

MAGGIE'S HOUSE

Different Backgrounds + Different Abilities + Different Cultures
ONE LIFE TOGETHER

IMPACT

January 2022

This newsletter is to share with you the **impact** your support and contributions are making on our lives, our families, and our communities. It is through your generous support that we are able to move forward to establish a network of affordable and safe homes throughout the area.

Starting this month, the Internal Revenue Service said that the federal gift tax exclusion is growing from \$15,000 to \$16,000 annually. That same cap also applies to contributions to ABLE accounts, a special savings vehicle for people with disabilities.

TAX-FREE SAVING ACCOUNTS FOR DISABLED INDIVIDUALS

The Stephen Beck, Jr., Achieving a Better Life Experience Act (ABLE) became law on December 19, 2014. The law aims to ease financial strains faced by individuals with disabilities by making tax-free saving accounts available to cover qualified disability expenses.

IMPORTANT FACTS

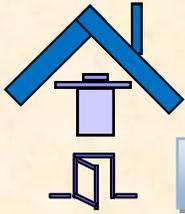
- The designated beneficiary of an ABLE account is the eligible individual who owns the ABLE account. He or she must be:
- eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) based on disability or blindness that began before age 26;
- entitled to disability insurance benefits (DIB), childhood disability benefits (CDB), or disabled widow's or widower's benefits (DWB) based on disability or blindness that began before age 26; or
- someone who has certified, or whose parent or guardian has certified that he or she met the criteria for a disability certification before age 26.
- An eligible individual may have only one ABLE account.
- A contribution is the deposit of funds into an ABLE account. Any person may contribute to an ABLE account for an eligible beneficiary. Typically, contributions for an ABLE account may not exceed the annual gift tax exemption (\$15,000 in 2021).

- However, if the beneficiary is working, and they or their employer is not contributing to a retirement plan, they may contribute an additional amount equal to the lesser of their annual gross salary or the individual Federal Poverty Level which is \$12,760 in the continental US, \$15,950 in Alaska, and \$14,680 in Hawaii.
- A distribution is the withdrawal from an ABLE account. Distributions are only to or for the benefit of the designated beneficiary.
- A person with signature authority can establish and control an ABLE account for a designated beneficiary who is a minor child or is otherwise incapable of managing the account.
- Qualified disability expenses (QDE) are expenses made for the benefit of the designated beneficiary and related to his or her disability, including, but not limited to:
 - Education;
 - Housing;
 - Transportation;
 - Employment training and support;
 - Assistive technology and related services;
 - Health;
 - Prevention and wellness;
 - Financial management and administrative services;
 - Legal fees;
 - Expenses for ABLE account oversight and monitoring;
 - Funeral and burial; and, Basic living expenses.

Maggie's House would be pleased to have a representative deliver a presentation to your organization or club. For more information, email info@maggieshouse.org

<https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/spotlights/spot-able.html>





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THE GEORGIA COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES ANNOUNCES VIRTUAL "ADVOCACY DAYS" DURING THE 2022 GEORGIA LEGISLATIVE SESSION

(December 27, 2021-Atlanta, Ga) - The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) will host its annual Advocacy Days January 26th, February 16th, and March 16th in 2022 to connect people with their legislators and to get elected officials in touch with their constituents who have disabilities.

The topic for January 26th Advocacy Day one is "Addressing the Direct Support Professional Workforce Shortage," where GCDD advocates will speak on the issue about the current lack of direct support professional workers, which has a great impact on the disability community in Georgia. This demand is outpacing the supply of available workers. Vacancy rates and voluntary turnover is high among direct support professionals. Low wages and limited benefits, minimal training, ineffective supervision, and few opportunities for career growth, combined with the growing complexity of work, are barriers to creating a stable workforce. Advocacy Day two, scheduled for February 16th, focuses on "Reducing the NOW/COMP Waiver Waitlist." The waiting list is comprised of people who are eligible for Medicaid and Developmental Disability Services who are waiting to get a NOW or COMP waiver who have not received one because there is a waiting list for these Medicaid waivers, which provide home and community-based services. In Georgia, there are over 7,000 people with developmental disabilities waiting to receive a Medicaid waiver, some waiting more than a decade. Although Georgia is not alone in having a waiver waitlist, limited spending on Medicaid waivers in Georgia has resulted in a longer waitlist than most states. Especially troubling is the result we see when waiver services are underfunded, which is the increased numbers of young people with disabilities who end up staying in nursing homes. On Thursday, December 9th, the Department of Community Health (DCH) and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) released a joint statement indicating that they officially rescinded their proposals to place daily maximum caps on skilled nursing services and additional staffing services

The topic for Advocacy Day three, scheduled for March 16th is "Advancing Employment First in Georgia," which will focus on building a community for inclusive employment in Georgia, as it is currently legal to pay people living with disabilities below minimum wage. Georgia's Employment First Council was created through the passage of House Bill 831, "Georgia's Employment First Act", during the 2017 Legislative Session and was signed into law by Governor Nathan Deal on May 8, 2018. GCDD's goal this session is to work with partners to strengthen the Employ-

ment First Council by encouraging them to restart meetings, produce their biannual reports, and work to develop a strong strategic plan for the future of the Employment First Council. GCDD has been greatly encouraged by the development of the Employment First Council and do believe that it has an important role to play in advancing competitive, integrated employment options for Georgians with disabilities.

"Advocacy Days are an opportunity to come together as a community to learn and educate legislators about issues important to people with disabilities. For GCDD, it is how we create community engagement and support efforts to change public policy," said GCDD Executive Director Eric Jacobson.

As of 2019, it is estimated that in Georgia there are 167,755 individuals with a developmental disability. For the past five years, GCDD updated its format of the event, where the activities are issues-based. There are three Advocacy Days during each legislative session and in 2022 the Advocacy Days will be virtual due to COVID-19. On average, there were 120 people that participated in each Advocacy Day in 2021 and GCDD is hoping to increase that number in 2022. Participating legislatures and state representatives for Advocacy Days will be announced early in January of 2022. State Legislators and Representatives who have participated in Advocacy Days before include state representative El-Mahdi Holly who oversees Georgia District 111. Prior to this new approach, GCDD did a single disability day at the Georgia State Capitol. To increase its impact, GCDD pivoted the event to Advocacy Days to focus on particular topics. The end goal of these events, which have now gone virtual due to COVID-19, is to advance the legislative momentum on issues GCDD has identified as legislative priorities in order to improve the lives of people with developmental disabilities.

"Advocacy days are a critical component of our policy initiatives and have contributed greatly to our past legislative victories," said Alyssa Lee, GCDD's Public Policy Research and Development Director. "We view GCDD's advocacy days as an important part of making sure the community has their voices heard during the process. Providing opportunities to educate our community on policy issues impacting the disability community, as well as best strategies to advocate, has long been a top priority."

The time for each Advocacy Day is 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. To register or for more information, click here:

<https://gcdd2022advocacydays.eventbrite.com>

About the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities: The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) is the

