



# Exchange

*"Protecting the Rights of Persons With Disabilities"*

## Diversity in the Workplace

### *Creating an inclusive culture*

October is National Disability Employment Awareness month, and we are celebrating the value of a diverse workforce with Chelsea Chamberlin, an advocate on the Disability Rights Michigan (DRM) employment team. Chelsea started at DRM in January 2019 and ensures the contributions, skills, and talents of our clients are recognized in the workforce.

**Why is it important to recognize diversity in the workplace?** Diversity is a natural part of the human condition, and it plays an important role in who we are and how we interact with the world around us. It plays a critical role in the workforce because individuals of all backgrounds bring unique perspectives to employers and the communities in which they serve. Also, when we see others to whom we can relate doing great work, it inspires us to believe in ourselves and sends a message that everyone has inherent value, talents and skills to share.

### **What are the biggest challenges facing individuals in the employment arena?**

I would argue that one of the biggest challenges individuals with disabilities

face in the workforce is attitudinal barriers. Historically, employing people with disabilities has been viewed as either a liability or an act of charity. This often results in people getting overlooked for job opportunities that would fit their skills, talents, and interests. This contributes to a greater rate of poverty for individuals with disabilities as well.

### **What is a self-advocacy tip you can give someone looking to gain meaningful employment?**

I encourage anyone seeking meaningful employment to become familiar with the resources available to them, so they may be empowered with the skills necessary to compete in the workforce. Networking with others who are successful in your area of interest is also very valuable.

**What is the best part of your job?** It is so rewarding when I am able to assist clients in gaining access to necessary resources to increase their employment prospects. For example, I recently helped a client navigate the process of



Chelsea Chamberlin

developing an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) with Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS). Through this process, this client was able to obtain a commercial fishing license and start their own business. Helping people elevate is such a rewarding experience!

### **When would someone call DRM for help with an employment question?**

From application to case closure, DRM staff are ready to assist clients of Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) and the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons (BSBP) to know their rights and access necessary resources to obtain or maintain employment. If you believe that your rights have been violated, give us a call!

***People with disabilities are a critical piece of the fabric of a diverse workforce!*** ~Chelsea Chamberlin

## Fiscal Year 22 Focus Areas

Each year DRM identifies areas of focus to guide the use of our advocacy resources. Our board approves these objectives in September after considering community input, including the nature of information and referral requests, the results of DRM public issue surveys, input from DRM staff, focus groups conducted by DRM, other advocacy organizations, and state and national research on emerging issues.

- Eliminate abuse and neglect.
- Increase the protection of voting rights, the rights of individuals with representative payees, and access to COVID recovery efforts.
- Increase access to integrated, competitive employment.
- Improve access to services.
- Ensure the right to a high-quality education.

We welcome your feedback as we determine future focus areas. Please help us create advocacy services that better serve the disability community by completing our survey.

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FY22\\_DRM](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FY22_DRM)

## Ernie Reynolds Essay Contest

We are proud to hold our annual essay contest in honor of an outstanding disability rights advocate, Ernie Reynolds, who passed away in 2012.

We are looking for motivating stories about people with disabilities who have successfully overcome barriers and achieved success while advocating for themselves or others.

**First Prize:** \$300

**Second Prize:** \$200

**Third Prize:** \$100

**Entry deadline:** January 12, 2022

Visit our website to learn more

<https://www.drmich.org/ernie-reynolds-essay-contest/>

## Covid-19 and Your Rights

### Q&A

COVID-19 has raised a host of challenging questions, including questions about your rights. Here is the first in a series of questions and answers about COVID-19 and the law. (The following is not intended to be legal advice and does not create an attorney/client relationship.)

#### QUESTION:

**I am 16 and I want to be vaccinated. If I decide to go ahead with vaccination, do I have to tell my parents?**

#### RESPONSE:

There is a lot of information out there about COVID-19 and the risks to the health of everyone, including teenagers. Much of what you will find on the internet is helpful. However, there is a lot of misinformation that has been posted.

We recommend that you look only to trustworthy sources of medical information. These include your healthcare provider, your local health department, and information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) that can be found online.

If you do decide to be vaccinated, Michigan law requires that a parent or guardian consent to the vaccination for anyone under 18. However, the law does allow an emancipated minor to consent to the vaccination.

You should also know that Michigan law does allow a minor who is 14 years of age or older to request and receive the services of a mental health professional. The professional may provide up to 12 outpatient sessions or four months of outpatient counseling. MCL 330.1707. However, you should also be aware that the mental health professional may bill your parent's health insurance provider, and that information could be disclosed to your parent.

## Report a Voting-Related Problem or Incident

DRM is part of the rapid response team with [www.MichiganVoting.org](http://www.MichiganVoting.org). MichiganVoting.org is a coalition of nonpartisan organizations and election officials working to ensure that everyone can make their voice heard in our democracy.

The rapid response team has created a form to report any, and all, voting-related problems or incidents that happen in Michigan, including those incidents related to registration or absentee voting.

Please provide as much information as possible so the team can promptly address the issues. (Providing your own contact information is not required, but it will help us collect additional information and/or follow up with you if necessary.)

DRM supports the right of individuals with disabilities to vote and we provide resources to help voters feel more engaged and confident. Questions? Please call (855) I-VOTE-MI or visit [www.michiganvoting.org](http://www.michiganvoting.org).

## Advocacy Partner Highlight

*Michigan Developmental Disabilities Institute (MI-DDI)*

- **Take the MI-DDI 2021 Needs Assessment**

Michigan Developmental Disabilities Institute (MI-DDI) wants to know what is most important for you in order to meet the needs of Michigan's intellectual and developmental disability (I/DD) community. Take our 2021 Needs Assessment either online (<https://ddi.wayne.edu/2021needsassess>) or over the phone (313.577.9918).

- **Listen to MI-DDI's New Podcast Series: Possibilities**

Michigan Developmental Disabilities' (MI-DDI) Possibilities Podcast Series examines topics that affect people with disabilities and their support systems. In this episode, we talk with Elizabeth Janks, Associate Director of Training and Education at MI-DDI, about transitioning young people with disabilities to adulthood and promoting their independence. To listen to the podcast visit, <https://ddi.wayne.edu/possibilitiespodcast/transitioning-to-independent-life>.



## Back to School

Do you have a child who is back to school? Are you looking for resources as you navigate the special education process?

DRM offers a free guide to parents that provides insight into federal and state special education statutes and regulations. It also features self-advocacy techniques and approaches.

Students with Disabilities: An Advocate's Guide is meant to be non-legal explanation of special education law. We believe every child deserves an education that meets their unique needs.



This guide is available to download online at [www.drmich.org/resources/special-education/](http://www.drmich.org/resources/special-education/) or call Disability Rights Michigan at 1.800.288.5923 to request a hard copy.



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## Disability Rights Michigan (DRM)

4095 Legacy Parkway  
Lansing, MI 48911-4264

• • • • •  
Telephone 517.487.1755

**TOLL FREE:**

**800.288.5923**

Fax: 517.487.0827



<http://www.drmich.org>

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Voice/TTY/Language and  
accommodations available.  
Available in alternative formats  
upon request.

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**Michelle Roberts**  
*Executive Director*

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