What is Disability Rights Iowa?

Protection and Advocacy (P&A) System for Individuals with Disabilities and Mental Illness
DRI is...

Independent Non-Profit
Civil rights law firm, NOT government agency
20 employees (8 attorneys)
Statewide services
Located in Financial Center in downtown Des Moines
Who Can We Serve?

1) Resident of Iowa
2) Have a disability
3) Have a disability-related issue, rights violation, legal problem, etc.
4) Issue falls under an Area of Focus

*No Age, Income, or Immigration Status Requirements

**Disability-related issue** = An individual discloses to their employer that they have a disability and that they need reasonable accommodations to do the essential functions of their job. The employer responds by firing the employee without giving the situation adequate processing. This person has an issue because of their disability.

**Not a disability-related issue** = An individual is blind and is getting a divorce. Yes, the individual has a disability, but they are not getting a divorce because of their disability. This person does not have an issue because of their disability. They are a person who has a disability and an issue, not a disability-related issue.
Current Areas of Focus

Abuse and Neglect
Accessibility
Assistive Technology
Benefits Planning for SSA beneficiaries to work
Community Living
Education
Employment
Guardianship Alternatives
Healthcare
Housing
Juvenile Justice
Prisons and Jails
Representative Payee Review
Voting

Who Decides?

Board of Directors
And
Mental Health Advisory Council
- Using public surveys, input from other agencies, family members and individuals with disabilities
What Do We Do?

**Mission:** Defend and Promote the Rights of Iowans with disabilities

**Activities related to Abuse and Neglect:**
1) **Investigating & Monitoring Facilities** – Investigate institutions with residents with disabilities for instances of abuse and neglect
   Examples: Prisons, juvenile detention centers, mental health residential facilities, etc.

**Services:**
1) **“Professional Inquiries”** – Provide guidance to & assist other service providers with disability related problem solving
2) **Direct Legal Advocacy** – Provide advice, advocacy and legal services for individuals with disabilities

We do not have social workers/case coordinators on staff.
Abuse and Neglect

Federal statutes grant authority to:

- Conduct investigations of abuse and neglect in facilities
- Monitor facilities—compliance of rights and to provide information and training
- Training and education in collaboration with other agencies
Where does DRI monitor?

Public and Private residential settings, including
  ◦ General and psychiatric hospitals
  ◦ Nursing homes and Board and Care Homes,
  ◦ Juvenile detention facilities, prisons and jails
  ◦ Homeless shelters

Community Settings
  ◦ Day habilitation services
  ◦ Home and Community Based Services
  ◦ Work programs
What does monitoring involve?

Announced or unannounced

Reasonable unaccompanied access at reasonable times to facility and areas used by residents, including adults with guardians and minors

Opportunity to interview individual without staff or chaperone
Types of Services

Direct Representation
Short Term Assistance
Self-Advocacy Assistance
Professional Inquiry
Information and Referral
Types of individual cases

- Education
- Housing
- Healthcare
- Accessibility
- Employment
- Assistive technology
- Guardianship/conservatorship
Current Systemic Work

1) Medicaid and Managed Care for individuals with disabilities
2) Abuse and Neglect of Residents at Facilities
3) Reforming the Juvenile Justice System
4) Arrests, Suspensions and Exclusion of students with disabilities
Requests for DRI Services

1) Call 515-278-2502 extension 212 OR email vsantosnila@driowa.org

2) Make request online on DRI website https://disabilityrightsiowa.org/contact-disability-rights-iowa/let-us-help/

Professional Inquiries (contact Vanessa @ 515-278-2502 OR vsantosnila@driowa.org)
Factors in Deciding Whether to Take a Case

Type of Disability (intellectual, developmental, physical, brain injury, other)
Legal Issue is Within Board-Approved Areas of Focus
Severity of Harm
Imminence of Risk
Potential to Create Systemic Change
Thank You

Questions?