



MARYLAND DOWN SYNDROME ADVOCACY COALITION

April 21, 2022

Dear Maryland Down Syndrome Community,

On March 21, 2021, we set out to revitalize our statewide advocacy community, the Maryland Down Syndrome Coalition (MDAC). One year (plus a few weeks) later, we find ourselves looking back on our first legislative session as MDAC co-chairs and we wanted to take the opportunity to update the community on what we've been doing and what will be coming next. We also wish to invite you to join us as we continue to advocate for laws, regulations, and policies that improve the quality of life for people with Down syndrome, their family members, and those professionals who support them.

Since March 2021, 93 members have joined MDAC, completing our [member registration](#) form and joining our listserv and/or Facebook group. Our members represent 13 counties across the state and 34 of the 47 legislative districts. The MDAC Steering Committee, which meets monthly, has representatives from each of Maryland's major Down syndrome organizations. Our two workgroups, the K12 Education Workgroup and Adults Workgroup, are active and meet monthly. We welcome you to join either group!

Below are some of the highlights from this past year and the 2022 MD legislative session:

- MDAC joined the Education Advocacy Coalition (EAC), a coalition of approximately 40 organizations and professionals concerned with education policy for students with disabilities in Maryland. MDAC also joined the Maryland Education Coalition (MEC), a broad education coalition concerned with education equity and accountability.
- MDAC signed on in support of several coalition partners' letters and/or testimony, pertaining to: the performance of MDOT MTA Mobility Service; MSDE regulations for continuity of learning plans; HB136 "Brynleigh's Act" for seizure-safe schools; and SB705 "Education - Physical Restraint and Seclusion - Limitations" bill to ban the use of seclusion in all Maryland Public Schools and limit in all, but very narrow circumstances, physical restraint in public and nonpublic schools. Both of these bills passed! You can read more about [Brynleigh's Act](#) and the [Restraint/Seclusion bill](#).
- MDAC's Adults Workgroup worked closely with the Self-Directed Advocacy Network of Maryland (SDAN) to advocate for the passage of the Self-Direction Act of 2022. The workgroup's co-lead, Adrian, submitted testimony in the Senate; you can read

his testimony [here](#). (Thank you, Adrian!) You can learn more about SDAN and the work that they do here: <https://marylandsds.org/>

- Read more about the 2022 Legislative Session:
 - The Arc Maryland's [2022 Legislative Wrap Up](#)
 - Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council [2022 Legislative Overview](#)
- In July 2021, we [brought together 17 organizations and advocates across Maryland who serve students with disabilities to encourage policymakers to require mandatory masking in schools](#). At the September 9th meeting of the Joint Committee of Administrative, Executive & Legislative Review, MDAC testified in support of mandatory masking in schools, which ultimately was upheld when the statewide school mask mandate was approved.
- This winter, we conducted a survey of 100 families across the state who have students with Down syndrome or another I/DD regarding their educational experiences, particularly with respect to placement, alternate assessment, and pursuit of a diploma vs. certificate of completion. See a [summary of the results](#).
- In January 2022, we submitted [comments to MSDE on the 2021-2022 MSDE Draft Action Plan: Addressing Maryland's 1.0 Percent Participation Threshold](#) – the state's submission to the US Department of Education requesting a waiver for exceeding the 1% participation threshold for alternate assessment.
- MDAC joined the Maryland World Down Syndrome Day Coalition to plan an event in Annapolis on World Down Syndrome Day (WDSD). In advance, MDAC hosted two "leave behind" letter writing workshops and collected 15 constituent letters which were hand delivered to Maryland delegates and senators.



- Lauren and Liz also wrote about WDSB and MDAC for the [Little Lobbyists Blog](#).

WHAT'S NEXT FOR MDAC?

Growing our membership and filling our gaps ...

- Become a [member](#)! We are seeking advocates and self-advocates of all abilities and backgrounds — we are always looking to grow our membership! Unsure of how to best advocate? We will teach you — no experience required! We work closely with the National Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition (NDAC), an arm of [National Down Syndrome Congress Policy & Advocacy](#) and look forward to hosting an advocacy training for all MDAC members this Fall. Your voice matters — all are welcome!
- Already a member? Join a workgroup! [Email us](#) to become connected to the K12 or Adults workgroup. We would love to have you!
- Almost 300 people follow our public [Facebook page](#) – please “like” and “follow” us there, and “share” MDAC posts that are impactful to you.
- **Here are the counties where MDAC currently does not have members. If you are in one of these counties, join us! If you know of a family or self-advocate in one of these counties, invite them to join us!**

Allegany
Calvert
Caroline
Cecil

Charles
Dorchester
Garrett
Kent

St. Mary's
Somerset
Washington

Other things we're working on ...

- 1) It's an election year! We want to make sure that our community is registered and ready to make our voices heard in both the primaries (July 19th) and the general election (November 8th).
~ *Did you know?* The disparity in voting participation between people with and without disabilities is larger in Maryland (-15.7%) than in any other state (US as a whole is -5.7%). We will be asking the experts why and looking into how we can contribute to efforts that ensure people with disabilities in Maryland have equal access to a ballot.
- 2) Continuing our efforts to advocate on behalf of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who take the alternate assessment. And following major education issues like compensatory education and recovery services.
- 3) Following the development of regulations around the self-directed services law.

Finally, don't forget ...

Now is the time to register for the [50th Annual National Down Syndrome Congress Convention](#), taking place from July 23-26 in New Orleans. Registration is open with early bird rates until May 2nd. A few particular highlights you won't want to miss:

- [Youth and Adults Conference](#): By and for self-advocates ages 15+
- [OSEP](#) will be in attendance! Valerie Williams, MDAC member, and Director of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), will present at the plenary session, provide remarks at the African-American Lunch and Learn, and hold a Town Hall for members of the National Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition. If you are not yet a NDAC member, [join here](#).
- College Fair, hosted by Think College
- [NDSC Advocacy Training Bootcamp](#)

We hope to see many of you in person in New Orleans!

Best,

Liz and Lauren

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