



2024 ANNUAL REPORT



**Disability
Law United**

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

**Lauren Deutsch, Executive Director
Disability Law United**

2024 was a huge year for us!

The past twelve months saw us scale up our docket and bring a laser focus to our primary practice areas: accessibility, anti-carceral litigation, environmental justice and disaster relief, and immigrant justice.

Although we have been proud of our history as the Civil Rights Education & Enforcement Center (CREEC) since this organization's founding in 2013, we made the decision to become Disability Law United in 2024, to better tell the story of our unique work and reach crucial new audiences.

“ Every day is a new opportunity to fight for a just, inclusive, disabled future.”

We've expanded our legal team to now include four staff attorneys and a paralegal, in addition to our Legal Director, and our administrative and executive teams to include Directors of Operations, Communications and Development. We also said farewell to our Denver office and are now fully remote, and therefore fully nationwide in our reach. Disability Law United staff cover three time zones and six states, with clients and cases in 10 jurisdictions.

It is impossible to truly summarize 2024 without acknowledging our rapidly shifting legal landscape and fears for the future. DLU's work advocating for systemic change relies on a robust, healthy legal system, and it's daunting to press forward in the face of active threats to the rule of law itself.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Lauren Deutsch, Executive Director Disability Law United

And yet in some ways, nothing has changed. Our clients still face systems that are stacked against them, rooted in the idea that disabled lives are worth less. And still every day is a new opportunity to fight for a just, inclusive, disabled future.

When everything is under attack, it can be tempting to triage how we respond – that is, to deal with the biggest actionable emergency first. That would be a mistake. Not only does it let the other team write your playbook, but it gives in to the ableist idea that a life which is harder to save is less worth saving.

I propose the opposite. At a basic level, disability justice is justice for all. How we create a shared society for humans of all different bodies, minds, and experiences, is the measure of our country. Moreover, when rights and support are taken away from any group of people, it will harm the disabled people in that group disproportionately. We don't have to stand for that.

Disabled activists have long been among the most resilient, creative, and determined agents of change. The laws in our country offer unique, individualized protections for the disability community, but they will only be implemented if we demand it – so that's what we do. At Disability Law United, every day our dedicated team demands that we never give up on an inclusive disabled future. We are proud of what we've accomplished with your help in 2024, and we ask you to stay with us; believe with us that the future is up to us to fight for, and that together we are unstoppable.



Lauren Deutsch

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Staff Attorney

MISSION & CORE ISSUE AREAS

Disability Law United is a nonprofit legal organization that fights for liberation and equity through the lens of intersectional disability justice. We believe we can have the greatest impact by supporting disabled people who experience discrimination and exclusion at the intersection of other systems of harm.

In 2024, Disability Law United focused on fighting for disability justice at the following intersections:

1. ACCESS TO PUBLIC SPACES & SERVICES

The communities in which we live and services upon which we depend are not designed for everyone. DLU works with individuals and community partners to uphold the promises of the ADA and other cornerstone disability laws, ensuring that people with disabilities can fully thrive and participate in their communities.

2. DISASTER & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The ripples of climate collapse disproportionately impact disabled people, who are too-often left out of land use planning & environmental advocacy, including disaster planning, preparedness & response. DLU fights for environmental justice on the front lines of the climate crisis by centering people with disabilities in disaster resilience & environmental justice work.

3. IMMIGRATION

The U.S. immigration detention system worsens existing disabilities and can increase the risk of becoming disabled, discriminates against people with disabilities, stigmatizes and exacerbates the mental health needs of detained people, and causes further trauma to a population that is already destabilized. DLU defends the human rights of disabled people in this cruel system and aims to improve the immigration process for all.

4. INCARCERATION & POLICING

Our prisons are filled with disabled people, many of whom do not have access to needed treatment and care while incarcerated. Solitary confinement, lack of proper communications technology, and the militarization of local police forces threaten the freedom and lives of disabled people. DLU works to protect them from further harm in our carceral systems and when dealing with police.

LEGAL DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Cynthia R. Rice, Legal Director
Disability Law United

“The first thing we do is, let’s kill all the lawyers.”

Henry VI Part II, by William Shakespeare

In Shakespeare’s *Henry VI, Part II*, villain Dick the Butcher helps to plan a treasonous rebellion against King Henry VI. To ensure the rebellion’s success, Dick asserts that lawyers – the guardians of law and order – must be eliminated as part of an anti-intellectual purge. Dick and his co-conspirator Jack Cade make a practice of killing those who can read, and burning the written word whenever they encounter it.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens would then reference this same line in a 1985 decision, noting that “Shakespeare insightfully realized that disposing of lawyers is a step in the direction of a totalitarian form of government.”

In this moment, the rule of law is under threat, and lawyers find ourselves on the front lines defending our democracy. A recent Supreme Court ruling in *Lackey v. Stinnie* took aim at the practice of civil rights law itself, making it more difficult for attorneys to take on these cases and as a result, reducing Americans’ access to justice when their civil rights are infringed upon.

Amidst all this, I’ve never been prouder to be a civil rights lawyer, working with a dedicated team who refuse to surrender to ableist, racist, and xenophobic lawlessness and intimidation. We’re not going anywhere.

Disability Law United has spent the last year refining our organizational focus to center several key issue areas and intersections, and scaling up our work fighting for disability inclusion, bringing actions against systems that harm

LEGAL DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

**Cynthia R. Rice, Legal Director
Disability Law United**

vulnerable community members. I could go on for pages about the vital work our legal team has done in recent months, and continues to do in 2025, but I will instead simply say this:

We're proud to share our work with you, our peers, supporters and community members, and to let you know that we will never stop fighting for a just and inclusive society.

“I've never been prouder to be a civil rights lawyer... We're not going anywhere.”

With the legal climate becoming increasingly unstable, our work at local, state, and federal courts across the country matters more than ever. The courts are our last and strongest bulwark against oppression, and here at Disability Law United, we are working every day to craft good law that protects the inclusive, beautiful, disabled future we believe in.

Thank you for fighting alongside us.



Cynthia R. Rice Esq.

WHAT WE ACHIEVED

We're proud to share just a few of our biggest achievements in 2024. For more information about what's happening at Disability Law United, check out our blog and join our mailing list at www.disabilitylawunited.org.

Ensured Accessibility for Deaf Prisoners

Along with partners Disability Rights Advocates, Disability Rights Tennessee, and Fox & Robertson, we settled a landmark case against the Tennessee Department of Correction for their failure to provide accommodations and ensure effective communications for deaf people incarcerated in their facilities. TDOC must make systemic changes, including individualized needs assessments for prisoners, sign language interpreters, videophones and auxiliary aids and services.

Held ICE Accountable

We successfully challenged Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) for their failure to respond to FOIA requests seeking information about the online asylum appointment system, and its impact on the processing of asylum requests by immigrants with disabilities; we've since filed a second lawsuit to compel a records release relating to the conditions inside privately-operated Northwest ICE Processing Center.

Defended Disabled Students' Rights to an Education

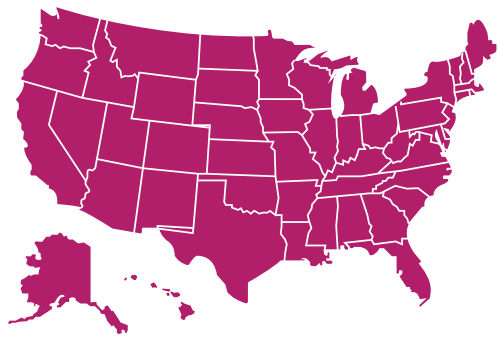
We reached a vital settlement with the Del Norte County Unified School District in California, ensuring all students and especially those with disabilities will receive the education they deserve, in the wake of severe staffing shortages that deprived disabled children of the opportunity to attend and learn with their peers. The school district will implement changes to effectively support all students, highlighting the importance of accountability and proactive measures in our education system.

Compelled Transparency in New Orleans

After 7 months of unanswered requests, we sued the City of New Orleans for concealing emergency operations plans from the public and asked the court to compel the release of public records detailing the city's plans for city-assisted evacuation and paratransit, resource distribution, sheltering, and other services. In response to the lawsuit, the City was quick to release the remaining records, revealing that plans for some of the most critical aspects of disaster response do not exist.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

We're **all in** on our strategy – disability is our superpower and **we're not getting distracted**.



As of early 2025, DLU attorneys have active or pending cases in 8 U.S. states and 10 jurisdictions.

Our biggest concern this year? The erosion of protections for people with disabilities.

We know that the disabled are always some of the first to suffer – because disability is a condition that affects people across all groups.

The reform, deregulation, or dissolution of public health and other service agencies rings alarm bells for us. We know that disability sits at the nexus of many public health concerns, from reasonable accommodations to accessibility and access to resources.

Disability Law United will continue the fight to protect the rights of immigrants with disabilities. It is now more important than ever to ensure the protections and laws that exist to uphold civil and human rights are upheld, and we anticipate ramping up our intersectional immigration work to meet the increased need.

We're concerned that climate mitigation and FEMA funding for affected communities in the event of floods, fires or storms are already on the chopping block, leaving millions vulnerable in the wake of disasters. Federal, state and local governments must be held accountable for failing to provide for people with disabilities in their emergency planning.

Accountability is essential in fostering trust between communities and law enforcement. Significant percentages of houseless or incarcerated people have reported disabilities. Building a fair and just system where public officials and private service providers alike are held to high standards is crucial in protecting disability rights.

RECOGNIZING OUR SUPPORTERS

We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge our many stalwart supporters in 2024, who made ongoing litigation and justice efforts possible. Some donors have chosen to remain anonymous and are not named here, but we are no less grateful for their generous gifts.

To all our donors, funders, allies and supporters: **We thank you for your continued support as Disability Law United fights to eliminate discrimination at every intersection.**

Philanthropic Partners

We received generous support from foundations in 2024, including **Calamus Fund, a fund of Tides Foundation, and Piper Fund, a Proteus Fund initiative.** Our sincerest thanks to all our foundation partners, listed and unlisted, for their continued support.

Individuals & Firms

Champions of Justice

\$1,000+

Stephen Dane

Rufina Hernández-Prewitt

Insperity Corporate Citizenship

Caroline Jackson

Bill Lann Lee

Mari Newman

The Nolan Family Foundation

Relman Colfax

Cynthia Rice

Sansanowicz Law Group, P.C.

RECOGNIZING OUR SUPPORTERS

Advocates

\$500+

Sara Campos
Alan Chen
Disability Law Colorado
Kennedy Hunt PC
Julie Reiskin
Tierney Lawrence Stiles LLC

Fox & Robertson, PC
Anna Genoese
Dorianne Godoy-Bychowski
Faith Gross
Brittany Hall
Emma Hoffman
Lillian Hwang-Geddes
Miriam Jaffe
Rachel Jones
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Kate Schuttenburg
Claire Spina
Roscoe Sullivan
Eleanor Swift
Kate Thorstad
Amanda Upson
Jenna Ward
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Julie Yates
Jenny Yau
Kai Yuan

Activists

Up to \$499

Keshia Allen Horner
Elisabeth Andersen
Hannah Anderson
Rachel Bailey
Karolyn Benger
Jana Beougher
Courtney Boise
Timothy Breen
Sharon Brown-Jodoin
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Brittani Cunningham
Lauren Deutsch
Lisa Eimer
Gabriela Flora
Nora Fogarty

JOIN THE LIST

Make your gift today to fund the ongoing
fight for intersectional disability justice!

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www.disabilitylawunited.org/take-action/ways-to-give



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