

Disability Advocacy Day Raises the Voices of Utahns With Disabilities



Disability Advocacy Day at the Utah State Capitol

A day-long event at the Utah State Capitol in late January 2026 brought together people with disabilities, their families, disability-related agencies, and legislators in a powerful reminder that Utah policies affect lives—and those affected have the power to speak out.

Disability Advocacy Day events included a legislative training by USU's [Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice \(IDRPP\)](#), the [Utah Developmental Disabilities Council](#), and the [Utah Statewide Independent Living Council](#).

"This year the turnout has been absolutely amazing," said Aubrey Snyder, a member of the IDRPP Policy Team who presented at the training. More than 100 people attended the session, which addressed the [legislative process](#) and outlined [ways to get involved](#).

"Disability Advocacy Day makes the disability community in Utah more visible," said IDRPP Executive Director Matthew Wappett. "For many policymakers and even the public, people with significant disabilities are often invisible. Getting people to show up and have a visible presence at the Capitol is important because it reminds policymakers that people with disabilities aren't invisible and/or incapable. People with disabilities are citizens, voters, and deserving of respect and support.

Wappett continued, "The other aspect that is important is the training. Many people with disabilities haven't had the same opportunity to learn about the policymaking process, so they are often at a disadvantage when it comes to engaging in the American political process. By providing

policy process training for people with disabilities and their families, we help them learn how to influence policy decisions."

Disability advocates are watching this year's legislative session closely. A proposed 10 percent budget cut to the Division of Services for People with Disabilities is currently up for discussion in the Social Services Appropriations Subcommittee. The proposed cut will be subject to revision and debate as the 2026 Utah Legislative Session continues.

Advocates say Utah services are already underfunded. "We recently had a rate study that shows that disability service providers are in need of about 24 percent funding increases," Snyder said.

Several people told their stories at a rally on the Capitol steps following the training. More than 300 people registered to attend the rally, which was hosted by the [Utah Parent Center's Youth Advisory Board](#).

One of the rally's speakers was USU doctoral candidate Autumn Cuellar, whose disability affects her mobility, speech, and hand function. "My success can be attributed to all of the support I received from disability resource centers and my professors," she said. "One of my professors saw my skills and allowed me to work in his robotics lab as a freshman. He noticed that the number lock on the door was a barrier for me and wanted to change it. His fight included filing a Title IX complaint. This advocacy later led to all door locks to be accessible in the new engineering building."

Cuellar said she wants to continue as an advocate for all disabled students, "but I cannot be the only one. Please support students with disabilities so they can grow to their fullest potential."

Attendees said the event brought important information to disability advocates who may be getting involved for the first time. "In a caucus system, there may be just a very small number of people who are responsible for nominating and voting for a legislator in a party," said Greg Green, a parent advocate from South Jordan. "We need to be part of that process. We need to be one of those voices who are helping elect the people who are going to represent us and carry legislation that matters to us."