

37th Annual Disability Advocacy Day 2026

Leading the Way: Advocacy in Action



Wed, March 4th
SC State House Steps



Sign-in 9:30 a.m.
Program 10:00 a.m.

Table of Contents

- **Welcome to Disability Advocacy Day 2026**

An introduction to why we gather and the importance of advocacy in South Carolina

- **Leading the Way: Advocacy in Action**

This year's theme and the purpose of Disability Advocacy Day

- **Who We Are (SCPDO)**

An overview of the South Carolina Partnership of Disability Organizations and our shared mission

- **Our Partners & Community Organizations**

Statewide partners, agencies, and community organizations tabling and sharing resources throughout the day

- **What to Expect at Disability Advocacy Day**

Event flow, accessibility information, and how to engage during the day

- **Schedule at a Glance**

A snapshot of the day's activities, speakers, and events

- **Why We're Here**

Key advocacy priorities and the issues impacting people with disabilities and families across South Carolina

- **Meet Our Emcee**

Introducing the voice guiding the day's conversations

- **Speaker Highlights**

Advocates, leaders, and community voices sharing lived experience and expertise (Speakers featured in no particular order)

- **The March**

Coming together in collective advocacy at the State House

- **Stay Connected**

How to find updates, resources, and continue advocacy beyond Disability Advocacy Day

Information in this publication reflects details confirmed at the time of release. Updates, including additional speakers or schedule changes, will be shared on www.scpdo.org and SCPDO social media.

Welcome to Disability Advocacy Day 2026

This digital magazine was created in support of Disability Advocacy Day 2026 and reflects a shared commitment to advancing disability rights, inclusion, and equity across South Carolina. It centers the voices of people with disabilities, families, and advocates while highlighting the policies, systems, and supports that directly impact daily life in our communities.

Within these pages, you'll find speaker profiles, key advocacy priorities, and information designed to encourage informed civic engagement. While details are current at the time of publication, planning continues and updates—including additional speakers or schedule changes—may occur.

Disability Advocacy Day is not only a gathering—it is a call to action. Meaningful change happens when individuals use their voices to engage with policymakers, share lived experience, and advocate for solutions that strengthen home- and community-based supports, access to services, and opportunities for people with disabilities across our state.

Final details and updates will be shared at www.scpdo.org and on SCPDO's social media channels.

Leading the Way: Advocacy in Action

Disability Advocacy Day (DAD) brings together people from across South Carolina who believe in a more inclusive, accessible, and equitable future for people with disabilities.

This publication is an invitation—to learn, to connect, and to be part of a movement centered on lived experience, collective action, and real change.

This year's theme, *Leading the Way: Advocacy in Action*, honors the advocates, self-advocates, families, organizations, and community partners who are not only envisioning a better future—but actively building it.

Whether you plan to attend, partner, speak, volunteer, or support from afar, we invite you to explore what this day is about, who will be there, and why it matters.



What is Disability Advocacy Day?

Disability Advocacy Day (DAD) is more than an event—it's a movement. Each year, advocates, self-advocates, families, organizations, and community partners from across South Carolina come together at the State House to raise their voices, share their stories, and call for a more inclusive future.

This is a day about connection, visibility, and action. It's where lived experience meets leadership—and where real change begins.

Why It Matters

Public policy shapes everyday life. From education and healthcare to housing, employment, and community access, decisions made at the State House directly impact people with disabilities and their families.

Disability Advocacy Day exists to ensure those voices are heard—clearly, respectfully, and powerfully.

Advocacy isn't just something we talk about—it's something we do.

It looks like:

- Sharing lived experiences
- Educating lawmakers
- Building community
- Supporting one another
- Turning stories into solutions

Today honors the leaders who are making that happen across South Carolina.



Who We Are: The South Carolina Partnership of Disability Organizations (SCPDO)

The South Carolina Partnership of Disability Organizations (SCPDO) is a group of disability-focused organizations from across the state that work together to advocate for people with disabilities and their families.

Rather than working alone, SCPDO brings organizations together to share ideas, identify common goals, and speak with a stronger, unified voice. This collaboration helps ensure that disability issues are visible, understood, and taken seriously by decision-makers.

SCPDO believes that people with disabilities should be included in every conversation that affects their lives. That means listening to lived experiences, respecting different perspectives, and working toward policies that support independence, dignity, and opportunity for all.

Disability Advocacy Day is SCPDO's largest annual event. Each year, advocates from across South Carolina gather at the State House to meet with lawmakers, share their stories, and advocate for meaningful change. This day reminds us that advocacy is stronger when we stand together.

Our Partners

Disability Advocacy Day is made possible through the collaboration of organizations from across South Carolina that are committed to advancing the rights, inclusion, and well-being of people with disabilities and their families.

Our partners represent a wide range of supports and perspectives—from self-advocacy and family leadership to education, healthcare, employment, and community-based services. While each organization has its own mission and focus, we are united by a shared belief: people with disabilities deserve to be fully included, heard, and valued in every part of society.

By working together, we strengthen our collective voice, share knowledge, and advocate more effectively for policies and systems that promote independence, dignity, and opportunity.

We are grateful to partner with the following organizations:

Aldersgate Special Needs Ministry, The Arc chapters of South Carolina, Babcock Center, Brain Injury Association of South Carolina, Bright Start, Disability Rights South Carolina, Elite Home Care, Family Connection of South Carolina, I.M.P.A.C.T. SC, Limitless Purpose, Pattison's Academy, South Carolina Human Services Providers Association, South Carolina Partners in Policymaking, South Carolina Respite Coalition, South Carolina Spinal Cord Injury Association, SOS Care, and Sunrise SC.

At the event, you'll have the chance to meet and connect with many of these organizations—along with a wide range of other community partners who will be tabling throughout the day. Stop by, say hello, learn about their work, ask questions, and explore the many resources available to you. Whether you're looking for support, information, or ways to get involved, these organizations are here to help.

Because advocacy is stronger when we stand together.

This list is still growing, and we look forward to welcoming even more organizations as the event approaches.

Active Day – Adult day health and activities

AKIN Home Care – In-home personal care services

A Special Needs Plan™ – Special needs life and financial planning

Axxess Home Care – Nursing and personal care services

Camp Cole – Therapeutic and inclusive camp programs

Camp Wonder Hands – Inclusive camps and ASL support

Charles Lea Center – Residential, vocational, and community supports

Civitan Club of Columbia – Community service and inclusion advocacy

Community Options, Inc. – Employment advocacy and community partnerships

Colleton C.A.R.E.S – Person-centered advocacy and family supports

Dr. Morelisa Sabb-Cordes – Let's Talk About IEP – IEP coaching and family advocacy

Jewish Family Service – Family support and crisis assistance

Koger Home Care – Non-medical home care agency

Lutheran Services Carolinas – Supports adults with disabilities through safe, supportive host home placements.

SC Housing – Affordable and supportive housing programs

Sevita Health – Group homes and disability support services

South Carolina State Museum – Inclusive education and cultural programs

State Treasurer's Office – Palmetto ABLE Savings Program – Disability savings accounts

What to Expect at Disability Advocacy Day

Disability Advocacy Day is designed to be welcoming, informative, and empowering. Whether this is your first time attending or you've joined us for many years, today is about learning, connecting, and taking action together.

Throughout the day, you can expect to hear from self-advocates, community leaders, and policy experts who will share their experiences and perspectives. You'll have the opportunity to participate in our march, connect with lawmakers, and engage in meaningful conversations about the issues that matter most to people with disabilities and their families.

You'll also be able to visit tables hosted by organizations from across South Carolina, where you can learn about services, supports, and advocacy efforts happening in your community. These organizations are here to answer questions, share resources, and help you find next steps. Disability Advocacy Day is not just about listening—it's about participating. Your presence, your questions, and your voice all matter.

Accessibility Partner Appreciation

We extend our sincere thanks to **Camp Wonder Hands** for supporting Disability Advocacy Day 2026 by offering one-on-one ASL interpretation support for attendees who need it. Their partnership helps ensure this day is inclusive, accessible, and welcoming for Deaf and Hard of Hearing advocates.



Schedule at a Glance

Disability Advocacy Day is designed to be welcoming, energizing, and community-centered. Whether you're here to learn, connect, advocate, or simply be part of something bigger, we hope today feels meaningful and empowering.

Morning

9:30 a.m. – Sign-In & Welcome

Arrive, get oriented, pick up materials, and connect with fellow advocates.

10:00 a.m. – Opening Remarks

We'll kick off the day with a warm welcome and an overview of what's ahead.

Morning Speakers

Hear from self-advocates, family leaders, professionals, and community voices who are shaping change across South Carolina.

Midday

March Around the State House

Midway through the event, we'll come together for a collective march led by W.C. Hoecke and his family. This moment is about visibility, unity, and showing that our voices matter.

Afternoon

Afternoon Speakers

The afternoon will continue with additional speakers sharing stories, insights, and calls to action.

Resource Tables & Community Connections

Throughout the day, visit tables hosted by organizations from across the state. Learn about services, supports, advocacy efforts, and ways to stay involved beyond today.

All Day

- Community partner tables • Networking & conversations
- Learning opportunities • Advocacy in action

Why We're Here

The Issues Facing South Carolinians with Disabilities

Across South Carolina, people with disabilities and their families continue to face barriers that limit independence, access, and opportunity. These challenges are long-standing, interconnected, and require action now.

Advocacy Priorities

- **End the Wait:** Eliminate waiting lists and expand home- and community-based services so people can live safely in their communities.
- **Housing & Transportation:** Increase access to affordable, accessible housing and reliable transportation statewide.
- **Healthcare & Integrated Supports:** Improve access to timely healthcare and coordinated supports, including services for individuals with dual diagnoses.
- **Workforce & Employment:** Strengthen the direct care workforce through better pay, training, and retention, while expanding inclusive employment opportunities.
- **Families, Caregivers & Respite:** Support families and aging caregivers with respite services, resources, and long-term planning options.
- **Rights, Education & Self-Advocacy:** Protect decision-making rights, expand alternatives to guardianship, fully fund IDEA, and ensure accessible voting, technology, and civic participation.

Take Action

Disability Advocacy Day is about turning lived experience into change.

• **Meet with your legislators** • **Share your story** • **Advocate for solutions**

Find your legislators: scstatehouse.gov/legislatorssearch.php

Advocacy tools & support: www.scpdo.org

Guiding the Conversation

Emcee, *Disability Advocacy Day 2026*



Judi Gatson

Judi Gatson is an Emmy Award–winning journalist and trusted civic leader whose work focuses on elevating voices, building understanding, and connecting communities to meaningful change. As co-anchor of WIS News at 5 and 6, she brings nearly 30 years of experience covering public policy, health equity, education, and issues impacting vulnerable populations across South Carolina.

She has been widely recognized for her reporting on mental and public health, including honors from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Services for her leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. Judi also received the STAR Award from Homeless No More for her advocacy on behalf of families in crisis and her work to expand access to shelter and affordable housing.

Known for guiding thoughtful, inclusive conversations, Judi has moderated major political debates and civic forums across the state. Beyond journalism, she serves in leadership roles with United Way of the Midlands, City Year, and Homeless No More—using her platform to strengthen families, protect children, and expand opportunity.

Meet Our Speakers

Disability Advocacy Day brings together people with lived experience, community leaders, professionals, and advocates who are shaping a more inclusive future across South Carolina.

Our speakers represent a wide range of perspectives, from self-advocates and family leaders to educators, service providers, and policy champions. Each brings their own story, expertise, and passion for change.

Together, they remind us that advocacy is not just about policy...it's about people.

Speakers are featured in no particular order. While additional speakers may be added following the publication of this digital magazine, the list included here reflects our confirmed speakers as of the date of publication. **You can view each speaker's full bio on our website at scpdo.org.** Final details and updates, including the speaking schedule, will also be shared on our website and social media.



Pamela S. Evette

Speaker | Lieutenant Governor of South Carolina

Topic: Leading Through Service: Community, Opportunity, and Impact



Curtis Loftis

**Speaker | State Treasurer of South Carolina
Administrator of the Palmetto Able Savings Program**

Topic: Palmetto ABLE: Financial Independence for People with Disabilities



Angel Heaven Lee

Speaker | Self-Advocate

Topic: The Power of Lived Experience: Why Self-Advocates Must Be at the Center of Decision-Making



Kallyn Long

**Speaker | Youth Self-Advocate
America's Ideal Miss South Carolina Teen 2026**

Topic: There's Ability in Every Disability: Youth Advocacy and Access in Education



Rachel Nash

Speaker | Founder & Patient Advocate
Nash Patient Advocacy & Consulting

Topic: Patient Advocacy: Navigating the Healthcare System with Confidence



Becca Williams

Speaker | Magnolia Scholars Consultant

Topic: Reimagining Education: Navigating IEPs, Homeschooling, and Student-Centered Learning



Chelsea Mayne

Speaker | Self-Advocate

Topic: Challenges in Holding a Job When You Have Autism



W.C. Hoecke & Family

Speaker
Family Advocates & Community Leaders

Topic: Building a Future Together: Families, Housing, and Community-Based Living



Jason Lofton

**Speaker | Self-Advocate
IMPACT SC**

Topic: Cerebral Palsy: No Limits



Kyeanna Cobbs

**Speaker | Self-Advocate
IMPACT SC**

Topic: Disability Rights



Robert Hinson

**Speaker | Brain Injury Survivor & Self-Advocate
Brain Injury Association of South Carolina**

Topic: The Power of Support: Why Groups Matter!



Dr. Morelisa Sabb-Cordes

Speaker | Master IEP Coach | Independent

Topic: Help! I Am Attending an IEP!



Margaret Janse van Rensburg, Ph.D., MSW, RSW

Speaker | Assistant Professor | Self-Advocate
University of South Carolina College of Social Work

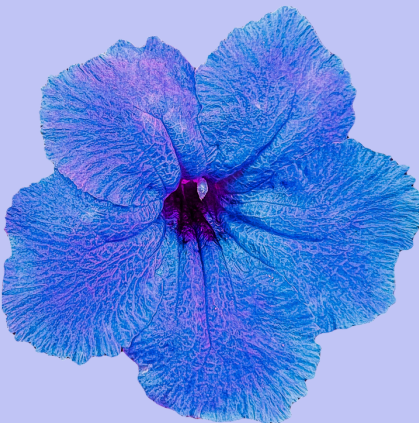
Topic: “Says You!” Creating a Community of Inquiry to Shape Autism Research Priorities



Joyce Davis

Speaker | Executive Director
Brain Injury Association of South Carolina

Topic: What’s in a Name? Everything



Miranda Harris

Speaker | Special Needs Parent & Advocate
J.A.M. - Just a Mom

Topic: Educating on Education



Anastasia Ford & Donovan

Speakers | Disability Advocate, Homeschooling Parent & Youth Self-Advocate
AKOMA Cares

Topic: Disability Rights, Inclusion, and Why Advocacy Must Continue



Kim Brock

Speaker | Advocacy Influencer | Self-Advocate

Topic: Using Your Voice: Advocacy, Accessibility, and Living Fully



The March

Midway through Disability Advocacy Day, we come together for one of the most powerful moments of the event: our collective march around the State House.

This march is about visibility, unity, and reminding ourselves—and our leaders—that people with disabilities and their families belong in every space where decisions are made. Each step represents a voice. Each person represents a story. Together, we move forward in solidarity.

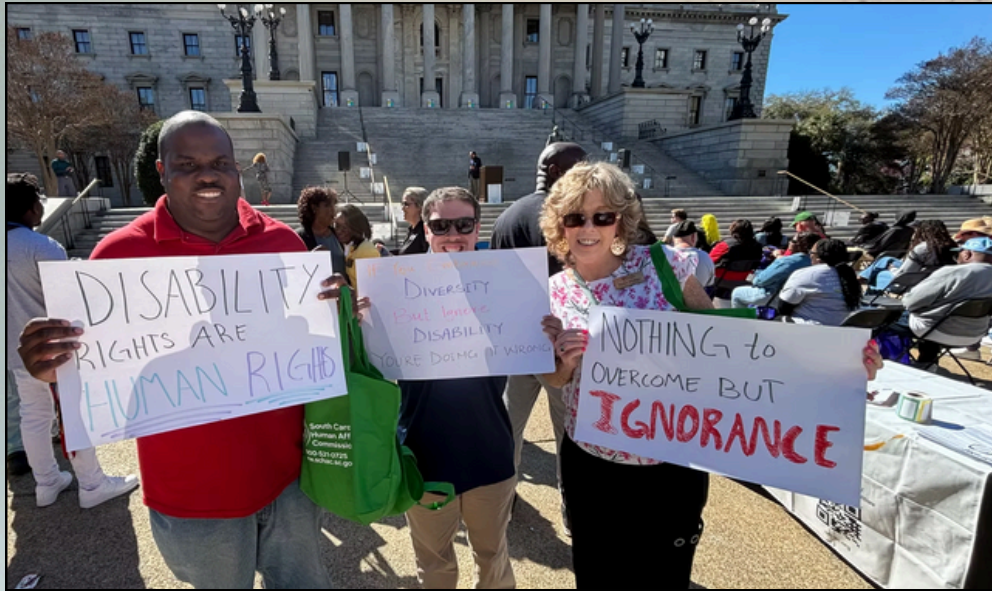
Led by W.C. Hoecke and his family, the march is a peaceful, inclusive, and welcoming opportunity to stand together and show that advocacy is stronger when we move as one.

You don't need to chant. You don't need to carry a sign. You don't need to say a word. **Your presence is enough.**

What to Expect

- A calm, supportive pace
- A welcoming and respectful environment
- Community members walking together
- A visible show of unity and purpose

Whether this is your first march or your fifteenth, we hope you'll join us. Because when we show up together, our voices are impossible to ignore.



Join Us

Disability Advocacy Day is more than an event—it's a gathering of voices, stories, and shared purpose.

On March 4, 2026, advocates from across South Carolina will come together at the State House to learn, connect, and stand up for inclusion, dignity, and opportunity for all.

Whether you join us as a self-advocate, a family member, a professional, or a community ally, your presence matters. Your voice matters. And your story matters.

We invite you to be part of this movement—not just for one day, but for the work that continues long after.

Because advocacy is stronger when we stand together—and even stronger when we stay connected.

