



DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS REPORT – JANUARY 2026 REPORT

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Policy Update

Legislation

Because the deadline for the Governor to sign bills occurs at the end of October, there was no significant legislative activity in November and December. The second year of the two-year session begins in 2026, during which new bills will be introduced through the deadline of February 20. In addition, bills that did not reach the Governor's desk in the first year will continue to move through the legislative process.

SCDD staff will continue to track legislation, work with the Legislative and Public Policy Committee, and make recommendations for the Council regarding positions on new and existing bills, consistent with past practice.

Seeking Bill Authors

SCDD staff created fact sheets and drafted bill language for three of the legislative priorities identified by the Council: clarify authorized representative language, improve plain language from government agencies, and background checks for off-campus worksites and contractors. At of this writing, an author has been identified for authorized representative proposal, and staff continue outreach to identify authors for the remaining bill proposals.

Testimony Provided

The Council identified chronic absenteeism in schools as a priority area based on ideas submitted through the 2024 There Should Be a Law Contest. To advance the goal of ensuring students have what they need to attend school consistently, the SCDD staff provided written testimony on two agenda items at the November School Attendance Review Board (SARB) meeting. The comments emphasized the use of IEPs as a tool to address disability-related absenteeism and the importance of training school personnel to implement these approaches effectively.

The Little Hoover Commission held a hearing on January 22 to review implementation of its recommendations from its 2023 report, *A System in Distress: Caring for Californians with Developmental Disabilities*. At the Commission's request, SCDD submitted written testimony addressing both progress to date and ongoing issues that continue to affect access, consistency, and equity in the provision of services.

The Respiratory Care Board (RCB) issued proposed regulations related to the scope of practice for licensed vocational nurses (LVNs). Upon review, SCDD staff identified potential unintended consequences that could affect the civil rights of individuals who require tracheostomy and ventilator care. During this reporting period, SCDD submitted written testimony on three agenda items raising these concerns. In response to testimony from SCDD and other stakeholders, the RCB is in the process of issuing emergency regulations to address these issues. SCDD continues to participate in a coalition of organizations advocating for outcomes that protect the rights and needs of individuals impacted by these regulations.

Trainings

The Deputy Director of Policy and Public Affairs was one of three featured speakers at El Arc de California's Latino Disability Leadership Summit, a two-day event conducted entirely in Spanish that focused on building skills for engaging in systemic advocacy. Additionally, the Deputy Director provided a training for the Statewide Self-Advocacy Network (SSAN) on the CA legislative and budget processes, advocacy opportunities within each, and strategies for advancing systemic change.

Coalition Meetings

SCDD participates in monthly coalition meetings to collaborate on efforts that strengthen systems serving individuals with IDD and their families. Coalitions include ADHAC (Aging, Disability, and Homelessness Advocacy Coalition), Employment First, Inclusive College Association (ICA), the Office of Administrative Hearing's Fair Hearing Advisory Committee, DDS' Deaf Steering Committee, Fight for Our Health (focused on issues related to HR 1), and the Fair Hearing Reform Coalition. SCDD staff assist coalitions in various ways, including providing information and guidance, connecting partners to resources and individuals, and sharing coalition updates more broadly.

Communications Update

Outreach reaches 15,000-23,000 unique email addresses and frequently includes distribution through social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and occasionally other platforms).

Monthly News & Events Email Blasts

Each month, SCDD highlights timely events, awareness campaigns, and Council activities in its statewide email newsletter.

- December: Featured National Special Education Day and the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, along with observances of Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and New Year's Eve. Included reminders about Self-Determination Program orientations offered in multiple languages; meetings of the Statewide Self-Determination Advisory Committee and the Statewide Self-Advocacy Network; and promotion of SCDD's Annual and Virtual Training Calendars. Partner updates highlighted a 2.8 percent Social Security and SSI cost-of-living adjustment for 2026 and shared a public transportation community survey led by Disability Rights California.
- January: Highlighted National Braille Literacy Month, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and Ed Roberts Day. Included ongoing Self-Determination Program orientations; announcements for Membership, State Plan, Self-Advocates Advisory Committee, and Council meetings; and reminders to subscribe to SCDD calendars and the Storytellers blog. The blast also promoted partner opportunities, including the California Youth Leadership Forum and National Core Indicators Family Surveys.

Initiatives and Calls to Action (English/Spanish)

Initiatives and alerts provided opportunities for community members to take action, participate in trainings, and stay informed on urgent issues.

- Regulatory Public Comment Opportunities (January 2026): Promoted two California Department of Education public comment periods on proposed Early Start (Birth–Age 3) and Extended School Year (ESY) special education regulations, encouraging participation through virtual hearings or written comments.
- CalFresh Benefits Update (November 2025): Shared timely social media updates informing recipients that paused CalFresh benefits were being restored following a federal court ruling, helping ensure continuity of food access for Californians with disabilities and their families.
- CDC Statement on Autism and Vaccines (November 2025): Issued a formal statement reaffirming SCDD's longstanding position that autism is a part of the

human condition and emphasizing reliance on credible, evidence-based medical information.

Promotion of Council Initiatives and Thought Leadership

Council priorities and initiatives were advanced through targeted messaging, resources, and creative design.

- **Welcome New Councilmembers:** Announced and welcomed newly appointed SCDD Councilmembers, reinforcing SCDD's commitment to inclusive governance and statewide representation.
- **Gratitude & Community Impact:** Shared a Thanksgiving-themed message thanking the community for its advocacy, highlighting more than 2,600 letters submitted about Medicaid-funded services and 4,222 responses to the 2027–2031 State Plan Development Survey.
- **Storytellers Blog – Medicaid Matters:** Promoted the blog post 'Medicaid Matters: Supporting Alan's Safe and Dignified Life,' which illustrated how Medicaid-funded services enable safety, dignity, and inclusion through lived experience.

Seasonal, Holiday, and Community Engagement Communications

Communications supported staff recruitment efforts and provided design and messaging assistance to Council partners.

- **Remembrance:** Honored the life and legacy of disability advocate Alice Wong.
- **Veterans Day:** Recognized Veterans Day and notified the public of office closures.
- **Thanksgiving & Year-End Holidays:** Shared messages expressing gratitude, announcing office closures, and extending well wishes for the winter holidays and New Year.