



"How can P&A help me?"

What is P&A?

The Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities ("P&A" or "OPA") is an independent state agency established to safeguard and advance the civil and human rights of people with disabilities in Connecticut. Part of a nationwide network, P&A operates under both state and federal statutory mandates. In addition to conducting investigations, educating policy makers and challenging discriminatory barriers in court, P&A helps individuals with disabilities understand and exercise their rights. If you contact P&A, we can give you information about disability rights, refer you to experts and resources, and help you with your advocacy efforts.

In addition to advocating for disability rights, State statutes also require P&A to respond to reports of abuse or neglect of persons with mental retardation between the ages of 18 and 59. The agency responds to approximately 1,300 such reports every year. In addition, federal law authorizes P&A to investigate certain other types of abuse and neglect and to pursue remedies in court.

P&A gives information, advice and advocacy help to more than 8,000 callers each year. People call us with questions about a variety of topics, including:

- ◆ Housing
- ◆ Special education
- ◆ Rights in treatment facilities
- ◆ Accessibility of buildings, programs and services
- ◆ Troubleshooting problems with human services
- ◆ Employment and vocational rehabilitation
- ◆ Transportation and handicapped parking
- ◆ Legal and human rights

These are just examples. You can call P&A to discuss any disability-related issue or question. Anyone can call – you don't have to be a person with a disability. P&A also pursues community outreach projects, including training and consumer empowerment initiatives, and works with other disability groups on systems advocacy strategies, including efforts to educate legislators and other policy makers.

What happens when you contact P&A?

Telephone calls (and e-mails, faxes, TTY calls, and letters) are directed to advocacy staff having professional expertise in the subject area of the call. Very often calls are taken immediately by the appropriate advocate, while sometimes you will receive a call back, usually by the end of the next business day. P&A tries to be accessible and welcoming to everyone. If you need a language interpreter or a particular accommodation, P&A will try to make appropriate arrangements.

Because resources are limited, P&A lawyers and advocates work on cases that meet specific mandates and priority criteria. Generally, these cases involve fundamental disability rights issues and potentially impact many people.

Unfortunately, P&A does not have enough resources to take action on every individual request for assistance. However, the agency is very aware that most people call because they are facing dilemmas, important decisions or unfair situations. Each person's issue is important and P&A will do the best it can to give you information and ideas that will help.

P&A accepts advocacy cases based on state and federal mandates, and on formally adopted priorities. Each case is reviewed on an individual basis to determine if it meets those guidelines and if the resources are available to provide advocacy assistance. P&A also collaborates with other agencies and other disability rights groups. If P&A is unable to provide direct advocacy representation, the agency will try to give the person information, coach them through the process and assist them with self-advocacy.

How does P&A determine its priority issues?

Priorities for special projects and case selection are reviewed annually by the P&A Board. To be sure the agency's priorities reflect current needs; P&A staff analyzes data from thousands of constituent requests for assistance, identifies the issues that occur most often, and tracks the geographic locations of problems and the results of our advocacy efforts. P&A also provides the community with an opportunity to assist with priority setting by conducting public forums to listen to the concerns and experiences of people with disabilities, their families, friends and other interested persons. All the information is reviewed by the P&A Board, which recommends priorities for the coming year. Public comments on current or future priorities are welcome and can be submitted at any time by contacting the office by phone, e-mail, fax, or by completing a survey on the agency website at www.ct.gov/opapd

P&A Does Not Discriminate

While P&A attempts to promote awareness of our common humanity, the Agency also respects the diversity of peoples' traditions, cultures and experiences. P&A does not discriminate in the basis of race, color, religious creed, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, ancestry, genetic information, or disability.

Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities
60B Weston Street, Hartford, CT 06120-1551
860.297.4300 (V) or toll-free CT-only 1.800.842.7303 (V) or (TTY)
860.566.8714 (fax) and 860.297.4380 (TTY)
OPA-Information@po.state.ct.us

This publication is available in alternative formats upon request.