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Governor Shapiro Signs Three New Executive Orders Expanding Protections for Pennsylvanians with Disabilities and Autism, Building on Three Years of Historic Support and Investment

New Executive Orders create a Governor's Advisory Commission on People with Disabilities; protect the disability community's rights, dignity, and privacy within state government; and modernize the Developmental Disabilities Council within the Department of Human Services.

"Today is more than a ceremony. It is a commitment to never turn back." – Lisa Butler, Developmental Disabilities Council Member

Governor Shapiro's [2026-27 proposed budget](#) builds on three years of historic support and investment for Pennsylvanians with disabilities.



Harrisburg, PA – Today, **Governor Josh Shapiro** signed three executive orders to strengthen the rights and protections of Pennsylvanians with disabilities and autism. Under the Governor’s leadership, the Commonwealth has made historic investments in their support, care, and freedom to live on their own terms — and these executive orders build on that progress.

Effective immediately, the three executive orders will reaffirm the Commonwealth's disability nondiscrimination policy, establish new data privacy protections, reauthorizes the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Council, and create a new Governor's advisory [commission](#) focused solely on people with disabilities.

“Far too often, decisions have been made about people with disabilities, but not with them,” said **Governor Shapiro**. “These new executive orders that I signed today will not only improve services for Pennsylvanians with disabilities, they’ll also give this community a real seat at the table — helping my Administration bring about real change and deliver on policies that Pennsylvanians with disabilities actually need. Here, we treat people with respect and dignity, and we believe in listening to Pennsylvanians with disabilities and giving them a seat at the table as policy advisors.”

First Lady Lori Shapiro, who has championed the rights of Pennsylvanians with disabilities and encouraged major businesses across the Commonwealth to partner with the [Office of Vocational Rehabilitation \(OVR\)](#) to expand their access to good-paying jobs, and **Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) Secretary Dr. Val Arkoosh** also attended the signing.

OVR, housed within the **Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry**, has supported 76,000 Pennsylvanians with disabilities and strengthened partnerships with employers across the Commonwealth since 2023, expanding job placement services, pre-employment transition services, and on-the-job training opportunities.

“Since the time I served as a County Commissioner, I have heard from parents of an adult with disabilities or autism trying to plan for their child’s future, looking for help to get their child the services and supports they need,” said **DHS Secretary Dr. Arkoosh**. “To make change you need two things: resources and will. These calls and the tireless work of self-advocates and families fuel our commitment to Pennsylvanians with disabilities and the tangible progress we’ve made in the last three years. Today’s actions build on this commitment by ensuring that people with disabilities are heard, represented, and protected by our state government.”

The first Executive Order signed by **Governor Shapiro** rescinds and replaces EO 2002-5, and will protect the rights, dignity, and privacy of people with disabilities by **reaffirming the Commonwealth's longstanding nondiscrimination commitment** and emphasizing the need that these protections require renewed attention and action, not just compliance. At a time when the federal government has recklessly proposed creating databases of Americans with Autism and their private, personal data, this order will **ensure data collection by Commonwealth agencies is limited to the minimum data necessary and proper processes are followed** by Commonwealth agencies, including collection in health care, research, and compliance in the law.

"I'm very grateful to Governor Shapiro for giving his attention and support to the autism community," said **Tom Bak, a musician and neurodiversity advocate who spoke at today's signing along with his mother Erin Lopes**. "This executive order matters because it gives autistic people a voice in protecting their data privacy and autonomy."

The Governor's second Executive Order rescinds EO 2006-09 and EO 2016-03 and establishes the [Governor's Advisory Commission on People with Disabilities](#) which will consist of up to **30 volunteer members, appointed by the Governor**, including individuals with disabilities, family members, or those with relevant expertise. They will serve two-year terms. The new **commissioners will recommend policy changes across the disabilities spectrum**, engage with federal/state/local agencies, communicate Administration initiatives to the public, and compile information on programs, funding, and additional supports to create an inclusive resource for individuals with disabilities and their family members across Pennsylvania.

At the signing ceremony, the Governor announced that his Administration is currently [accepting applications](#) for the Advisory Commission's Executive Director position.

"From the beginning of his Administration, Governor Shapiro has worked and embraced the disability community. At its core, a Commission on People With Disabilities is about representation, equity, and voice," said **Sherri Landis with the Arc of Pennsylvania**. "For too long, people with disabilities have been left out of conversations that directly impact their lives – whether those conversations are about housing, education, employment, or community access. This Commission changes that, and ensures that people with disabilities have not just a voice, but a seat at the table."

Today's third Executive Order rescinds EO 1997-2 and reestablishes the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Council so that it can continue to fulfill Pennsylvania's obligations under the federal Developmental Disabilities Act.

The independently-operated DD Council is more narrowly focused than the newly-created Commission, and will **advise the Governor on all matters** affecting individuals with developmental disabilities in Pennsylvania, and advocate for improved independence, productivity, and community inclusion. The Council will continue to **develop and implement a statewide plan** and advocate for systemic change across the Commonwealth.

Since taking office, **Governor Shapiro** has been laser focused on ensuring Pennsylvanians with disabilities are represented in state government and have the resources to succeed and thrive on their own terms.

- In [FY 2024-25](#) the Governor secured a **historic \$354.8 million** in state and federal funding for adult ID/A services, to raise rates for service providers and Direct Support Professionals, and begin to clear the emergency waiting list for adults seeking ID/A services.
- Since February 2024, the adult emergency waiting list for services decreased from 4,600 adults to 3,191 adults in December 2025 – a 31 percent decrease.
- In the [FY 2025-26 budget](#), **Governor Shapiro** secured a **\$21 million** investment to increase the wages of eligible Direct Care Workers, increasing their wage to nearly \$15 an hour, paid time off, and increased access to affordable insurance for approximately 8,500 workers.

The Governor's [2026-27 proposed budget](#) continues this work by:

- Increasing state funding for OVR by **\$1 million**, bringing the **total to \$49.7 million**, to serve more Pennsylvanians with disabilities.
- Investing **\$3 million** into the modernization of PA Link, Pennsylvania's Aging and Disability Resource Center network, to improve navigation of long-term services.
- Growing Special Education Funding by **\$50 million**, **totaling \$1.58 billion** to support students with disabilities and special needs, through after-school programs, full-day pre-K and kindergarten, and more.

Today's actions reinforce **Governor Shapiro** and his Administration's broader commitment to supporting the approximately **242,000 people** who receive intellectual and physical disability services in their homes or communities across the Commonwealth.

For more information on the new Commission, visit our [website](#).

Read the Governor's proposed budget in brief [here](#).

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