

Paraquad Legislative Priorities 2008

Overview: The Public Policy Department advocates for policies and programs that create opportunities for people with disabilities to be integrated in the social and economic mainstream. Priorities include increasing access to affordable health care and expanding home and community-based options, including consumer-directed services. The Department will lobby for additional public policies, such as education and housing, which empower people with disabilities to live productive lives and participate in community activity.

Categories of Priorities:

The priorities are categorized into three levels of activity: 1) Leadership Role; 2) Actively Support and 3) Support. The three levels of support are described below. As the legislative session progresses, certain items could move between categories depending on what issues arise.

Issues on which Paraquad takes a **Leadership Role** will get the highest possible attention from Paraquad staff. Where appropriate and feasible, Paraquad will:

- Advocate for these priorities before the Missouri General Assembly and Administration through lobbying, testifying, writing and lobbying for bill language.
- Build and/or expand coalitions within the disability community and other social service advocates to fight for the issue.
- Organize grassroots lobbying activities such as Rally Days, lobbying visits, in-district visits, letter-writing, phone-call, petitions, etc.
- Collect and maintain a story-bank of personal stories of people impacted by the issue who are willing to share their story with the media or legislators.
- Educate our network and the general public on these issues through strategies such as media work (press conferences, press releases, letters to the editor, op-eds, etc.), seminars and briefings, writing and disseminating analysis, etc.
- Highlight and provide information on the status of these issues in our emails, website and Paraquad newsletter.

Issues which Paraquad **Actively Supports** are those which are priorities for Paraquad but are not expected to use a high level of resources. Where appropriate and feasible, Paraquad will:

- Advocate for these priorities before the Missouri General Assembly and Administration through lobbying, testifying and providing any requested technical support to legislative sponsors.
- Highlight these issues and provide information on the status of these issues in our emails and website.
- Through action alerts, mobilize the advocacy network to make phone calls and write letters as needed.
- Identify participants impacted by the issue to connect them with media and legislators.

For issues in the **Support** category, Paraquad will serve as the bridge between our advocacy network and other organizations/coalitions that are taking the lead. Resources dedicated to these issues will be minimal. Where appropriate and feasible, Paraquad will:

- Testify in support of the bill or budget item.
- Forward action alerts from other organizations and/or include information on the bills in emails.
- Identify advocates to participate in advocacy efforts, but will not take responsibility for arranging meetings or actions.

PARAQUAD LEADERSHIP ISSUES

Health Care Access: Paraquad's priority is to assure that people with disabilities have access to the health care and in-home services necessary to work and live independently. Paraquad will advocate for access to affordable health care, attendant services and assistive technology for low-income people with disabilities, workers (past and current) with disabilities, families of children with disabilities and seniors.

1. Maintain and expand access to consumer-directed personal attendant services for the people with disabilities who work or have worked, but still cannot afford the high costs of personal care attendant services.
2. Increase Medicaid eligibility to 100% of poverty in order to cover all disabled individuals under the poverty line and decrease the spend down amounts of those individuals above the line.
3. Restore dental and vision services to Medicaid recipients.
4. Restore access to therapies, including but not limited to occupational therapy and speech therapy, which are necessary for people with disabilities to live and work independently.

Independent Living Fund: Increase the fund or appropriate additional General Revenue for Centers for Independent Living in order to bring Missouri CILs to the national average. Increase core funding by \$565,000 over the next year in order to bring Missouri CILs toward the national funding average. This is the second year in a three year funding plan to bring Missouri CILs up to the national funding average.

ACTIVELY SUPPORT/OPPOSE

Housing: Increase access to accessible, affordable housing.

- Increase the amount of tax credits for the Accessible Home Tax Credit bill. This will expand upon legislation passed last year (SB 8). This legislation creates a tax credit for people who have expenses to make their home accessible. The maximum tax credit is \$2500. Individuals who do not pay state income taxes because their incomes are so low can still get up to \$2500 to cover the costs of making their home accessible.

Assertive Community Treatment programs – ACT is an evidenced-based model that has been successful in helping persons with mental illness live in the community while reducing hospitalization and inappropriate incarceration. Individuals in more restrictive settings most likely have chronic, ongoing, or intermittent treatment needs. ACT provides highly individualized, long-term services that are available when the individual needs them – on weekends and evenings, as well as days. Additionally, helping individuals find safe, affordable housing, as well as employment, are priorities for ACT programs.

- The mental health advocacy community is asking for 2.7 million for new ACT sites.

Employer Tax Credit: Support the bill which will authorize a tax credit for a business employing a disabled worker against a company's corporate income tax.

Independent Living Waiver: Support expansion of the IL waiver. This expansion would give the people who need a higher number of personal attendant hours access to such services.

Spending Limits: Oppose TABOR or other legislation which would impose a spending limit on all appropriations and only allow for growth based on a population-growth-plus-inflation formula. The TABOR formula would not be adequate to allow the state to maintain year after year the same level of programs and services, thus causing cuts in the state budget.

SUPPORT

MRDD Waiting List: Support funding to eliminate the waiting list for MRDD home and community-based services. Currently there are over 3,500 people on the waiting list. Home and community-based services are essential to preventing unnecessary institutionalization.

MRDD Name Change: Support taking the Mental Retardation (MR) out of the Department of MRDD name. This name change supports language which is more accepted by the developmentally disabled population.

Special Education: Advocate for full funding necessary for local school districts to provide quality education and accommodations for students with disabilities in the most integrated setting.