

# Governor's Disability Policy Summit

June 18, 2024 • Lakeshore Foundation • Birmingham, AL



# Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>3</b>
SESSIONS ANALYSIS .....	6
KEYNOTE SPEECH .....	6
<b>SESSION I: GETTING TO WORK TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY .....</b>	<b>8</b>
KEY POINTS HIGHLIGHTED THROUGHOUT THE SESSION .....	9
OVERVIEW OF THE SESSION .....	9
<b>SESSION II: LIVING AND AGING IN PLACE.....</b>	<b>12</b>
KEY POINTS HIGHLIGHTED THROUGHOUT THE SESSION .....	13
OVERVIEW OF THE SESSION .....	13
<b>SESSION III: EXERCISING YOUR RIGHTS .....</b>	<b>16</b>
KEY POINTS HIGHLIGHTED THROUGHOUT THE SESSION .....	17
OVERVIEW OF THE SESSION .....	17
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>20</b>
EMPLOYMENT AND TRANSPORTATION.....	20
HOUSING AND HOME MODIFICATIONS.....	20
EDUCATION AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT .....	21
LEGAL REPRESENTATION AND ADVOCACY.....	21
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND AWARENESS.....	21
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS .....	22

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document presents a comprehensive overview of the critical issues discussed during one keynote speech and three themed panel sessions as part of Alabama Governor's Disability Policy Summit, held at Lakeshore Foundation on June 18, 2024. An early draft of the report was made online from 08/20/2024 to 09/30/2024 to collect feedback from the public. In total, four individuals shared their feedback which has been incorporated into an updated version of the report (i.e., the current version). Additionally, the exact feedback received was added as an appendix to this report. Throughout the event, six major topics were discussed as the following: *Employment, Transportation, Housing, Healthcare, Education, and Civic Engagement* of people with disabilities. This report highlights the main issues discussed by panelists and attendees to provide actionable recommendations to policy makers to enhance the support and resources available for individuals with disabilities, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Christopher Alvarez, a disability advocate and journalist, shared his personal journey and insights on living with a disability. He emphasized the importance of a positive mindset, inclusion, and advocacy in overcoming barriers. Mr. Alvarez highlighted the need for better policies, such as improved Medicaid support, early intervention, and family support. He also stressed the importance of employers being open-minded in hiring practices and the necessity of removing barriers that infringe on the rights of people with disabilities.

The first session focused on the interconnectedness of transportation, employment, and housing. Panelists discussed the need for reliable transportation as a key factor in job acquisition and retention. They emphasized the importance of reasonable workplace accommodations, vocational rehabilitation, and job training programs to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Legislative advocacy and collective action were identified as critical for driving change. The session concluded with a Q&A where attendees raised concerns about losing benefits when employed, the need for better literacy programs, and the importance of accessible transportation.

The second session addressed home modifications and support services necessary for independent living. Panelists highlighted the urgent need for increased federal and local funding to meet the demand for home modifications. They stressed building relationships with legislators to advocate for the needs of the disability community. The session also emphasized the development of affordable and inclusive housing and support for individuals with non-physical disabilities. During the Q&A, attendees discussed the availability of grants for home modifications, the prioritization of disability funding, and the need for legal representation and actualizing effective and state-wide disability-friendly laws for disabled individuals.

The final panel underscored the importance of advocacy, visibility, and community engagement for individuals with disabilities. Panelists highlighted ongoing issues with accessibility, particularly in voting and educational support. The session emphasized the need for free or affordable legal representation and the expansion of transportation

services. Attendees raised questions about maintaining independence skills after college, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) eligibility for non-disabled conditions, and the importance of advocacy and education. The panel encouraged ongoing collaboration and community input to advance disability rights.

The summit concluded with a set of actionable recommendations to enhance the support and resources available to individuals with disabilities:

**1. Employment and Transportation:**

- Expand transportation services and promote reasonable accommodation in the workplace.
- Enhance vocational rehabilitation and job training programs.

**2. Housing and Home Modifications:**

- Increase funding for home modifications and develop inclusive housing models.
- Create a comprehensive, accessible database of all 501(c)(3) organizations and relevant agencies, detailing the services they offer, eligibility requirements, and application processes. This resource should be regularly updated and made available to individuals with disabilities, advocacy groups, and service providers to ensure easy access to critical support and funding opportunities.
- Simplify grant structures to make them more accessible.

**3. Education and Financial Support:**

- Utilize ABLE accounts for scholarships and increase awareness of educational programs.

**4. Legal Representation and Advocacy:**

- Provide free or affordable legal representation and close legislative loopholes.
- Amend state laws to reinforce civil rights protections and close legislative loopholes, especially regarding Alabama's shortened statute of limitations for federal disability-related claims.
- Amend Alabama insurance laws to recognize a wide range of disability-related tools, devices, and care as "medically necessary."

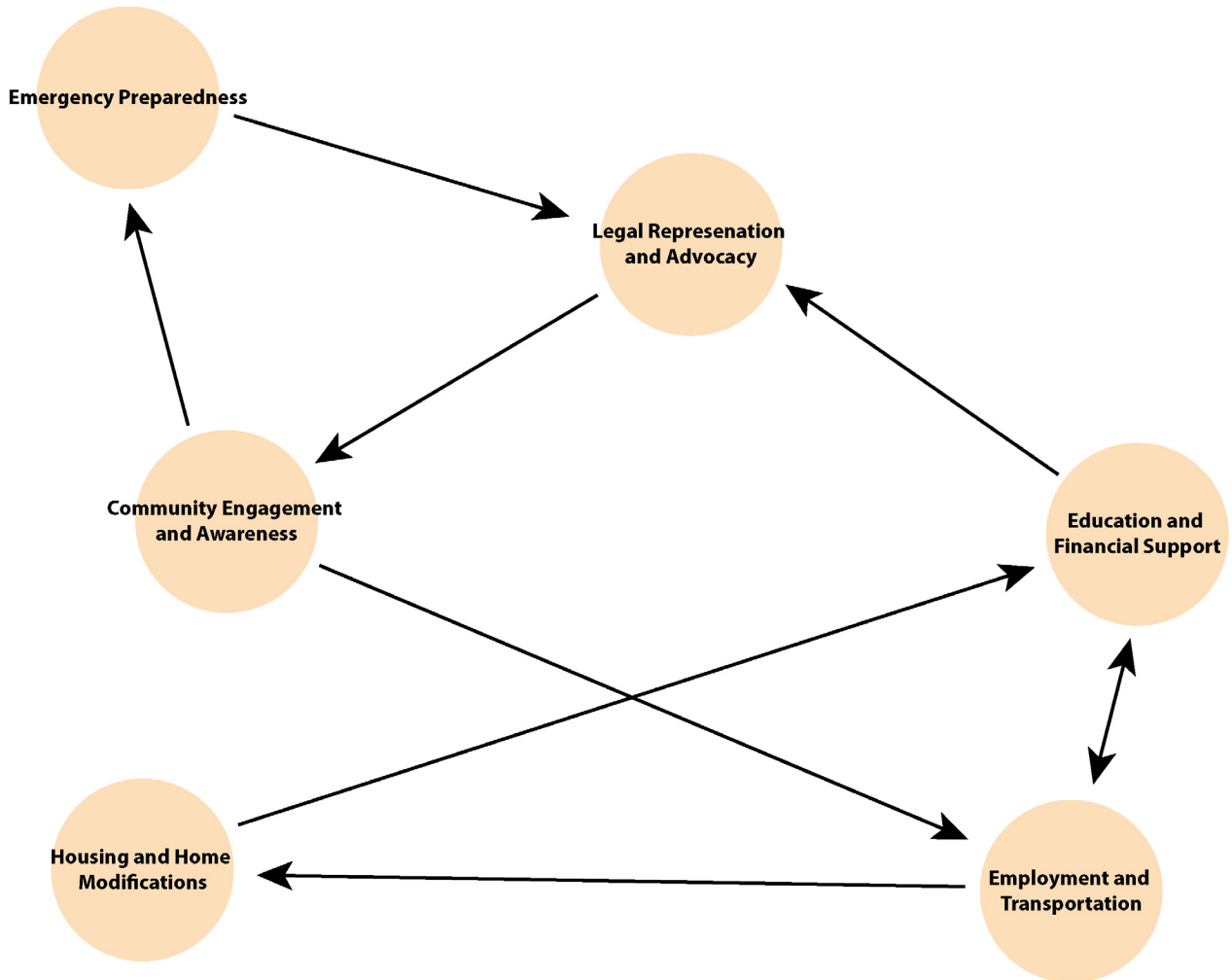
**5. Community Engagement and Awareness:**

- Build relationships with legislators and increase awareness through social media.
- Organize community forums and educational events to bring together healthcare providers, guardians, and policymakers to discuss the importance of cohesive care for "Protected Persons." These events can serve as platforms for identifying solutions and building partnerships to advocate for better care coordination practices.

**6. Emergency Preparedness:**

- Include disability considerations in emergency preparedness plans.

## Interconnections Between Actionable Recommendations



# SESSIONS ANALYSIS

## KEYNOTE SPEECH

NAVIGATING EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, HOUSING SYSTEM FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Keynote Speaker: Mr. Christopher Alvarez, M.S.

The keynote speech was delivered by Christopher Alvarez, a bilingual disability advocate and freelance journalist for NY Times and contributing writer for NBC Latino. As a staunch disability rights advocate, Chris's remarkable journey, achievements, leadership skills, academic accomplishments, and tireless advocacy work for individuals with disabilities were commended by the audience. In his speech, Mr. Alvarez shared his insights and personal experiences with regard to living and working as a person with disability as the following:



- **Personal Background** — Chris Alvarez shared his inspiring personal story, detailing his rare medical condition, Thanatophoric dysplasia, that left him on life support. Defying numerous predictions by doctors about his life expectancy, Chris continues to thrive at the age of 26. He emphasized the power of a positive mindset and the importance of making each day count. Chris attended Adelphi University on a full scholarship, excelling academically and graduating as valedictorian. He pursued further education at the Columbia School of Journalism, earning a master's degree. His involvement in extracurricular activities, such as wheelchair basketball and student government, played a crucial role in his development as a leader and advocate.
- **Challenges and Achievements** — Chris discussed the systemic barriers faced by people with disabilities, including the lack of support for higher education and employment. He highlighted the importance of inclusion, advocacy, and diversity in overcoming these challenges. Despite these barriers, Chris has achieved significant milestones, including working for The New York Times and producing a movie.

- **Advocacy and Policy** — As an active advocate for disability rights, Chris has lobbied for better policies to support students and individuals with disabilities. He criticized recent Medicaid cuts in New York and called for improved networking and advocacy in Alabama to enhance access to services. Chris stressed the significance of early intervention, family support, and assistive technology for individuals with disabilities.
- **Employment and Independence** — Chris shared his experiences with the job market, highlighting the biases and challenges faced by people with disabilities in securing employment. He urged employers and recruiters to be more open-minded and willing to take risks on individuals with disabilities. Chris expressed his aspirations for independence, a family, and a fulfilling career, calling for the removal of barriers that infringe on the rights of people with disabilities.
- **Closing Remarks** — Chris concluded his speech with a powerful message about the importance of purpose, perspective, and a positive mindset. He encouraged the audience to embrace their challenges, pursue their dreams, and appreciate the support of their families and communities. Chris challenged elected officials to consider the needs of the disabled community in their policies and actions.





## SESSION I: GETTING TO WORK TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY

Focusing on issues of employment, housing, and transportation for people with disabilities, this session started with opening remarks of the four panelists followed by the questions by attendees and panelist's response to them. The panelists were:

- Alicia Luckie Roper- Deputy director, Children's Trust Fund of Alabama (Moderator)
- John Kemp- CEO and President of the Lakeshore Foundation
- Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw- Commissioner, the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services
- Nakisha Adams- Representative from Accessing Potential through Assistive Technology (APTAT)



# KEY POINTS HIGHLIGHTED THROUGHOUT THE SESSION

The panel session highlighted several key areas where policy interventions are urgently needed:

- **Interconnectedness of transportation and employment:** Reliable transportation is essential for job acquisition and retention.
- **Reasonable accommodations in the workplace:** Employers must provide reasonable accommodation and view it as an investment.
- **Vocational rehabilitation and job training:** Enhancing such programs can significantly improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities as well as their able-bodied peers.
- **Accessible transportation:** Improving transportation services is crucial for job retention.
- **Legislative advocacy and collective action:** Unified efforts within the disability community can drive significant legislative changes.
- **Inclusive and supportive environments:** Creating inclusive workplaces and communities is fundamental to enabling individuals with disabilities to reach their potential.

## OVERVIEW OF THE SESSION

Alicia Roper from the Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect, also known as the Children's Trust Fund, opened the session by welcoming attendees and introducing the panelists. Each panelist highlighted key points in their remarks on aspects of living and working independently as the following:

**Mr. John Kemp** began his talk by emphasizing the critical link between transportation and employment for individuals with disabilities. He argued that reliable transportation is essential not only for securing jobs but also for retaining them. Mr. Kemp highlighted the importance of reasonable accommodations in the workplace, drawing from legal precedents to underscore that employers must view such accommodations as an investment, similar to how they support non-disabled employees. He further encouraged the audience to consider entrepreneurship as a viable option for people with disabilities, not just a default choice when traditional employment opportunities are scarce. He concluded his remarks with a call for reinforcing policies to address workforce crises, stressing that systemic support is crucial for long-term solutions.

**Ms. Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw** celebrated the partnerships and trailblazing efforts of employers who are actively hiring individuals with disabilities. She emphasized the unity within the disability community and the power of collective action in driving legislative change. Ms. Burdeshaw highlighted key legislative acts such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Olmstead decision, stressing the need for equal treatment and opportunities. She introduced the Work Matters Report as a valuable resource for policy development and detailed various state programs aimed at supporting individuals

with disabilities. These programs include early intervention, children's rehabilitation, vocational rehabilitation, and independent living programs. Additionally, Jane Elizabeth reinforced the agency's goal of creating inclusive environments and helping individuals with disabilities reach their full potential within their communities.

Finally, **Ms. Nakisha Adams** shared personal experiences of living with a disability, shedding light on the everyday challenges faced by individuals in similar situations. She underscored the importance of vocational rehabilitation and job training programs, highlighting that many people with disabilities often have to prove their capabilities before securing employment, often starting as volunteers. Nakisha emphasized the significance of reliable transportation for job retention, recounting her own challenges with Max VIP and public transportation. She advocated for substantial improvements in transportation services to better support employment for individuals with disabilities.

Upon culminating their remarks, the attendees shared their questions. The following highlights the main issues in the questions and the responses given:

- **Employment without losing benefits** — In response to a question about employment without losing benefits, the panel emphasized the need for individuals with disabilities to make informed decisions. The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) has increased the number of benefits counselors to help individuals understand the impact of working on their benefits. They also suggested getting involved in regional and state workforce boards to influence policies.
- **Invisible disabilities and literacy programs** — Regarding invisible disabilities and literacy programs, the panelists noted that ADRS provides evaluations and connects individuals to necessary resources. They mentioned that K-12 educational records, such as IEP and 504 plans, can assist in determining needs. Additionally, incarcerated individuals can receive education and vocational training through integrated correctional facility programs.
- **College sponsorship and ED (Elderly and Disabled) waiver programs** — On the topic of college sponsorship and ED waiver programs, ADRS supports various educational paths, including four-year colleges, community colleges, and vocational certifications. The marketing of these programs is primarily through community connections due to restrictions on federal funds for advertising. The panelists emphasized the importance of community awareness and partnerships in spreading information about available programs.
- **Vertical harvest and employment opportunities** — One of the attendees introduced Vertical Harvest as a promising solution offering agricultural jobs to people with disabilities. He proposed pairing agricultural programs at land-grant universities with comprehensive programs to create more employment opportunities.
- **Blind children in public schools** — Regarding the education of blind children in

public schools, the panelists emphasized the importance of early family support and access to resources. They stressed that assistive technology (AT) is vital for blind students and should be made available as early as possible. Suggestions included expanding AT loan centers and increasing the number of teachers for the visually impaired.

- **Transportation in eastern Jefferson County** — Nakisha Adams acknowledged the lack of transportation options in some areas, highlighting the availability of apps to find public and private transportation options. Additional comments suggested including information about adaptive transportation services in real estate listings to help individuals find accessible housing locations. The need for policy changes to provide Medicaid transportation in Alabama was also highlighted.
- **College costs beyond tuition** — The panelists noted that ADRS covers tuition and books for community college programs. Four-year college programs may have income-based support, while other workforce programs and vocational training may have separate funding options.
- **Medicaid transportation for medical appointments** — The panelists advocated for policy and legislative changes to provide targeted Medicaid coverage for medical transportation.





## SESSION II: LIVING AND AGING IN PLACE

The second session focused on home modifications and support services for individuals with disabilities. The panelist, listed below, discussed the importance of home modifications, funding challenges, and the need for legislative advocacy.

- Alicia Luckie Roper- Deputy director, Children's Trust Fund of Alabama (Moderator)
- Rev. Matthew Wilson- Tuscaloosa City Council Member
- John Roper- Disability Rights and Resources, CEO
- Addie Woods- Advocate

# KEY POINTS HIGHLIGHTED THROUGHOUT THE SESSION

The panel highlighted several key areas where policy interventions are urgently needed:

- **Home modifications:** The necessity of home modifications to promote independent living for individuals with disabilities.
- **Funding and resources:** The critical need for increased federal and local funding to meet the demand for home modifications and support services.
- **Legislative advocacy:** Building relationships with legislators to advocate for the needs of the disability community.
- **Support for non-physical/ non-visible disabilities:** Expanding resources to address social, emotional, and cognitive disabilities.
- **Affordable and inclusive housing:** The importance of developing affordable, accessible housing for individuals with disabilities.
- **Educational opportunities:** Enhancing support systems and funding for individuals with disabilities pursuing higher education.

## OVERVIEW OF THE SESSION

In his opening remarks, **Mr. John Roper** emphasized the importance of home modifications to enable people with disabilities to live independently, highlighting the success of a HUD grant that facilitated 150 home modifications in 18 months. He stressed the need for more federal and local funding to continue such programs, as the demand far exceeds the current resources. Mr. Roper discussed the common issue where grants require upfront spending, which is not feasible for many individuals, emphasizing the need for more accessible grant structures.

**Reverend Matthew Wilson** spoke about his work in Tuscaloosa and Marion Counties, focusing on helping those with disabilities get necessary home modifications. He shared specific examples of how these modifications have positively impacted lives. Rev. Wilson called for more resources and funding to assist those in rural areas who often lack access to necessary services. He suggested starting advocacy at the local level with City Council members and building coalitions to address specific issues and bring them to higher levels of government.

**Ms. Addie Woods** shared her initial skepticism about grants but ultimately received significant help for home modifications. She described the transformative impact of these modifications on her daily life and echoed the need for more funding and resources to help more people in need.

The Q&A session for the panel brought forth several crucial issues and insightful responses. The discussion highlighted the challenges faced by individuals in securing appropriate housing modifications and the efforts required to address these needs.

- **Grant availability in Fort Payne** — A concerned resident from Fort Payne voiced her frustration over the lack of grant money for home modifications in her county. The panel responded by directing her to Katie Toro from the Disability Resource Network, which covers the area. They emphasized the importance of connecting with local independent living centers in Huntsville or Montgomery, reassuring her that assistance is available, and that Katie would be a valuable resource.
- **Building relationships with legislators** — The session then moved on to a question about the importance of building relationships with legislators and how this can be achieved without reliable transportation. The panel stressed starting with local city council leaders, who can advocate for the disability community at higher government levels. They noted that some cities, like Tuscaloosa, have transport systems in place that can be utilized to facilitate these connections.
- **Prioritizing disability funding over drug wars** — One of the more contentious issues raised was the prioritization of funding for disabilities over drug wars in areas like Walker County. The panel acknowledged this challenge and suggested forming coalitions with like-minded individuals, setting specific targets, and advocating through city council to escalate the issue to county and state levels. This approach, they believed, could help shift focus and resources toward disability funding.





- **Legal representation for disabled individuals** — A particularly moving moment came when a participant shared her personal story about the lack of legal representation and support for disabled individuals who cannot afford it. Sharing a deeply personal and compelling story about her struggle with disability and employment. She highlighted the severe lack of enforceable laws in Alabama to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities, focusing not just on the need for legal representation but on the broader systemic issues that create barriers for disabled workers. She emphasized that her situation, like many others, was a result of Alabama’s inadequate legal framework, which fails to ensure basic civil rights for disabled individuals in the workplace.

The participant shared her experience as a teacher who, despite receiving help from Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) in negotiating an accommodations plan after becoming a below-knee amputee, was unable to get her employer, Hoover City Schools, to provide her with the accommodations needed. This led to unsafe working conditions that ultimately resulted in a devastating injury. Due to the school district’s refusal to accommodate her needs, she suffered multiple physical injuries, including the shattering of her prosthetic elbow joint, tearing of tendons, and complications with her prosthetic leg. She questioned what and how should be done to address this discrimination. The panel recommended contacting advocacy groups and legal experts, specifically mentioning Dr. Graham Sisson in the Governor’s Office. They emphasized a collaborative approach to finding solutions, expressing regret over her past experiences and committing to doing everything possible to help.

Another important question raised was whether laws should be considered to close loopholes and make disability rights enforceable without ambiguities. The panel agreed that laws need to be both changed and enforced more effectively, with clear language to avoid loopholes. They acknowledged the complexity of changing laws but stressed the importance of starting with a few strong recommendations and building from there.



## SESSION III: EXERCISING YOUR RIGHTS

The final panel of the day, titled “Exercising Your Rights,” was introduced with the following panelists:

- Alicia Luckie Roper- Deputy Director, Children’s Trust Funds of Alabama (Moderator)
- Dr. Graham Sisson- Executive Director, AL Governor’s Office of Disability
- Mary White- Advocate
- Jana White- Mother of Mary White and advocate

All panelists underscored the importance of advocacy, visibility, and community engagement for individuals with disabilities. They also highlighted the significance of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and ongoing issues with accessibility and voting. Moreover, the session emphasized ongoing collaboration and community input to advance the rights and quality of life for individuals with disabilities, highlighting the importance of networking, sharing experiences, and advocating for policy changes.



## KEY POINTS HIGHLIGHTED THROUGHOUT THE SESSION

- **Advocacy and visibility:** Advocacy is essential for advancing disability rights. Similarly, visibility in the community is crucial; “out of sight, out of mind” often leads to neglect of disability issues.
- **Accessibility and voting:** Ongoing issues with accessibility in voting including inaccessible voting options and absentee ballots.
- **Educational support:** Support needed for individuals with disabilities to succeed in higher education. Additionally, financial support and scholarships should avoid impacting SSI benefits.
- **Legal representation:** Need for free or affordable legal representation for individuals with disabilities. Legal support is crucial for enforcing rights and addressing discrimination.
- **Transportation services:** Expansion of transportation services should be a priority and the existing services such as Birmingham On-Demand service is valuable but has limited coverage.
- **Community engagement and legislative advocacy:** Building relationships with local legislators is vital leading to expanding community-minded decisions and actions.
- **Financial management and support:** Utilizing ABLE accounts to manage scholarships and benefits without losing support services.
- **Awareness and education:** Increasing awareness and education about disability rights and resources via using social media and other platforms to empower individuals and families.

## OVERVIEW OF THE SESSION

**Dr. Graham Sisson** emphasized the importance of advocacy and visibility for people with disabilities, highlighting that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has made progress, but there are still significant barriers. He stressed the need for individuals with disabilities to be active in their communities and to advocate for their rights, particularly in areas like voting and emergency preparedness. Graham called for the audience to share their experiences and solutions to help shape better policies and practices.

**Ms. Mary White** shared her personal journey, detailing her experiences growing up with hydrocephalus and undergoing 44 brain surgeries. She highlighted the support she received from various organizations, such as Hand in Hand, Children’s of Alabama, and Lakeshore Foundation. Mary emphasized the importance of inclusive education and how she succeeded in college through the ACCESS program at Mississippi State University. She discussed her job at Children’s of Alabama and her goal to live independently, underscoring the need for support systems and inclusive communities.

**Ms. Jana White** discussed the practical aspects of supporting Mary (her daughter), focusing on navigating the complexities of securing scholarships and managing SSI benefits without losing essential support. She highlighted the importance of finding

the right community and resources to help Mary maintain her independence and life skills. Jana shared strategies for applying for scholarships and emphasized the need for affordable, inclusive housing to enable individuals with disabilities to live independently while remaining connected to their support networks.

The Q&A session for the panel brought forth several crucial issues and insightful responses. The discussion highlighted the challenges faced by individuals in pursuing education, developing independent living skills, advocating for their rights, and accessing appropriate accommodations.

- **Limited coverage of Birmingham on-demand services** — As the “Exercising Your Rights” panel concluded, the floor opened to questions, giving attendees the chance to delve deeper into the topics discussed by the panelists. The first question came from a participant who voiced concerns about the limited coverage of Birmingham On-Demand services. Jana White responded by explaining that the service currently operates within a 10-mile radius. She encouraged everyone to advocate for the expansion of this valuable service, as it could greatly benefit more individuals with disabilities if its coverage were extended.
- **Navigating college funding and SSI benefits** — The discussion then shifted to the financial challenges of funding college education. A participant inquired about the impact of scholarships on SSI benefits and how to navigate these expenses. Jana White, along with an audience member, advised having scholarship funds sent directly to the educational institution or using an ABLE account. This approach would prevent the funds from affecting SSI benefits. They emphasized the importance of seeking all available scholarships and utilizing resources like ABLE accounts and independent living centers to manage finances effectively.
- **Maintaining independence skills after college** — Another participant was curious about how Mary White maintained her independence skills after moving back home. Mary and Jana explained that Mary continued to practice skills such as cooking and laundry with her mother’s support. They highlighted their goal for Mary to eventually live independently with the right roommate and housing arrangement.
- **Affordable and inclusive housing challenges** — The conversation then turned to the challenges of finding affordable, inclusive housing for individuals with disabilities. A participant highlighted the need for scalable models of inclusive, affordable housing that meet accessibility requirements. They mentioned ongoing efforts to build such communities in Birmingham, emphasizing the importance of creating living spaces that are both accessible and affordable.
- **SSI eligibility for non-visible disability conditions** — A question about SSI eligibility for conditions like Type 1 diabetes and ADHD was raised next. The panelists clarified that these conditions alone generally do not qualify for SSI. However, they encouraged individuals to apply for benefits to receive an official determination, as the severity and combination of conditions could potentially qualify someone for assistance.

- **Successfully applying for scholarships** — The topic of successfully applying for scholarships for disabled students was addressed by Jana White. She shared her experience of writing applications for Mary and leveraging her story to secure scholarships. Jana emphasized the importance of sharing personal stories to appeal to scholarship committees and increase the chances of receiving financial support.
- **Support for returning to education** — A mother inquired about support for her son, who had a brain injury, to return to education. Jana White encouraged seeking scholarships and grants by telling personal stories and applying to as many opportunities as possible. She stressed that persistence and sharing compelling narratives could open doors to educational funding.
- **Importance of advocacy and education** — Robin Lindsey (an attendee) commented on the importance of advocacy, education, and awareness. She highlighted the role of UAB's Disability Health Coalition and the need for inclusive educational programs. Robin's remarks underscored the collective effort required to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities through informed advocacy and accessible education.

## Closing Remarks

In his closing remarks, Dr. Graham Sisson encouraged ongoing collaboration and input on issues such as voting and emergency preparedness. He stressed the importance of using the gathered information to influence policy changes and thanked everyone for their participation. Mary White expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to share her story, emphasizing the crucial role of community support.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the insights and discussions from the Alabama Governor's Disability Policy Summit, the following actionable solutions and recommendations are proposed to enhance support and resources for individuals with disabilities:

## EMPLOYMENT AND TRANSPORTATION

- **Expand Transportation Services:**
  - ▷ **Action:** Advocate for the expansion of Birmingham On-Demand services to cover a wider area, including key locations such as Lakeshore Foundation.
  - ▷ **Rationale:** Reliable transportation is essential for job acquisition and retention. Expanding coverage will facilitate better access to employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
- **Promote Reasonable Accommodations:**
  - ▷ **Action:** Encourage employers to provide reasonable accommodations as an investment in their workforce, similar to how they support non-disabled employees.
  - ▷ **Rationale:** Ensuring reasonable accommodation in the workplace will help individuals with disabilities to perform their jobs effectively and remain employed.
- **Enhance Vocational Rehabilitation and Job Training:**
  - ▷ **Action:** Increase funding and resources for vocational rehabilitation and job training programs.
  - ▷ **Rationale:** Enhancing these programs will improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities and support their career development.

## HOUSING AND HOME MODIFICATIONS

- **Increase Funding for Home Modifications:**
  - ▷ **Action:** Advocate for increased federal and local funding to support home modification programs.
  - ▷ **Rationale:** Home modifications are essential for enabling individuals with disabilities to live independently. Increased funding will help meet the high demand for these services.
- **Develop Inclusive Housing Models:**
  - ▷ **Action:** Collaborate with housing authorities and non-profits to develop scalable models of affordable, inclusive housing.
  - ▷ **Rationale:** Creating inclusive and accessible housing will provide individuals with disabilities with suitable living environments and enhance their quality of life.
- **Simplify Grant Structures:**
  - ▷ **Action:** Reform grant structures to eliminate upfront spending requirements and make grants more accessible to individuals in need.

- ▷ **Rationale:** Simplified grant structures will ensure that more individuals can benefit from funding for home modifications and support services.

## EDUCATION AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- **Utilize ABLE Accounts for Scholarships:**
  - ▷ **Action:** Encourage the use of ABLE accounts to manage scholarship funds and avoid impacting SSI benefits.
  - ▷ **Rationale:** Proper management of scholarships through ABLE accounts will enable individuals with disabilities to receive financial support without losing essential benefits.
- **Increase Awareness of Educational Programs:**
  - ▷ **Action:** Improve community outreach and marketing of educational programs for individuals with disabilities.
  - ▷ **Rationale:** Increased awareness will ensure that more individuals can access and benefit from educational opportunities, including college sponsorships and vocational training.

## LEGAL REPRESENTATION AND ADVOCACY

- **Provide Legal Representation:**
  - ▷ **Action:** Establish programs to offer free or affordable legal representation for individuals with disabilities.
  - ▷ **Action:** Amend state laws to reinforce civil rights protections and close legislative loopholes, especially regarding Alabama's shortened statute of limitations for federal disability-related claims.
  - ▷ **Rationale:** Legal support is crucial for enforcing rights and addressing discrimination, ensuring that individuals with disabilities receive fair treatment.
- **Close Legislative Loopholes:**
  - ▷ **Action:** Advocate for the drafting and implementation of laws that clearly define and enforce disability rights without ambiguities.
  - ▷ **Rationale:** Clear and enforceable laws will protect the rights of individuals with disabilities and prevent discrimination.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND AWARENESS

- **Build Relationships with Legislators:**
  - ▷ **Action:** Foster relationships between the disability community and local legislators, starting with City Council leaders.
  - ▷ **Rationale:** Engaging with policymakers at all levels will ensure that disability issues are prioritized and addressed in legislative agendas.
- **Increase Awareness Through Social Media:**
  - ▷ **Action:** Utilize social media and other platforms to raise awareness about

disability rights and resources.

- ▷ **Action:** Use real-life stories and data to illustrate the consequences of uncoordinated care and encourage community support for legislative changes.
- ▷ **Rationale:** Increased awareness and education will empower individuals with disabilities and their families to advocate for their rights and access available resources.

## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

- **Include Disability Considerations in Emergency Plans:**
- **Action:** Integrate the needs of individuals with disabilities into emergency preparedness plans at all levels of government.
- **Action:** Develop a resource guide or program to assist families who do not qualify for Medicaid but are unable to afford necessary care and equipment through private insurance. This guide should include information on financial assistance programs, grants, and other resources available to bridge the gap in coverage for medical needs not fully supported by private insurance.
- **Rationale:** Inclusive emergency plans will ensure that individuals with disabilities are protected and supported during crises.

By implementing these actionable solutions and recommendations, policymakers and community leaders can significantly enhance the support and resources available for individuals with disabilities, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

