

**Systems Advocacy & Government Affairs  
Committee Report for the Board of Directors  
September 2020**

---

SAGA COMMITTEE Chairperson: Joshua Stranix

The SAGA Committee met on the following dates: Jan. 6<sup>th</sup>, Feb. 3<sup>rd</sup>, and March 3<sup>rd</sup>

The following topics and actions were discussed:

1. Legislative/Policy Updates -

- a. New Legislative Committees Chairmen & Members Announced - The Arc of PA provided an update to the Committee on the committee chairman for the key committees we track information: Education, Health, Human Services, and Labor & Industry
- b. New Legislative Priorities - The Arc of PA circulated our policy brief from last session to open the committee to discuss what key priorities the SAGA committee recommends The Arc of PA provide active advocacy on. The committee moved the key priorities be: closure of state centers, funding the waiting list, hate crimes protections for individuals and intellectual disabilities, and the Direct Support Professional crisis.
- c. Budget Update: The Arc of PA provided the committee a breakdown of the Governor's proposed 2021-2022 budget and the hearing dates for the House and Senate Appropriation Budget committee hearings. The Arc of PA will be conducting virtual budget advocacy meetings with all members of the two committees to advocate for our budget priorities. The Arc of PA shared our budget priorities with the committee: close state centers and re-invest that funding into Home and Community based services; funding the waiting list; increase the rates for Direct Support Professionals; increase the rate for Early Intervention (Birth to 3); and increase Special Education funding.
- d. Sex Education Legislation Discussion - Representative Benham reached out to The Arc of PA to comment on last session's HB 1586 and provide any updates needed from the I/DD perspective.

**The SAGA committee recommended the following changes: (1) Sex education is imperative for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities; (2) Needs to include specific mention of the topics of sexual abuse and sexual trafficking being covered as individuals with I/DD are more likely to be at risk; (3) Curriculum must specifically address the needs of special education students and ensure that the curriculum is made accessible to all individuals at all comprehension levels; (4) Specific language that only the parent or individual themselves (if they are over the age of 18) can opt-themselves out of the curriculum - not the school district or teacher.**

**If a parent opt-outs their child, when the child turns 18, they should be able to opt- in or vice versa. Ensure self-determination of the individual. Also, the opt-out must be done in writing.**

- e. **Cody's Law - HB 185 - Representative Jim Struzzi has introduced legislation that would amend Section 2702 of the Crimes Code. This would make intentionally or knowingly cause bodily harm or injury to an individual with an intellectual or physical disability an aggravated assault of the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree.**

**This is a re-introduction of last session's HB 2056 which The Arc of PA supported. During the virtual meet & greet with Rep. Kinhead, she raised her concerns of this legislations impact on peer-to-peer violence and unnecessarily incarcerating individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The committee has not taken an official position at this time.**

- f. **Loan Forgiveness Program for Graduates Entering the ID Professional Field - SB 94 - Senator Mario Scavella has introduced legislation that would create a loan forgiveness program for graduates who are enter a job in the Intellectual Disability field.**

**The SAGA Committee moved for us to watch this legislation and as it works to address the DSP crisis and the retention of new DSP staff.**

- g. **Compensatory Education Advocacy - The Arc of PA shared with the committee the work to address the concern for students who will be aging out of services during COVID-19 and the loss of the essential supports and services during that time. The Arc of PA is actively working with the legislature to support students who are aging out of services the ability to repeat a year. They have met with Chairman Sonney of the House Education Committee who requested follow up information on the fiscal cost. Currently, 2 co-sponsorship memos have been circulated by members on this issue. The Arc of PA's move would be to amend a current piece of legislation that is moving rather than a stand-alone bill.**

- 2. **Freshman Legislator Meet & Greets - The Arc of PA is conducting virtual meet & greets with the freshman legislators. We will invite our local chapters who are in their area and a self-advocate from the chapter to meet the legislator and share with them our policy and budget priorities.**
- 3. **Advocacy & Policy Conference 2021 - The Arc of PA updated the committee that the Advocacy & Policy Conference will be a one-day virtual format, with a them on employment, on June 8<sup>th</sup>. The Committee moved that the Legislator of the Year Award will be given to Majority Leader Kerry Benninghoff and Senator Art Haywood who were slated to receive the award last year before it was cancelled due to COVID-19.**
- 4. **PA COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Advocacy - The Arc of PA shared with the committee the on-going efforts to ensure that the PA COVID-19 Vaccine rollout is accessible and prioritizes the vaccination of individuals with IDD in the**

Commonwealth. The Arc of PA has met with policy makers and legislators sharing our concerns and highlighting key recommendations for ensuring the IDD population can access the vaccine as soon as possible.

5. The Arc of PA shared with the committee the comments submitted at 3 House and Senate committee hearings: House and Senate Education Committee hearing on the impact of COVID-19 on education and the Senate Health & Human Services Hearing on the PA COVID-19 vaccination plan.
6. The Arc of PA shared with the committee the testimony shared at the House Human Services Hearing on the I/DD system in Pennsylvania in March.