

Many Voices / One Vision



The Community Advocacy Coalition for Developmental Disabilities

August 10, 2026

Governor Bob Ferguson

Attorney General Nick Brown

RE: Protecting the Right of People with Disabilities to Live in the Community

Dear Governor Ferguson and Attorney General Brown

The Community Advocacy Coalition for Developmental Disabilities (CAC) is a statewide alliance representing self-advocates, families, and service providers. We are committed to ensuring that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) can live safely, participate meaningfully, and thrive in their communities.

We are writing this to express our strong disagreement with the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Legal Counsel opinion issued on June 18, 2026, concerning the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Supreme Court's decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.* The opinion concludes that these federal laws did not impose an integration mandate on states and that *Olmstead* did not require services in the most integrated setting appropriate to a person's needs. The Department of Justice went further on July 20th writing a Federal Register Notice which states they won't rely on the *Olmstead* guidance to enforce Title II of the American with Disabilities Act. We strongly disagree with these opinions because this goes against over 50 years of hard-fought advocacy by lawmakers and community members alike who worked day and night to help people with IDD live in their local community and be able to lead full, meaningful lives. This also goes against decades of Supreme Court decisions that affirmed over and over people with disabilities's right to a welcoming accessible community.

For the CAC, this is not simply a disagreement about legal language. It is about whether people with disabilities will continue to have a meaningful opportunity to receive the support they need without being separated from their families, friends, neighbors, and communities.

We Ask Governor Ferguson and Attorney General Brown to Lead Washington Forward

We respectfully call on Governor Bob Ferguson and Attorney General Nick Brown to publicly reaffirm Washington's commitment to the principles of *Olmstead* and to speak out against the June 18, 2026, Department of Justice opinion that seeks to narrow decades of disability civil rights protections.

In Particular:

- Publicly affirm that unnecessary institutionalization is discrimination and that Washington remains committed to the principles established in *Olmstead v. L.C.*

- State clearly that Washington supports the right of people with disabilities to receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate to their individual needs.
- Continue defending the rights of Washingtonians with disabilities if those rights are threatened through federal policy changes or litigation.
- Work alongside self-advocates, families, disability organizations, service providers, and other stakeholders to preserve and strengthen community living.
- Support Washington State legislation codifying the right of people with disabilities to live in the most integrated setting appropriate to their individual needs.
- Ensure that before any reductions to Home and Community-Based Services are considered, Washington evaluates whether those reductions would increase a person's risk of unnecessary institutionalization.
- Continue investing in housing, direct support professionals, transportation, employment supports, behavioral health services, and other community resources that allow people with disabilities to remain active members of their communities.

Washington has long been recognized as a leader in expanding opportunities for people with disabilities. We ask our governor and attorney general to continue that leadership by standing with the disability community during this important moment. Together, we can ensure that every Washingtonian—regardless of disability—has the opportunity to live, work, learn, and participate in the community they call home.

Our lives belong in the community

People with IDD, our families, and our supporters have fought for generations for the ability to receive services in our own homes and communities. We do not want to return to a time when a person had to enter an institution simply to receive assistance.

People with IDD are fully human. We have dreams, goals, relationships, talents, responsibilities, and the same desire for freedom and belonging as everyone else. Needing help with daily living, communication, health, transportation, employment, or personal care does not make someone less worthy of a life in the community. We strongly affirm that those with IDD should not be isolated or cast out of society just because they require assistance.

People with IDD want to work, live, learn, worship, build relationships, volunteer, vote, and play in our communities. Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) make those ordinary parts of life possible. HCBS pays for supported living and other residential services, personal care, employment supports, transportation assistance, habilitation, respite, communication supports, crisis services, and other community programs. They are the foundation that allows many people with disabilities to live safely and direct their own lives.

What Olmstead protects

The 1999 Olmstead decision arose after two women with disabilities remained in a Georgia state institution even though their treatment professionals determined that they could be served in the community. The U.S. Supreme Court recognized that unjustified institutional isolation can be disability discrimination.

Olmstead itself does not require every institution to close. It does not ignore safety, clinical needs, available resources, or the needs of other people receiving services. Instead, it protects choice and requires states to provide community services when community placement is appropriate, the person does not oppose it, and the services can be reasonably accommodated.

Choice is not meaningful when community services do not exist, when waiting lists last for years, or when a person must accept segregation to receive needed support. A state should not be permitted to point to a lack of community capacity as a reason for institutionalization while failing to build that capacity.

Why we disagree with the DOJ opinion

The DOJ opinion can influence how federal agencies investigate complaints, enforce civil rights, and defend the integration regulations. We believe this ruling will cause real harm to people with disabilities because it gives the opportunity to federal and state officials not to enforce protections found in the ADA that guarantee individuals' rights to community services.

We reject the idea that protecting community living means demanding 'maximum integration' at any cost. The disability community is asking for appropriate services, meaningful choice, reasonable accommodations, and steady progress toward a system that does not segregate people unnecessarily. Those principles allow for individual needs and state resources while still recognizing that unnecessary isolation is harmful and discriminatory.

Federal policy should move the nation forward, not reopen the door to unnecessary institutionalization. The answer to workforce shortages, service gaps, housing barriers, and budget pressures is to solve those problems—not to weaken the right to community life.

Medicaid Cuts and Our State Budget

What makes this situation worse is that the recently enacted H.R. 1 in 2025 includes Medicaid-related changes that are expected to place additional financial pressure on states over time. At the same time, Washington state has faced budget deficits these last couple of years and will again next session. This means difficult budget decisions must be made that might affect disability services, long-term care, behavioral health, housing, and the direct support workforce.

Any additional cuts to these services at the state level put the risk of institutionalization even higher.

For many people with disabilities, Home and Community-Based Services are not optional programs—they are the supports that make community living possible. When those supports are reduced, delayed, or unavailable, people may lose the ability to remain safely in their homes. Families can become overwhelmed, community providers may struggle to continue services, and individuals may face unnecessary placement in more restrictive settings simply because adequate community supports are no longer available.

We ask all our lawmakers to stand with the disability community, reject any return to unnecessary segregation, and protect the services that make community life possible. Let Washington show the nation that people with disabilities are valued members of our communities—not people to be hidden away.

Many voices. One vision: every person should have the opportunity to belong, make choices, and live a full life in the community.

Sincerely,

Community Advocacy Coalition for Developmental Disabilities

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Organizations

Allies In Advocacy

AtWork!

Community Employment Alliance

Community Residential Services Association

Developmental Disabilities Ombuds

Disability Rights Washington

Entrust Community Services

Exceptional Foresters, Inc.

Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment

Hispanic Disability Support SWWA (Pasitos Gigantes)

Kinderling

Kittitas County Parent Coalition

Life Enrichment Options (LEO)

Max Higbee Center

Northwest Center

Parent Coalition Grant/Adams County

Parkview Services

Partners4Housing

PAVE

PeaceNW

Self Advocates In Leadership

Sherwood Community Services

Spokane Disability Collaborative

Tavon Learning Center

The Arc of King County

The Arc of Snohomish County

The Arc of Spokane

The Arc of Tri-Cities

The Arc of Washington State

The Arc of Whatcom County

Trillium Employment Services

Washington Multicultural Services Link

Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council

Wise

Work Opportunities

Individuals

Alyssa Midgley

Cathy Murahashi

Darci Ladwig

Donna Tracy

Gabriela Ewing

Karen A Williams

Kim Lappala

Kristina Mendieta

Lance Morehouse

Linda Wilkinson

Marc Côté

Michael Stewart

Pam Blanton

Ramona Hattendorf

Riannon Bardsley

Ruth Ann Lunderville

Shawn E. Latham

Tom Gaulke

Tracy Kahlo

Background materials

- [U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Legal Counsel opinion \(June 18, 2026\)](#)
- [Colorado House Bill 25-1017: Community Integration Plan for Individuals with Disabilities](#)

- Community advocacy video provided with this letter