



Annual Report

2024



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Introduction

Dear Friends, Supporters, and Advocates,

As we reflect on the past year, we are proud to present Disability Rights Vermont's (DRVT) Annual Report, which highlights our ongoing commitment to defending and advancing the rights of Vermonters with disabilities. This year has been marked by significant challenges and opportunities, but we have remained steadfast in our mission to empower individuals, foster inclusion, and challenge systems of inequity.

At DRVT, we work tirelessly to ensure that all Vermonters with all abilities have access to the resources, services, and protections they need to thrive. From addressing systemic barriers to advocating for inclusive policies, our team has dedicated countless hours to promoting justice and equity for all.

This report offers an overview of our achievements, including our upcoming established goals, impactful advocacy efforts, and community partnerships that have strengthened our collective voice. It also acknowledges the barriers we continue to face and outlines our vision for a more accessible and equitable future.

We are deeply grateful to our staff, board members, council members, and community allies who continue to support our work. Your unwavering dedication fuels our mission and inspires us to push the boundaries of what's possible. Together, we have made strides toward a Vermont where everyone can live with dignity, independence, and respect.

As you review this report, we invite you to reflect on our progress and join us in shaping a future where disability rights are human rights. Your partnership is vital, and we are honored to walk this path alongside you.

With gratitude and determination,

Lindsey Owen
Executive Director
Disability Rights Vermont



About DRVT

Disability Rights Vermont (DRVT) is part of the National Protection and Advocacy system. Congress created this system in response to concerns that States were not doing enough to protect people with disabilities against abuse, neglect, and serious rights violations. Congress created the Protection and Advocacy (P&A) system to increase scrutiny and available resources to improve conditions for people with disabilities.

Each state has a P&A system; some are part of state government and some are private, non-profit corporations. DRVT is a private, independent, nonpartisan, non-profit corporation designated by the Governor as Vermont's P&A system, authorized to advocate and protect the legal rights of people with disabilities in Vermont.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to promote the equality, dignity, and self-determination of people with disabilities.

We Promote:

- Self Advocacy
- Education
- Systemic change to benefit individuals with disabilities.

**Advocating for
the legal rights of
Vermonters
with disabilities.**



Our 2025 Goals

As we enter Fiscal Year 2025, Disability Rights Vermont remains committed to advancing the rights and well-being of Vermonters with disabilities. This year, we focus on key areas that address critical needs, amplify marginalized voices, and promote systemic change.

These goals represent our ongoing dedication to fostering independence, inclusion, and equity in every aspect of our work. Together with our partners, advocates, and the communities we serve, we aim to create a future where every Vermonter can live with dignity and opportunity.

1

Amplify Voices Through Policy Reform and Systemic Change

DRVT will intensify its efforts to address systemic inequities that disproportionately impact people with disabilities. This includes advocating for the implementation of policies that promote accessibility, equitable employment opportunities, and improved healthcare and education systems. DRVT will closely monitor and respond to legislative actions affecting Vermonters with disabilities, ensuring that their voices are heard in decision-making processes. By strengthening partnerships with community organizations and coalitions, DRVT aims to amplify collective advocacy efforts, driving meaningful policy reform and fostering a more inclusive society.

2

Strengthen Advocacy for Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS)

We aim to continue advocating for increased investment in HCBS to reduce Vermont's reliance on institutional care. DRVT will collaborate with policymakers and community partners to develop preventative strategies, such as affordable housing and timely access to care, raise public awareness through publications, and events, emphasizing the importance of community-based services in preserving independence and dignity, and provide direct support to individuals navigating systemic barriers to accessing HCBS.

3

Address the Housing Crisis for Vermonters with Disabilities

DRVT will focus on tackling the ongoing housing crisis, which disproportionately affects people with disabilities. We will advocate for increased access to affordable, accessible housing and work to eliminate systemic barriers that prevent individuals from securing stable living environments. DRVT will collaborate with policymakers and community organizations to help develop long-term solutions that prioritize the needs of people with disabilities. By addressing this critical issue, we aim to create a Vermont where everyone has access to safe, affordable housing that supports independence and dignity.

Intake

In 2024, Disability Rights Vermont (DRVT) handled a diverse range of service requests, totaling 1,285 for 979 clients. The intake process captured a broad spectrum of issues, with the highest number of requests concerning Rights Violations (493), closely followed by Abuse (127), and Neglect (175).

DRVT also supported individuals facing challenges related to Government Benefits/Services (130), Housing (73), and Healthcare (35), reflecting ongoing needs in these critical areas. Education (27) and Employment (25) concerns were also prevalent, demonstrating our organization's commitment to advocating for individuals in diverse contexts.

DRVT's intake procedures involved a careful review of each request to identify the most appropriate services, from legal assistance and advocacy to connecting clients with relevant resources. We make every effort to provide appropriate referral sources when individuals contact us about issues that fall outside our priorities or are unrelated to their disability. Through this system, DRVT continued to address issues related to accessibility, discrimination, financial entitlements, and more, ensuring that each client received the attention and support they required. Additionally, we educate people about their rights and available options. Our services and resources vary based on the specific needs of each individual, ensuring they receive the most relevant support.

38%

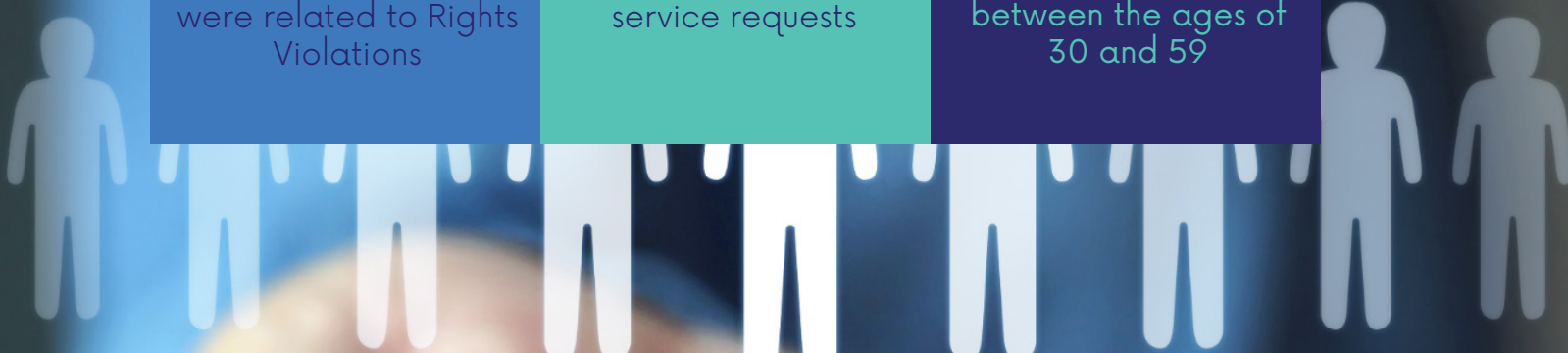
of service requests
were related to Rights
Violations

1,285

total
service requests

22%

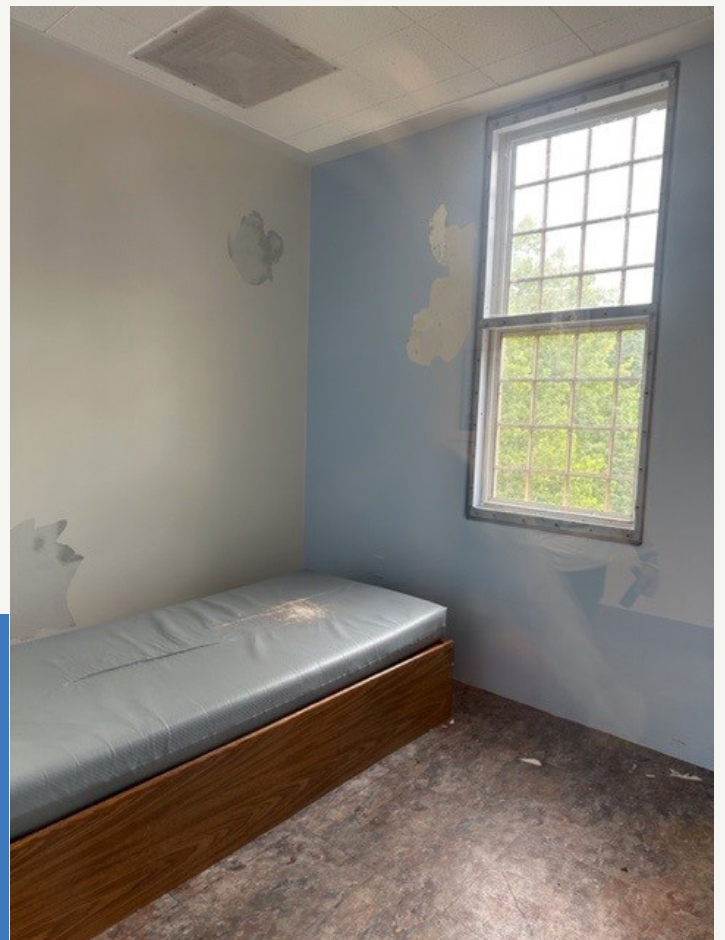
of clients were
between the ages of
30 and 59



Monitoring/Outreach

In FY24, Disability Rights Vermont (DRVT) conducted extensive outreach efforts to monitor treatment conditions and promote culturally competent, trauma-informed, violence-free, and coercion-free environments in facilities across Vermont. These efforts, conducted virtually, by mail, and in person, focused on protecting individuals from abuse, neglect, and serious rights violations while ensuring access to necessary healthcare. DRVT provided services to inmates with disabilities in Vermont's state prisons, primarily through mail, offering information about their rights, voter registration, Social Security benefits, and assistance with priority issues.

In-person outreach visits were conducted at various medical and psychiatric facilities, including 15 visits to the Brattleboro Retreat and multiple visits to institutions like the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital and the University of Vermont Medical Center. Outreach to correctional facilities included virtual and in-person visits to Northern, Southern, Northwest, and Chittenden State Correctional Facilities, with a renewed focus on resuming in-person services that were on pause since the pandemic.



57

total number of
facility visits in
FY24

567

total number of
cases from a
facility in FY24

Educational Activities

In 2024, Disability Rights Vermont (DRVT) actively participated in 12 educational presentations and 17 training initiatives. These included presentations to Vermont Police Academy recruits, a continuing legal education session for attorneys and state employees focusing on Access to Justice and Language Access, and collaboration with an independent filmmaker on an Olmstead documentary.

DRVT also delivered presentations to new staff at the Brattleboro Retreat on patients' rights and DRVT's role within the facility and the broader community. Additionally, DRVT hosted the Caravan for Disability Freedom and Justice, a national tour promoting civic engagement and amplifying the voices of the disability community. Throughout the summer and fall, DRVT partnered with the Secretary of State's Office to conduct voter education and registration drives at farmer's markets, Pride events, local fairs, and festivals across Vermont, in close coordination with the office's civic engagement director. Executive Director, Lindsey Owen, presented to Averte staff and clients regarding Advance Directives.

Employee Spotlight



Clark Postemski, our Employment and Benefits Specialist, has been with DRVT for 15 years. This year he delivered presentations to the Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV), Vermont Law and Graduate School students, the Brain Injury Alliance of Vermont, and staff at the Clara Martin Center.

His presentations focused on eligibility criteria and restrictions related to social security benefits.

166 number of clients that Clark assisted in FY24

12

total presentations provided by DRVT staff in FY24

482

total people who were trained in FY24

17

total trainings attended by DRVT staff in FY24

Systemic Activities

Disability Rights Vermont engaged in a wide range of systemic activities in FY24 to address critical issues impacting individuals with disabilities across Vermont. The Facility Team conducted regular strategic planning to promote culturally competent, trauma-informed, violence-free, and coercion-free mental health treatment environments in facilities statewide. DRVT addressed systemic violations of the Olmstead decision, particularly focusing on the over-reliance on institutional settings for youth with significant mental health conditions, advocating for enhanced home- and community-based services.

Accessibility improvements were prioritized, including the creation of a Language Access Plan, accessible materials in multiple formats, website enhancements, and enhanced processes for inclusivity. Collaboration with community partners like Vermont Family Network and the DD Council focused on improving cultural and linguistic competency in developmental disability services. DRVT also participated in a national initiative through NDRN to address involuntary commitment issues, exploring advocacy strategies, housing alternatives, and reducing stigma.

Work with the Developmental Disabilities Council strengthened connections between people with developmental disabilities, their families, and Vermont communities, emphasizing untapped resources and long-term advocacy strategies. DRVT engaged in systemic discussions on proposed rule changes to Home- and Community-Based Services, aiming for uniformity and accountability across service agencies. The organization contributed to the Mental Health Crisis Response Commission, reviewing critical incidents and recommending improvements in crisis response involving individuals with disabilities and law enforcement.

Prison advocacy efforts involved systemic research and communication with the Department of Corrections to address disability rights issues. Finally, DRVT participated in a grassroots initiative to explore conserving SSA benefits for youth in state custody, focusing on policies to ensure financial support and eligibility continuity for transitioning youth. These systemic activities reflect DRVT's commitment to equity, inclusivity, and comprehensive advocacy for Vermonters with disabilities.

5

number of times
testimony was provided
at a legislative hearing
in FY24

9,715

total number of people
impacted by systemic
activities in FY24



I N C L U S I O N

Voting Rights

Under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), Disability Rights Vermont (DRVT) carried out a wide range of activities to support and empower Vermonters with disabilities in exercising their right to vote. DRVT conducted polling place surveys across six towns with a combined population of 33,768, identifying and reporting ADA accessibility issues. Detailed written reports with recommendations for temporary and permanent improvements were shared with Town Clerks. To enhance election accessibility, DRVT partnered with the Vermont Elections Division to deliver in-person training on "Polling Place Accessibility for Town Clerks," training 200 officials statewide.

DRVT widely distributed the Voter's Guide for Vermonters with Disabilities, a resource designed to provide essential information on voting rights, electoral processes, and key office positions. This guide reached all 14 counties in Vermont, including locations such as hospitals, correctional facilities, peer-run programs, shelters, and community mental health agencies. In FY24, DRVT updated the guide, transitioning it into a year-round publication to enhance its utility and accessibility. This revised edition ensures individuals with disabilities and the general public have consistent access to voter education, empowering them to participate actively in the democratic process.

In collaboration with the Vermont Secretary of State's office, DRVT conducted outreach at events statewide, emphasizing voter registration and civic

engagement. DRVT staff provided direct support for voter registration, assisting 80 individuals in FY24, a significant increase from the previous year. Outreach efforts were extended to correctional facilities, leveraging Vermont's unique allowance for incarcerated individuals to vote, and included training for service providers and people with disabilities on voting rights and the electoral process.

The organization's polling place surveys, training initiatives, and collaborative efforts with local officials and the community reflect its dedication to creating a more accessible electoral process and fostering civic participation among Vermonters with disabilities.



6

polling place
locations were
surveyed in FY24

80

number of people
DRVT assisted with
registering to vote

2024 Attended Events



- Vermont Family Network Conference
- All Brains Belong Community Health
- Education Fair
- Central VT Refugee Action Network
- Communities in Action at the White House
- Disability Awareness Day
- NDRN CEO Conference
- Vermont Association of Justice Annual Conference
- NDRN Annual Conference
- Voice and Choices Conference
- Brattleboro Amtrak Train Station
- Accessible Platform Ceremony
- Mosaic's Take Back the Night
- MAD Pride Day
- Caravan for Disability Freedom and Justice
- Greensboro Farmer's Market
- Rocktoberfest in Morrisville
- Concert on the Green at Camp Meade
- Montpelier Pride
- Second Annual Mental Health and the Courts Summit

60%

of our budget
was salaries and
healthcare

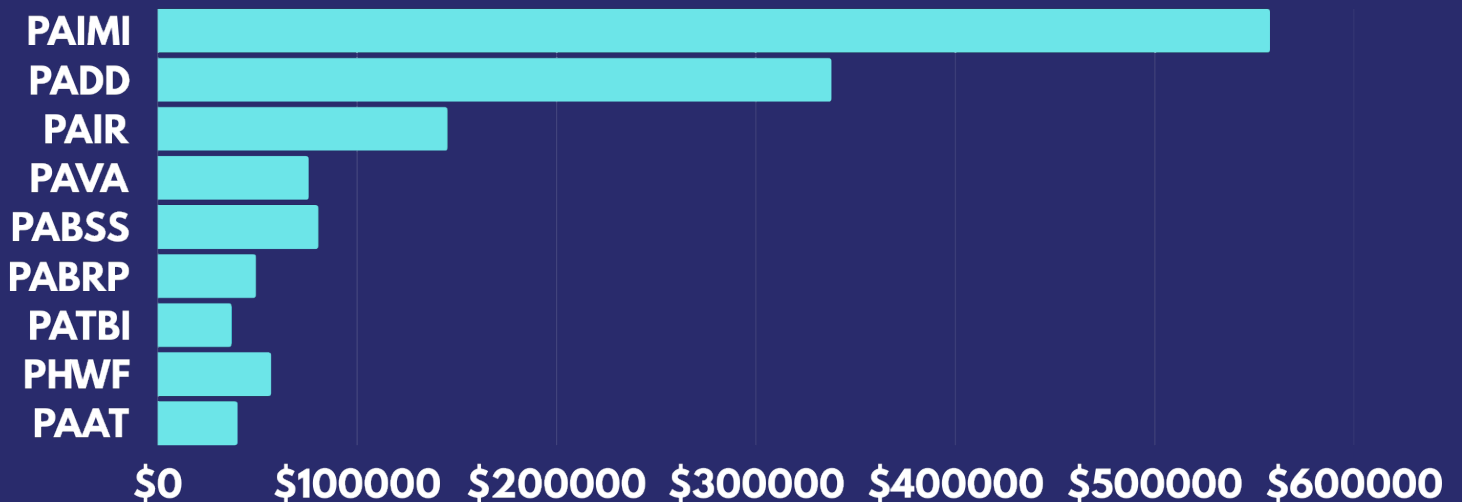
\$1,658,616.06

Total Expenses in FY24

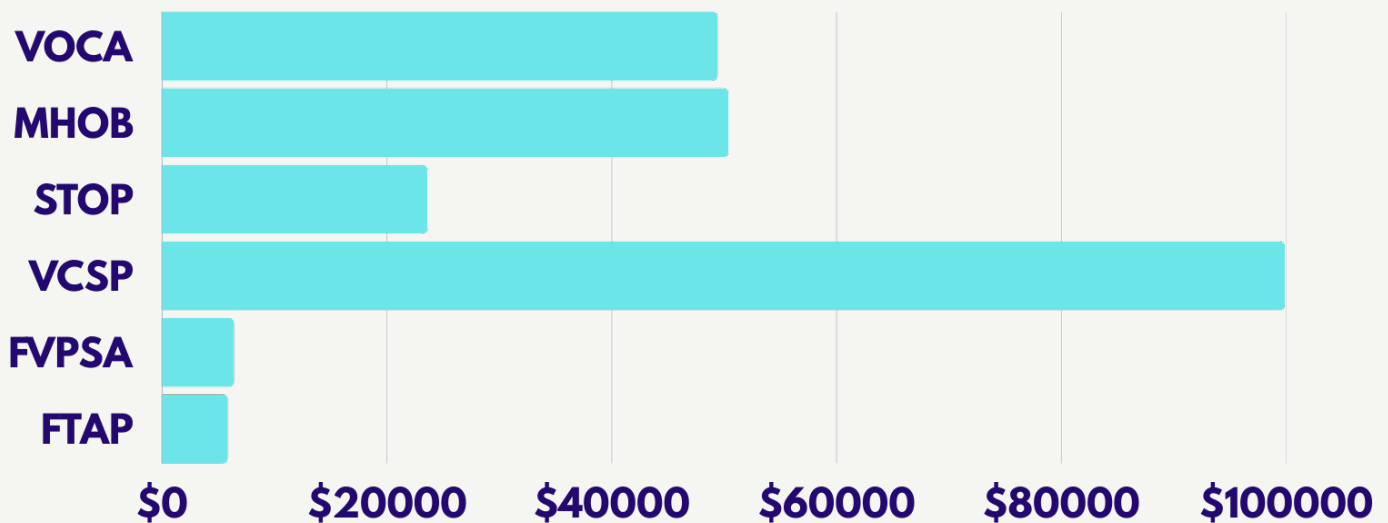
26%

of our budget was
contracted out to
other organizations

Federal Grants



State Grants



Disability Rights Vermont receives funding from several state-funded grants, each contributing to essential programs and services. The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant supports the Victims of Crime program, providing vital services to individuals affected by crime. The VLA State grant supports DRVT's role as the Mental Health Care Ombudsman (MHOB), helping individuals navigate mental health services. The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) grants enhanced remote services for individuals impacted by domestic violence, especially in the context of the pandemic. The Communication Support Project (CSP) grant, funded by various state agencies (DMH + DAIL), provides communication assistance to individuals with disabilities in court and state administrative meetings. The Firearms Technical Assistance Project (FTAP) grant allows DRVT to offer technical support on disability-related issues related to firearms. The STOP grants help fund victim support services and initiatives aimed at reducing violence in specific Vermont counties. These state-funded grants collectively enable DRVT to support and advocate for individuals with disabilities and other vulnerable populations in Vermont.

306

number of clients
assisted under state
funded grants in
FY24

88%

of state funded
service requests
were favorably
resolved in FY24

Client Feedback

“My advocate was absolutely wonderful. I was under time crisis and they made it happen. I am very grateful to my advocate and their staff.”

“Despite the overwhelming caseload, my advocate & attorney put forward a great deal of effort – and sleepless nights – and it paid off in the end. I’m very grateful for DRVT, we would have lost our security without you.”

“[Advocate] was up front and honest with what I could expect and that this could potentially be a lengthy process. Their expertise, knowledge, and patience that they provided me at a very stressful time in my life is so greatly appreciated.”

“Asking my attorney to “ride shotgun with me” for a little while as issues continued on going allowed me confidence to feel more assured that my housing is 1. Stable, 2. Habitable, 3. Free from harassment, and 4. That my issues are understood. Confidence I’ll be ok is priceless.”

Aknowledgments

We extend our deepest gratitude to the individuals and organizations who contributed their time, expertise, and dedication to our cause this year.

To the Vermonters with disabilities who inspire our work daily with their resilience, advocacy, and commitment to justice — your voices are at the heart of all we do.

To our staff, board members, and volunteers at Disability Rights Vermont, thank you for your tireless efforts in advancing the rights and dignity of Vermonters with disabilities. Your work exemplifies the power of collaboration and advocacy.

To the community organizations, service providers, and agencies who collaborated with us to educate and empower voters, your support and outreach made a profound impact across the state.

Finally, to our funders for providing the resources necessary to implement critical initiatives aimed at protecting the legal rights of people with disabilities.

Together, we are building a more equitable and inclusive Vermont, where every voice and person matters. Thank you for your ongoing partnership and dedication to this vital work.

THANK YOU!

We thank you for your continued support in our programs.

Consider supporting our mission by making a donation to Disability Rights Vermont by visiting www.disabilityrightsvt.org/donate

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