceled its

public meeting scheduled for March 2026. No reason was given for the cancellation. The group helps guide nearly \$2 billion in autism research and services. Its members include scientists, self-advocates, family members, and government officials. This meeting would have been the first public gathering in over a year. Many families and advocates were upset because they had shared comments and were waiting for answers after recent changes to the group. When meetings are canceled, families lose the chance to be heard and to understand how decisions are made. Advocates say ongoing public involvement is vital for transparency, clear communication, and family participation in policy and funding decisions.

In Pennsylvania, researchers, parents, and healthcare providers have started a new group called the Independent Autism Coordinating Committee. This group was formed due to concerns about changes to the federal committee. Some worry that the federal group no longer follows trusted science and that some new members support ideas not based on evidence. The independent group focuses on science-based research, accurate information, and the genuine needs of autistic people, especially those requiring more support. Advocates believe this group helps ensure autism research and funding decisions are grounded in facts, real experiences, and respect for autistic individuals and their families.

### Children's Behavioral Health

Recent federal actions are reducing support for children's behavioral health. Nearly \$2 billion in grants has been cut. Important programs, including the National Child Traumatic Stress Network and school initiatives like Project AWARE, have ended. These programs helped

children address mental health needs, especially after trauma.

Earlier, the U.S. Department of Education attempted to take back \$1 billion in grants that aided schools in hiring counselors and mental health staff. These staff are crucial for students with disabilities. Courts halted the cuts temporarily, but ongoing appeals make the future uncertain. Layoffs at the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education have also weakened the system that supports children's mental health, especially for those with complex needs. Even after a government shutdown paused some staffing changes, resources remain scarcer than before.

[These developments](#) weaken the federal safety net many families rely on, with children with disabilities the most affected. The article also raises concerns about how federal officials discuss mental health and medication. Some statements might confuse families or deter them from seeking help. For example, a report from the Health and Human Services questioned the safety of common antidepressants, potentially increasing stigma and creating additional barriers to care for children needing mental health treatment.

### Civil Rights in Education

A report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) identified serious issues at the U.S. Department of Education. The report states that the department spent up to \$38 million paying civil rights staff who were placed on administrative leave following significant layoffs in March 2025. For much of 2025, more than half of the staff in the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) were unable to perform their duties. During this period, OCR received over 9,000

complaints, many from students and families reporting disability discrimination.

Because the staff was not working, OCR dismissed 90% of the complaints it reviewed, a much higher rate than usual. The GAO noted that the Department of Education did not clearly explain how the staff reductions saved money or improved the office's efficiency. The report reveals a major failure in civil rights enforcement. OCR is responsible for safeguarding students' rights, including ensuring students with disabilities receive accommodations, are not unfairly disciplined, and are protected from restraint, seclusion, or harassment.

When OCR is not functioning properly, students with disabilities become less protected. Families often turn to OCR when a child is denied support, excluded from class, or treated unfairly because of a disability. When complaints are ignored or dismissed, families are left without answers, schools lack guidance, and students may suffer long-term harm. Civil rights only matter when they are enforced.

### Dangerous Autism Treatments

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) removed a webpage that warned people about ineffective and potentially dangerous autism treatments. These included treatments like chelation, chlorine dioxide, hyperbaric oxygen therapy, and raw camel milk. The FDA explained that the page was taken down as part of a routine cleanup of outdated content, even though the information remains important today.

Advocates are [worried](#) that removing the page leaves families without clear, trusted information. Some of these treatments are still heavily

advertised and can cause serious harm or even death. The change occurred during broader policy shifts at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Some leaders and advisors have supported autism treatments that lack scientific proof. Advocates fear this might confuse families and make it more difficult to protect people with autism from unsafe care.

### Medicaid & Rising Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Costs

State Medicaid programs face rising costs because spending on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy has increased rapidly. For example, Indiana spent \$21 million on ABA in 2017, but that amount jumped to \$611 million by 2023. Due to these escalating expenses, states are reviewing ABA programs, implementing more rules, and undergoing federal audits. Families worry these changes could limit access to ABA, which often requires 10 to 40 hours of therapy each week.

Providers are also concerned. They argue that if Medicaid does not pay enough, services might be reduced or halted, making it harder for children with autism to receive care. This issue is happening nationwide and is connected to potential federal Medicaid cuts nearing \$1 trillion. States like North Carolina, Nebraska, Colorado, and Indiana have already reduced payment rates or limited therapy hours, even as more families need services.

In North Carolina, ABA costs are projected to rise from \$122 million in 2022 to \$639 million by 2026. Nebraska and Indiana have seen even larger increases. These cuts are causing longer waitlists, fewer providers, and less available

care. Many families worry that crucial supports for children with autism might no longer be stable or accessible.

### **Real Emergency Access for Aging and Disability Inclusion (READI) for Disasters Act**

S. 3628 is a bipartisan bill that aims to improve disaster response for older adults and people with disabilities. It tackles issues in emergency planning, where services like healthcare, transportation, housing, civil rights, and recovery are often poorly coordinated. These gaps can increase risks for seniors and individuals with disabilities during disasters. The bill seeks to ensure accessibility, civil rights, and coordinated support are included in federal disaster response efforts, even during emergencies.

H.R. 7029 is a similar bill in the U.S. House of Representatives, co-sponsored by Representative Fitzpatrick. This bill also aims to better prepare older adults and people with disabilities for disasters. Together, these bills take an important step toward ensuring federal emergency plans include everyone and promote safe, inclusive disaster preparedness and response.

Senate <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/3628>

House <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/7029>

### **School Choice**

A report from the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA) warns that expanding private school choice could harm special education and civil rights. The report finds that

private school choice programs serve significantly fewer students with disabilities. In eight states, only about 2% of students with disabilities participate, except in Florida, where participation is higher. These programs can increase disparities based on disability, income, race, and neighborhood.

The report also notes that families often lose important rights when they move a child with a disability from a public to a private school. These rights may include access to special education services, legal protections, and inclusion with other students. Families are not always fully informed about these changes. The report indicates that students with disabilities in private programs are more likely to be educated separately than in public schools, where most students learn alongside peers without disabilities. COPAA cautions that while some families might benefit, expanding these programs could weaken disability rights and harm public schools, which serve most students with disabilities.

### **Special Education**

In 2024, the number of children and youth ages 3 to 21 with disabilities who qualify for special education increased. About 301,301,000 more students qualified than the previous year, according to The Advocacy Institute. In total, roughly 8.2 million students received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Early intervention services also supported nearly 459,459,000 infants and toddlers. Since 2019, the number of students receiving IDEA services has grown by over 12%, despite a slight decrease in total public school enrollment.

Some states experienced larger growth than

others. Texas saw the biggest increase in students with disabilities. Washington, D. C., and schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Education also experienced strong growth. Montana was the only state where the number declined. The increase is especially notable among students with autism, developmental delays, and mental health needs. This growth indicates a higher demand for trained staff, school support, and funding. Advocates say the data can be used to advocate for better services, early screening, inclusion, and robust enforcement of special education laws. Without sufficient support, schools may struggle to meet students' needs.

A recent federal [court decision](#) in Massachusetts also impacts families of students with disabilities. The court ruled that when parents choose to enroll their child in a private school, the state is not required to provide or fund special education services at that school. The court stated this aligns with federal law, which emphasizes providing services in public schools. Public schools may offer limited services at public or neutral locations, but comprehensive services are not mandated in private schools.

For families in Pennsylvania, this decision means opting for a private or religious school often comes with fewer special education supports. On-site IEP services might not be available, and families may face greater challenges and less legal protection. Unless a public school cannot meet a child's needs and must pay for a private placement, public schools remain the strongest option for safeguarding special education rights and services.

### **Supporting Blue Envelope Programs Act**

H.R. 6602 is a bill that would allocate about \$5 million each year from 2027 to 2031. The funds would go to the U.S. Department of Justice to support Blue Envelope programs. These programs help first responders, like police officers, communicate more effectively with people who have autism, intellectual or developmental disabilities, or difficulties communicating. The blue envelope is used to hold items such as a driver's license or registration, and officers receive training to help ensure safer, calmer interactions.

Participating in a Blue Envelope program is voluntary; individuals do not have to sign up for a registry or share personal information. The idea originated in San Bernardino County, California, and has since spread to many states, including Pennsylvania. The bill was sent to the House Judiciary Committee on December 10, 2025. Supporters say federal funding would help communities enhance public safety in ways that are inclusive, respectful, and trauma-informed, using clear, simple communication that benefits everyone.

### **Treatment Choices**

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved a drug called Wellcovorin (leucovorin calcium). This is the first approved treatment for a rare genetic condition called FOLR1-related cerebral folate deficiency. This condition makes it difficult for the brain to get enough folate, which is essential for development. Without treatment, individuals with this condition may face serious delays, seizures, movement issues, and traits similar to autism. When diagnosed early, this treatment may help improve outcomes.

It is important to understand that Wellcovorin is not approved as a treatment for autism in general. It only treats this specific rare condition. Clear and careful communication is crucial, so families are not misled. Medical care should be based on science, and a person's individual needs should be met safely and effectively.

A study from Brown University showed how public messages can influence medical decisions. The study found that a White House autism briefing in 2025 changed how doctors prescribed certain medicines. After the briefing, fewer pregnant people used Tylenol, and more children were prescribed leucovorin, even though strong evidence was limited. The briefing suggested a link between Tylenol and autism and promoted leucovorin as a treatment. This demonstrates how government messages can strongly impact health choices. Families need accurate, science-based information to make informed and safe decisions about care.

### Voting Access

The proposed SAVE America Act could hinder voting access for people with disabilities. The bill would impose additional requirements, such as proof of citizenship, current IDs, and extra paperwork for mail-in ballots. Many individuals with disabilities already encounter obstacles because polling locations are often difficult to reach. Many disabled voters depend on mail-in voting or online registration to vote privately and independently.

The Arc of the United States believes these changes would create more unfair barriers. They believe that mail voting and accessible technology are civil rights, not just conveniences. In recent elections, over half of voters

with disabilities used mail-in ballots. Laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Help America Vote Act mandate that voting be accessible and equal for all. Advocates warn that the SAVE America Act could strip voting rights from those who cannot travel easily, gather additional documents, or use inaccessible systems, thereby worsening long-standing inequalities in voting.

## Pennsylvania Legislative 2026 First Quarter Review

To look up any bill online, visit <https://www.palegis.us/>

### Legislation Moving

[House Bill 80](#) introduced by Representatives Arvind Venkat and Kristin Marcell, took another step forward this quarter. In February, it was amended in the Senate Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee and reported out unanimously. It now awaits consideration from the Senate Appropriations Committee. The bill would allow PA to join the Audiology and Speech Therapist Professional Compact. Similar bills for Social Worker Licensure ([House Bill 554](#)), Occupational Therapy Licensure ([House Bill 482](#) and [Senate Bill 571](#)), and Counseling ([House Bill 668](#)) received similar action.

[House Bill 200](#), introduced by former Representative Dan Miller, Representatives Jennifer O'Mara, Lindsay Powell, Kathleen Tomlinson,

and Natalie Mihalek, was amended and passed the House 107-92 in March. This is the Family Care Act, and the amendments changed the language to include no insurance fund, mandating businesses to have to provide it, so all workers are included, cut down to 12 weeks for all purposes (similar to Virginia, which recently passed), creating a fund for small businesses (less than 50 employees)/self-employed to get reimbursed for paid wages for leave, original qualifying reasons (parental, medical, taking care of family, safe leave, military) will still be included.

[House Bill 802](#), introduced by Representative Liz Hanbidge, was amended and unanimously passed the House. It would protect the assistive technology that public officials use for accommodations from Right-to-Know requests.

[House Bill 1700](#), introduced by Representative Brandon Markosek, was amended in the House Transportation Committee and reported out unanimously. It is currently tabled by the Speaker as of March 23rd. It would allow for a voluntary identifier on driver's licenses and state identification cards for individuals with communication impairments. Meanwhile, [Senate Bill 802](#), which would accomplish a similar objective, passed the Senate unanimously.

[House Bill 1902](#), introduced by Representatives Dan Frankel and Napoleon Nelson, was amended in the House Judiciary Committee and reported out 14-12 along party lines. It is currently tabled by the Speaker as of March 19th. It would amend law enforcement training on investigating hate crimes. Similar hate crime legislation, House Bill 1905, to expand the ethnic intimidation statute, received similar actions.

[House Bill 1963](#), introduced by Ryan Bizzarro, passed the House unanimously. It would add a certified driver rehabilitation specialist to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Medical Advisory Board.

[Senate Bill 402](#), introduced by Senator David Argall, was amended and reported out of the Senate Education Committee 9-2, and should continue through the consideration process in upcoming session dates.

[Senate Bill 867](#), introduced by Senator Christine Tartaglione, passed the Senate unanimously. It would grant the Accessibility Advisory Board the authority to review and adopt future accessibility codes.

### New Legislation Since Your Last Slice

[House Bill 2109](#), introduced by a group of eight House Democrats and one Republican, is known as the Golden Girls Law. It would benefit individuals with disabilities by removing arbitrary local occupancy limits, making it easier to create shared, community-based housing options. It would increase flexibility for group homes and life sharing arrangements, reduce costly regulatory barriers, and promote autonomy, affordability, and social inclusion—helping people with disabilities live in integrated neighborhoods rather than institutional settings. States that have adopted this show that removing arbitrary occupancy caps fosters more affordable, flexible, and integrated shared living arrangements.

[House Bill 2136](#), introduced by Representative Emily Kinkead, would require the Department of Corrections to honor any diagnosis made before incarceration, ensuring that their needs are properly recognized and accommodated in the correctional system.

[House Bill 2149](#), introduced by Representative Jennifer O'Mara, would expand access to executive-functioning and study-skills programming in grades 6-12, including organization, self-regulation, memory strategies, and time management.

[House Bill 2164](#), introduced by Representative Bridget Kosierowski, would enable family members of medically fragile children in Pennsylvania to become certified as Complex Care Assistants (CCAs). Under the supervision of a Registered Nurse, CCAs could provide skilled nursing services at higher reimbursement rates, helping address staffing shortages and ensuring proper training and pay. The care level would be equivalent to that of a Medical Assistant.

[House Bill 2275](#), introduced by Representative Tarah Probst, would extend the IEP evaluation timeframe from 60 calendar days to 60 school days.

[House Bill 2307](#), introduced by Representative Emily Kinhead, would increase the share of the Special Education Funding appropriation directed to the Contingency Fund from 1% to 2%. Would distribute funds from the percentage increase based on the student's cost relative to the applicant district's total special education instructional costs. Limit the Contingency Fund application for a student to 2 school years.

[Senate Bill 1148](#), introduced by Senators John Kane and Amanda Cappelletti, would prohibit financial penalties when an older or disabled tenant must break their lease because the landlord cannot make the necessary accommodations to allow them to remain safely in the unit.

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

## 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@thearcpa.org](mailto:pie@thearcpa.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@thearcpa.org](mailto:pie@thearcpa.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](http://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.

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

# *A Slice of Pie*

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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](mailto:pie@thearcpcpa.org). Thank you.

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