

DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER - NH

64 North Main Street, Suite 2, Concord, NH 03301-4913 • mail@drcnh.org • drcnh.org
(603) 228-0432 • (800) 834-1721 voice or TTY • FAX: (603) 225-2077

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Stephanie Patrick, Executive Director
Disability Rights Center - New Hampshire, (603) 228-0432

DRC-NH Announces New Special Education and COVID-19 Project – Expanding Legal Services for Students with Disabilities

Almost 30,000 children with disabilities receive special education supports and services in New Hampshire’s schools and many are struggling since the start of the COVID-19 public health crisis. Whether their school is remote, hybrid, or somewhere in between, these students are being segregated at increasing rates and otherwise put in unhealthy and unlawful situations at their schools. Parents have had to serve as not only teachers but also as service providers, and large numbers of children with disabilities are regressing or making only limited progress on the goals set forth in their individualized educational programs (IEPs).

To address this urgent need, Disability Rights Center – NH (DRC-NH) is pleased to announce a new Special Education and COVID-19 project, led by attorney Lisa Wolford. The new project, which began on October 13, 2020 and will continue through December 2022, is solely focused on protecting the educational rights of children with disabilities through individual representation, systemic advocacy, and public policy work. Lisa Wolford is an experienced attorney who comes to DRC-NH from the New Hampshire Attorney General’s Office.

“Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, we received hundreds of calls on special education issues. Since the start of the pandemic, that number has continued to grow. This new project expands our existing special education capacity to meet this growing need. I’m so pleased to make this critical resource available to families across the state,” said Stephanie Patrick, DRC-NH Executive Director.

Even before the current crisis, students with disabilities faced significant challenges including disproportionate rates of suspension and lower graduation rates compared to their non-disabled peers. Nearly half of parents of students with disabilities report that schools failed to facilitate parent involvement even though parents are a critical part of the student’s educational team. Significant effort is required to make sure that the pandemic does not result in increased inequities for student with disabilities. With this new project, Disability Rights Center can represent more students with disabilities in individual cases and address systemic barriers across the state.

“I’m excited to be joining the dedicated team of advocates at the Disability Rights Center-NH. Children with disabilities are entitled, as a matter of law, to a free appropriate public education. I

Protection and Advocacy System for New Hampshire

look forward to furthering the DRC-NH mission of breaking down barriers and increasing access to educational opportunities for children with disabilities so that they have the supports and services they require to succeed,” said Wolford. Read more about Lisa Wolford at drcnh.org/about-us/staff.

Parents who have concerns about a child’s access to special education services including compensatory education can [contact us](#) at 1-800-834-1721 or mail@drcnh.org to speak with an attorney free of charge.

This project is funded through the generous support of the [New Hampshire Charitable Foundation](#), [Endowment for Health](#), [New Hampshire Nonprofit Emergency Relief Fund](#), [Granite United Way: North Country Region](#), [Northern NH Region](#), [Southern Region](#) and [Upper Valley Region](#), and individual [donations](#).

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Disability Rights Center-NH is New Hampshire’s designated Protection and Advocacy system and is dedicated to eliminating barriers existing in New Hampshire to the full and equal enjoyment of civil and other legal rights by people with disabilities. More information about DRC-NH can be found at www.drcnh.org.