

# Board of Directors

Name:	Position:	City:
John Lakey	Chairperson	Kearney
Candi Koenig	Treasurer	Kearney
Lisa Casullo	Secretary	Waverly
Josh Burke		Lincoln
Seamus Kelly		Omaha
Paulissa Kipp		Omaha
Claude Louishomme		Kearney
Mary McHale		Omaha
William Voss		Scottsbluff
Aimée Folker		Omaha
Joni Thomas		Lincoln

## Our Staff >>>>

Tania Diaz	Chief Executive Officer
Judy Sinner	Fiscal and Human Resources Director
Dianne DeLair	Legal Services Director
Michael J. Elsen	Staff Attorney
Amy A. Miller	Staff Attorney
Madison Wurtele	Staff Attorney
John Murphy	Values-Based Program Director
Patricia Cottingham	Inclusive Education Lay Advocacy Coordinator
Bradley A. Meurrens	Public Policy Director
Molly Klocksinn	Case Advocate
Mindy Baird	Community Outreach Disability Advocate
Yorlery Diaz-Sullivan	Intake Specialist
Karen Masterson	Case Advocate
Nikki Broce	Representative Payee Reviewer
Patricia Nichelson	Legal Assistant
Sharon Ohmberger	Community Engagement Director
Jillian Ward	Business Operations and IT Coordinator
Adalia Henderson	Administrative Secretary
Christina Joseph	Program and Administrative Assistant
Maddie Clement	Law Clerk
Kato Craig	Senior Law Clerk

### Disability Rights Nebraska

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### Scottsbluff Office

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Scottsbluff, NE 69361

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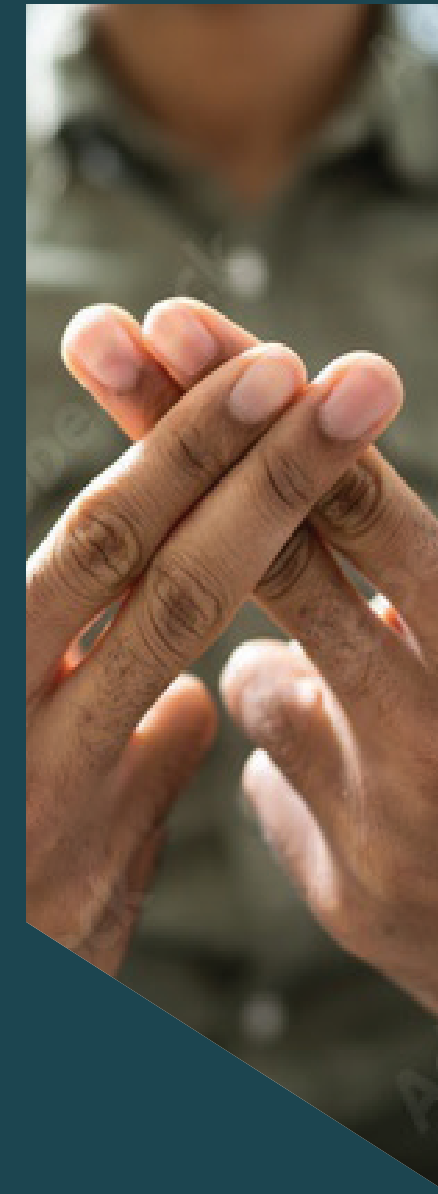
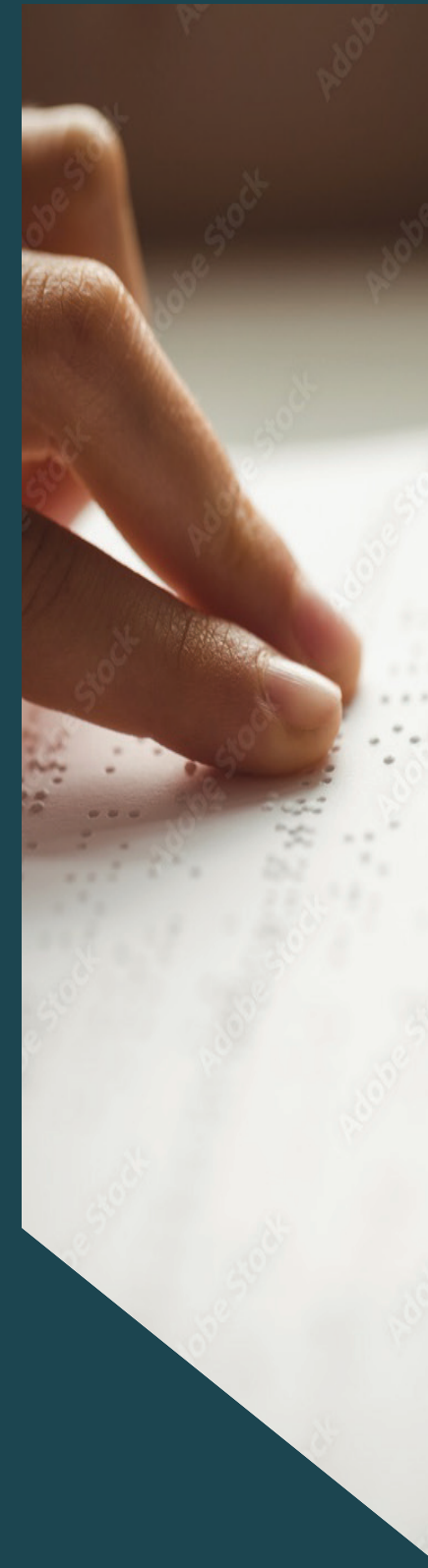
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[disabilityrightsnebraska.org](http://disabilityrightsnebraska.org)



Disability Rights Nebraska is a proud member of Give Nebraska.  
Learn more at [GiveNebraska.org](http://GiveNebraska.org)



**DISABILITY RIGHTS  
NEBRASKA**



# 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities.

[DISABILITYRIGHTSNEBRASKA.ORG](http://DISABILITYRIGHTSNEBRASKA.ORG)

# TANIA DIAZ

## »»» Chief Executive Officer

Tania Diaz became the Chief Executive Officer for Disability Rights Nebraska on July 5, 2022. She began her career as a law clerk on work-study through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. After earning her law degree, she joined the organization as a staff attorney, a position that evolved into her role as Legal Services Director. These roles have provided her with extensive knowledge and experience working with state and federal partners and stakeholders to protect and advocate for the legal and human rights of people with disabilities.

Tania believes it is imperative that the organization continue its engagement with values-based programs and principles; the philosophy provides the foundation for Disability Rights Nebraska as a progressive organization on the leading edge of disability rights. She is deeply committed to ensuring that the programs and services we provide uphold and complement the agency's mission, vision, and purpose.

"I am very fortunate to be a part of Disability Rights Nebraska and learned from incredible mentors. As I moved into this new role, two mentors played a major role in my development and the development of this organization. John Murphy, Values-Based Program Director, and Eric Evans, Chief Executive Officer. John and Eric both retired this year. Eric was a visionary who taught the entire organization how to envision a positive and robust future for people with disabilities. Eric showed us the importance of potent and impactful advocacy. John's strongly held beliefs in understanding devaluation and valued social roles for people with disabilities lead our commitment to these principles. He developed an amazing Citizen Advocacy Program that created countless deep personal relationships between a person with a disability and a person in their community. Eric and John's contributions are endless and we are eternally grateful to them!"

“ Tania believes it is imperative that the organization continue its engagement with values-based programs and principles; the philosophy provides the foundation for Disability Rights Nebraska as a progressive organization on the leading edge of disability rights. ”

# FINANCIAL REPORT

FY October 1, 2021 » September 30, 2022

## Support and Revenue »»»

US Dept of Health & Human Services .....	\$1,208,149
US Dept of Education .....	\$186,709
US Social Security Administration .....	\$207,875
NE Dept of Health & Human Services .....	\$555,039
Developmental Disabilities Council .....	\$48
Woods.....	\$4,609
University of Nebraska Medical Center .....	\$7,500
Donations, Interest & Other Income .....	\$19,016
<b>Total Revenue.....</b>	<b>\$2,188,943</b>

## Expenses »»»

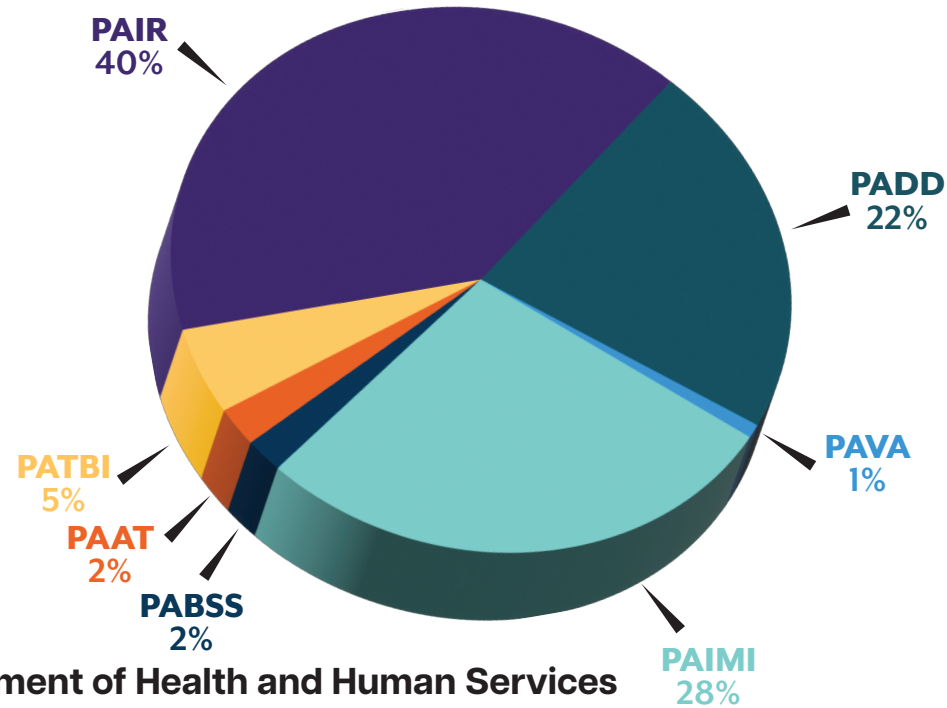
Salaries & Benefits .....	\$1,187,167
Operating Expenses.....	\$165,618
Travel Expenses.....	\$8,581
Educational Expenses.....	\$57,352
Contractual Services .....	\$146,579
Citizen Advocacy Support .....	\$387,490
<b>Total Program Services Expenses.....</b>	<b>\$1,952,787</b>

Fundraising.....	\$16,205
Management & Administration.....	\$286,642
<b>Total Support Services Expenses .....</b>	<b>\$302,847</b>

Total Support and Revenue .....	\$2,188,943
Less Total Expenses.....	\$2,255,634
Change in Net Assets .....	-\$66,691

Net Assets, beginning of year .....	\$145,310
Net Assets, end of year .....	\$97,940

# SERVICE REQUEST NUMBERS >>>



## US Department of Health and Human Services

- ACL** Administration on Community Living
- PADD** Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities
- PAIMI** Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness
- PAAT** Protection and Advocacy for Assistive Technology
- PAVA** Protection and Advocacy for Voting Access
- PATBI** Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury

## US Department of Education

- PAIR** Protection and Advocacy for Individual Rights

## Social Security Administration

- PABSS** Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security
- PABRP** Representative Payees of Social Security

## Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

- HHS** Department of Health and Human Services

The Protection and Advocacy System for the State of Nebraska. This publication was made possible by funding support from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Administration for Community Living; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; Social Security Administration; Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services; and U.S. Department of Education. Disability Rights Nebraska is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. These contents are solely the responsibility of Disability Rights Nebraska and do not necessarily represent the official views of these funding agencies.



## Our Mission

Disability Rights Nebraska uses a combination of legal advocacy, public policy advocacy, citizen advocacy, self advocacy and advocacy education to protect vulnerable people with disabilities, especially those who earn, live or work in isolated, segregated or congregated settings.



## Our Vision

Nebraskans with disabilities, especially those who are the most vulnerable, will be free from harm and able to exercise the same rights, opportunities and choices available to all citizens in order to live fully integrated and culturally valued lives.

## >>> Social Media Followers

- Facebook..... 2,221
- Twitter ..... 641
- YouTube ..... 38
- Instagram..... 108

- ▶ Press releases issued: 5
- ▶ Times a Protection and Advocacy System representative was interviewed or featured on TV or radio: 17
- ▶ Articles about the Protection and Advocacy System or its work in external mass media such as newspapers, radio, podcasts, blogs, or television: 17
- ▶ Social media followers: 2,970
- ▶ Absolute unique visitors to blogs/web pages where information about the Protection and Advocacy System is mentioned: 17,178
- ▶ Circulation of the Protection and Advocacy System's newsletter and/or listserv updates: 848
- ▶ Articles by the Protection and Advocacy System about disability rights issues published in newspapers, books, journals, or magazines: 4
- ▶ Links to other disability rights related information sources published on the Protection and Advocacy System website: 250
- ▶ Presentations made to community groups: 36

# MONITORING AND COVID-19

As we documented in our November 2020 report “A Widening Divide: How Nebraska’s Pandemic Response Has Left Behind Many People with Disabilities,” the state’s pre-pandemic planning unfortunately overlooked care for people with disabilities. Disability Rights Nebraska issued a follow-up to this report in December 2021, “Second Class During the Pandemic: How Nebraska Discriminated Against People with Disabilities,” which outlined deficiencies with the State’s COVID-19 response. See our reports at: <https://www.disabilityrightsnebraska.org/what-we-do/covid-19-updates/covid-19-reports.html>. This second report highlighted three deadly gaps in Nebraska’s response to the pandemic. First, inaccessible testing through the State’s Test Nebraska program. The program failed to plan and make accommodations for people with disabilities who could not drive or travel to a testing site. Second, the State failed to adopt crisis standards of care. Crisis standards of care are the rules that come into effect in the event of medical shortages, whether that be hospital beds, ventilators, prescriptions, or other life-saving care. When resources are scarce, doctors have to decide who will receive care and who will not. Many states have established standards in statute or regulation to guide the doctors’ decisions, but Nebraska has no such standards. Third, the State failed to properly plan and administer vaccine access for people with disabilities. The following solutions to these deadly gaps were identified: including people with disabilities in the pandemic and emergency management process; assurance and a commitment on the part of the State to ensure programs are accessible; and lastly, Nebraska needs public, clear, and enforceable crisis standards of care set forth in law. Disability Rights Nebraska continues to advocate and provide education on these issues. As a result of our education efforts, we have been invited into an ongoing partnership with the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency as part of a stakeholder disaster planning group so that in future emergencies people with disabilities will not be left behind.



## »»» LEGAL ADVOCACY

Disability Rights Nebraska represented an individual with multiple violations of both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The individual, a high school student, was removed from her neighborhood school and placed in a new school after she experienced additional symptoms related to her disability. The change removed her from the peers she attended school with for years and clustered her with other students with disabilities. Further, the individual was not given services related to her specific needs. Disability Rights Nebraska filed a due process complaint with the Nebraska Department of Education. Immediately following the filing of the complaint, Disability Rights Nebraska filed a motion for stay put and a brief in support of that motion, as allowed under the IDEA. Disability Rights Nebraska succeeded on that motion, allowing the individual to remain in her neighborhood school until a hearing on the complaint was held. A settlement agreement was entered into with the school district that ensured the student’s official placement would remain in her neighborhood school and set out guidelines for achieving better accommodations. This was a major win for the student as it meant she would be allowed to graduate from her neighborhood school and not be forced to attend a different school solely based on her disability.



# VALUES-BASED PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS >>>

## **Citizen Advocacy Program Consultation, Training, and Technical Assistance:**

Disability Rights Nebraska's role in Citizen Advocacy is to provide consultation on program development, train board members and staff, and evaluate Citizen Advocacy Offices in Nebraska. The Values-Based Program Director attended local Citizen Advocacy Board meetings; provided orientation related to Citizen Advocacy Principles and Practices; provided individual Coordinator support; contacted Coordinators weekly; held quarterly Coordinator meetings; and reflected with Coordinators who attended Image Method Training, Social Role Valorization and PASSING.

A new video featuring the Citizen Advocacy relationship involving "Pearl & Joan" was completed.

## **Annual Citizen Advocacy Retreat:**

This year's retreat was an online event designed for Citizen Advocacy boards to meet together in-person, while working virtually with presenters and with other boards and attendees. Recordings were made available of Citizen Advocacy Retreat presentations: From Barriers to Belonging: Creating Inclusive Communities for Everyone presented by Dr. Erik Carter, and Envisioning Possibilities presented by Hope Lee Dittmeier.

## **Values-Based Education:**

The "Return of Values-Based Education" workshop was held at Nebraska Wesleyan University, presented by Consultant Darcy Elks and co-presenter Elisa Parmer to 55 attendees. Management, staff and board representatives from Service Coordination; the Office of Public Guardian; Region V Services; and Disability Rights Nebraska attended, as did people with disabilities, family members and advocates.

Additionally, Darcy Elks completed three online "Wounds Module" workshops with 150 members of Service Coordination staff and management during this period, bringing the total attendance to 395 throughout the duration of the project. A total of seven attendees participated in the Valued Social Roles Facilitation Training facilitated by Darcy Elks.

## **Inclusive Education Lay Advocacy:**

The 5th training cohort for the Inclusive Education Lay Advocacy Program ended on October 21, 2021; three participants completed the training. The 6th training cohort began September 13, 2022 with 10 participants. Lay Advocates access training videos, scenarios, and other materials, on OneDrive, to independently refresh and strengthen their knowledge and skills as needed.

To streamline and expedite the referral process, Disability Rights Nebraska now refers families and students with education-related concerns to the Inclusive Education Lay Advocacy Project Coordinator. During this period, 38 families were referred to the Inclusive Education Lay Advocacy Program. 28 were referred to trained Lay Advocates.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement focuses on increasing the inclusion of people with disabilities in the communities of their choice by increasing awareness of, and building support for, disability rights. We tell the story with a focus on the people we serve and the work we do. Work in this program area includes:

- ▶ Strengthening community relationships through personal contact.
- ▶ Responding to inquiries and connecting people with resources.
- ▶ Building awareness of the issues people with disabilities face on a daily basis.
- ▶ Sharing our work to address those issues.
- ▶ Seeking out opportunities for collaboration to expand the impact of our work and our partners' work.

Responding to an inquiry from our website, two members of our staff met with representatives from a local church that wanted to make their community more inclusive overall to people with disabilities.

We toured the campus and provided training resources to support them in building inclusiveness into their congregation's day-to-day attitudes and actions. We also directed them to a local organization that could do a physical accessibility review of the building and provided contact information to pursue our recommendations.



# »»» PUBLIC POLICY

A major piece of our public policy work was educating policymakers about the need for disability-inclusive emergency management. Our research demonstrated that the need for disability-inclusive emergency management is significant (in all phases including planning and recovery). Successful efforts to build more inclusive emergency management centered on education, networking, and communication between emergency managers, disability organizations, and people with disabilities themselves.

We worked with Senator Jen Day to produce Legislative Bill 1104. The bill would require the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to consult with disability advocacy and disability service organizations in emergency planning. The hearing was a success: NEMA had no objection and between testifiers Senator Brewer openly discussed his experience in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina saying that this type of collaboration and information would have been helpful. The bill advanced out of committee unopposed but did not pass.



As a result of our work and visibility on LB 1104, Disability Rights Nebraska was asked to help NEMA develop and revise their Guiding Principles and Goals. Many of our suggestions made it into the new language directly or shaped what did. Additionally, we provided NEMA staff with a host of contacts to connect with the disability community and they used them: for example, NEMA had a table and staff at the 2022 Disability Pride Day event.

Our Public Policy Interns, Brooke Anderson and Sophia Kazmierski, spent their internship researching and working on the issue of disability-inclusive emergency management/ disaster preparedness. Brooke and Sophia are students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and each identifies as a student with a disability. Brooke and Sophia developed a slideshow presentation on the importance of including people with disabilities in emergency planning and management. Disability Rights Nebraska was able to arrange for Brooke and Sophia to present their work to officials from NEMA, including Assistant Director Portis (in photo on far right). After the presentation, Brooke and Sophia fielded questions and engaged the NEMA officials in a lengthy policy discussion.