**NEVADA GOVERNOR’S COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

**(DRAFT) Position on Self-Advocacy for Individuals with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities**

For decades, individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) have faced systemic barriers to full participation in society, including limited access to education, employment, healthcare, and community living. Historically, decision-making about their lives was placed in the hands of caregivers, professionals, and institutions, often excluding individuals with I/DD from meaningful participation. The self-advocacy movement emerged in response to this, empowering individuals with I/DD to speak for themselves, make informed choices, and take leadership roles in advocating for their rights. Despite significant progress, many individuals with I/DD continue to experience challenges in exercising self-determination due to outdated policies, lack of accessible resources, and insufficient opportunities for leadership and civic engagement.

**The Nevada Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities (NGCDD) believes that self-advocacy is a fundamental right of all individuals with I/DD. Self-advocacy fosters independence, personal growth, and full participation in the community. NGCDD supports policies and programs that empower individuals with I/DD to:**

* **Have a voice in decisions affecting their lives.**
* **Access education and training on self-advocacy, leadership, and rights.**
* **Be included in policymaking at local, state, and national levels.**
* **Receive accommodations and supports that enhance their ability to advocate for themselves.**
* **Engage in meaningful employment and community-based living options that respect their autonomy and choices.**
* **Uphold the principle that all self-advocates have the right to speak for themselves, recognizing that self-advocacy can take many forms, each valuable in promoting dignity and justice, including listening to and believing victims of crimes.**

NGCDD is committed to advancing policies that uphold the rights, dignity, and autonomy of individuals with I/DD. By fostering a culture of self-advocacy, we can build a more inclusive and equitable society where all individuals have the power to shape their own futures. In the realm of education, NGCDD calls for the full implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to guarantee that individuals with I/DD receive the quality, inclusive education they deserve—one that respects their unique needs and promotes their potential in diverse learning environments.

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**Policy Recommendations:**
To strengthen self-advocacy for individuals with I/DD, NGCDD recommends the following policy actions:

1. **Increase Funding for Self-Advocacy Programs:** Support and expand funding for self-advocacy training, leadership development, and peer support networks.
2. **Ensure Meaningful Representation:** Require the inclusion of individuals with I/DD in advisory councils, boards, and decision-making bodies at all levels of government.
3. **Promote Accessible Information and Communication:** Develop and enforce policies ensuring that individuals with I/DD receive information in accessible formats, including plain language, braille, and assistive technology.
4. **Expand Education and Training:** Integrate self-advocacy and disability rights education into schools, transition programs, and vocational training to empower individuals from an early age.
5. **Protect and Strengthen Disability Rights Laws:** Advocate for the enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Olmstead decision, and other policies that support self-determination and independence, while also establishing mechanisms to audit and verify compliance to ensure that entities uphold these laws as intended.
6. **Improve Support for Decision-Making:** Expand access to supported decision-making as an alternative to guardianship, ensuring individuals retain control over their own choices while receiving the necessary support.
7. **Encourage Employment and Economic Independence:** Promote inclusive employment policies and eliminate barriers that prevent individuals with I/DD from working in competitive, integrated jobs.

Last Review Date: