**Legislative Quarterly Report**

**October 2024**

**Here are some key upcoming bills and initiatives regarding disability rights in Georgia:**

1. **Bipartisan Efforts to Address Waiver Waitlist:** A legislative committee has proposed a plan to fund 2,400 additional waiver slots for the New Options Waiver (NOW) and Comprehensive Supports Waiver (COMP) programs. This aims to reduce the extensive waitlist for disability services, which currently exceeds 7,000 individuals. This funding is part of a three-year strategy to eliminate the waitlist completely ([Georgia Public Broadcasting](https://www.gpb.org/news/2022/12/14/georgia-legislative-committee-proposes-path-end-disability-services-waitlist)).
2. **Blind Persons' Braille Literacy Rights and Education Act (SB4):** This bill aims to enhance the rights and educational resources for individuals who are blind or visually impaired, ensuring access to Braille literacy education. It has already passed in the Senate and is currently being discussed in the House ([trackbill.com](https://trackbill.com/bill/georgia-senate-bill-4-blind-persons-braille-literacy-rights-and-education-act-enact/2313375/)).
3. **End of Subminimum Wage for Disabled Workers:** A significant bipartisan effort is underway to end the subminimum wage for workers with disabilities in Georgia. This would align the state's policies with a growing national trend to eliminate wage disparities affecting disabled individuals. Advocacy groups are actively supporting this change, highlighting the need for fair compensation ([Georgia Public Broadcasting](https://www.gpb.org/news/2022/12/14/georgia-legislative-committee-proposes-path-end-disability-services-waitlist))

([trackbill.com](https://trackbill.com/bill/georgia-senate-bill-4-blind-persons-braille-literacy-rights-and-education-act-enact/2313375/)).

1. **Creation of a Georgians with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Innovation Commission:** This proposal seeks to establish a new commission focused on enhancing services and supports for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, replicating the success of previous legislative efforts ([Georgia Public Broadcasting](https://www.gpb.org/news/2022/12/14/georgia-legislative-committee-proposes-path-end-disability-services-waitlist))

**In Georgia, recent legislative efforts have focused on housing and employment for individuals with disabilities, aiming to improve their quality of life and address systemic barriers.**

**Housing Initiatives**

**Affordable and Accessible Housing:** There is a critical need for housing that meets the accessibility requirements set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Advocacy groups are working to identify and promote legislation that supports the development of such housing (SILC Georgia).

**Partnerships for Independent Living:** Organizations like the Friends of Disabled Adults and Children (FODAC) are collaborating with Centers for Independent Living (CILs) across Georgia to provide resources such as home modifications and essential equipment (Georgia Public Broadcasting). This partnership aims to enhance living conditions for individuals with disabilities, particularly in rural areas (Georgia Public Broadcasting) (SILC Georgia).

**Legislative Support**: Current legislation is focused on expanding housing options through state funding and grants aimed at building or renovating housing that is accessible (Georgia Public Broadcasting).

Employment Initiatives

**Legislation on Housing**

One of the most significant developments is the passage of **House Bill 404**, also known as the "Safe at Home Act," which establishes minimum habitability standards for rental properties. This law requires that landlords maintain properties in a condition suitable for human habitation and sets caps on security deposits, limiting them to two months' rent. Additionally, it provides tenants with a three-day grace period to pay overdue rent before eviction proceedings can begin ([AVLF](https://avlf.org/news/georgia-governor-signs-house-bill-404-championing-renters-rights-and-housing-justice/)) ([National Low Income Housing Coalition](https://nlihc.org/resource/georgia-passes-new-tenant-protection-law-renters-establishing-minimum-habitability)). This legislation is crucial for renters, particularly those from marginalized communities, as many struggle with inadequate housing conditions. Data indicate that over 582,000 households in Georgia face severe habitability issues, impacting health and safety ([National Low Income Housing Coalition](https://nlihc.org/resource/georgia-passes-new-tenant-protection-law-renters-establishing-minimum-habitability)).

**Employment Initiatives**

**Employment Support Bills:** Recent legislative proposals include support for vocational rehabilitation services that assist individuals with disabilities in finding and maintaining employment. These services are critical for enhancing job readiness and providing necessary training (Georgia Public Broadcasting) (SILC Georgia).

**Collaboration with Employers:** Initiatives are underway to work directly with businesses to create more job opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This includes efforts from corporations like Home Depot and Essendant, which are partnering with advocacy groups to improve access to job training and employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities(disABILITY LINK)

(Georgia Public Broadcasting).

**CIL Involvement:** The CILs play a vital role in employment advocacy by providing peer support, job coaching, and resources to help individuals navigate the job market. They work closely with state agencies to ensure individuals with disabilities receive the necessary support to succeed in the workforce (SILC Georgia).

**Legislation on Employment**

The **Employment First Act** emphasizes competitive, integrated employment for individuals with disabilities. This act aims to shift the focus from sheltered workshops to community-based jobs, providing individuals with the necessary training and support to succeed in the workforce. The GCDD also promotes various projects that aim to improve job accessibility and ensure that individuals with disabilities receive fair treatment in hiring processe (Disability Law GA)([GA Dev Disabilities](https://gcdd.org/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)).

**On a national level there are several significant bills currently in the Senate aim to support people with disabilities:**

1. **Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Program Expansion**: Senator Bob Casey has introduced a suite of three bills to expand access to the ABLE program. This initiative allows individuals with disabilities to save money without jeopardizing their eligibility for federal assistance programs. The proposed bills focus on increasing awareness of ABLE accounts, allowing employers to contribute to these accounts, and affirming that direct deposits can be made to ABLE accounts ([Home | U.S. Senator for Pennsylvania](https://www.casey.senate.gov/news/releases/casey-introduces-suite-of-bills-to-expand-access-to-savings-accounts-for-people-with-disabilities)
2. **Section 508 Refresh Act**: Introduced by Senator Ron Wyden and colleagues, this bill aims to enhance the accessibility of federal technology for people with disabilities. It mandates that federal agencies ensure their technologies are compliant with accessibility standards, involving people with disabilities in the testing and acquisition of technology ([Home | U.S. Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon](https://www.wyden.senate.gov/news/press-releases/wyden-colleagues-introduce-bill-to-make-federal-technology-more-accessible-for-people-with-disabilities)).
3. **Health Equity for People with Disabilities Act**: This legislation seeks to address healthcare disparities experienced by people with disabilities by ensuring they receive equitable access to healthcare services ([Congress.gov | Library of Congress](https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/1219)).
4. **SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act**: This bipartisan bill aims to update the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program by raising the asset limit for individuals to $10,000 and for couples to $20,000. The bill addresses the outdated nature of the SSI asset limits, which currently force many individuals to live in poverty to maintain their benefits ([The Arc](https://thearc.org/blog/new-bipartisan-bill-would-advance-economic-security-for-disabled-americans/)).

**In the House of Representatives, several bills focused on improving the lives of people with disabilities are currently active:**

1. **Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act**: This bipartisan legislation aims to phase out the subminimum wage for workers with disabilities. It establishes grant programs to help states transition 14(c) certificate holders to competitive integrated employment, ensuring that individuals with disabilities are paid at least the federal minimum wage ([Cathy McMorris Rodgers](https://mcmorris.house.gov/posts/mcmorris-rodgers-reintroduces-bipartisan-bicameral-legislation-to-create-equal-opportunities-in-employment-for-workers-with-disabilities)) ([Cathy McMorris Rodgers](https://mcmorris.house.gov/posts/mcmorris-rodgers-bonamici-lead-bipartisan-bill-to-help-students-with-disabilities-access-college-support-services)).
2. **RISE Act (Respond, Innovate, Support, and Empower)**: This bill seeks to ease the transition from high school to college for students with disabilities by simplifying access to support services. It allows students to use existing documentation (like 504 plans and IEPs) when seeking accommodations at college ([Cathy McMorris Rodgers](https://mcmorris.house.gov/posts/mcmorris-rodgers-bonamici-lead-bipartisan-bill-to-help-students-with-disabilities-access-college-support-services)).
3. **Home Accessibility Tax Credit Act**: Introduced by Rep. Haley Stevens, this bill proposes a tax credit to help seniors and individuals with disabilities modify their homes for better accessibility. The credit would cover up to 35% of modification costs, providing financial relief to families ([Congresswoman Haley Stevens](https://stevens.house.gov/media/press-releases/stevens-introduces-bill-make-home-accessible-millions-americans-disabilities)).

**Centers for Independent Living**

The National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) is advocating for an increase in funding for Centers for Independent Living (CILs) through their "5 for 5" campaign. They are requesting $500 million in appropriations to support independent living services, emphasizing the critical role CILs play in enhancing the rights and support of individuals with disabilities. This campaign aims to mobilize community support and engage Congress in recognizing the need for increased funding([National Council on Independent Living](https://ncil.org/5-for-5-campaign-launch/)). For more details, you can visit the [NCIL website](https://ncil.org/5-for-5-campaign-launch/) ([National Council on Independent Living](https://ncil.org/5-for-5-campaign-launch/)).