

Annual Impact Report

FISCAL YEAR 2023



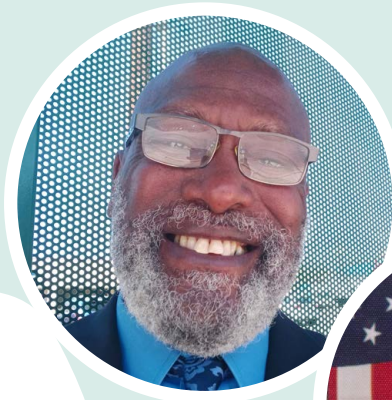
 **Disability**
RIGHTS
TEXAS



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**Together, we're creating
a fully accessible and
inclusive Texas.**



About us

Disability Rights Texas (DRTx) is the federally mandated protection and advocacy (P&A) agency for people with disabilities in Texas. In 1972, news journalist Geraldo Rivera aired a national story on the deplorable conditions at a state-run facility for children with disabilities in New York. The coverage gained the attention of Congress, which later passed a law creating the P&A network and requiring agencies like DRTx in each state.

Since opening our doors in 1977, our advocates and attorneys have helped tens of thousands of people with disabilities get the basic services they need and fight the discrimination they face in everyday life.



Issues we work on

We advocate for access and inclusion for people with a broad range of disabilities with a focus on the following issues:

- Community Living
- Disaster Resilience
- Education
- Employment and State Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- Guardianship Alternatives and Rights Restoration
- Healthcare
- Housing
- Institutional Rights and Protections
- Transportation
- Voting

How we help

Our staff advances the rights of Texans with disabilities by:

- **Providing** direct legal assistance to people with disabilities whose rights are threatened or violated.
- **Initiating** legal action through the courts and justice system.
- **Educating** policymakers about how issues impact our clients.
- **Informing** people about their rights.
- **Making** referrals to other programs and services.



Letter from our Executive Director

It is my honor to have now served as the Executive Director of DRTx for almost two years. I previously worked as a Supervising Attorney here for 12 years, but this role has given me a newfound appreciation for the breadth and depth of the work our staff does and the passion and expertise they bring to that work.

This past year has been both exciting and challenging. Exciting because we had some significant legal victories and secured new funding that allows us to extend our work in areas like education, housing, voting, opioid use recovery, and disaster resilience. But challenging as we continue to fight against major attacks on the civil rights of the people we serve.

No matter what each year holds, it is because of **you** — our funders, donors, pro bono and community partners, and all of those who support us — that we can keep fighting the good fight and breaking down barriers to pave the way to a fully accessible Texas.

Sincerely,

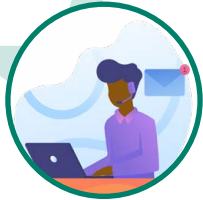


Sean Jackson



The impact of your support in 2023

Highlights and financials in this report are from DRTx Fiscal Year 2023 beginning October 1, 2022, and ending September 30, 2023.



6,215

calls requesting our services



3,037

new cases opened



3,172

people received information and referral services



77 lawsuits filed and **7** ongoing systemic lawsuits



23,245

people trained on disability rights



250,300

people used our website rights resources



41,972

self-advocacy resources distributed



205 million

people reached through news, social media, and email



700+

news stories about our advocacy

Highlights from 2023

School shouldn't hurt

In 2020, DRTx published [a report with alarming data about students with disabilities](#) being restrained and secluded. These disciplinary practices are often physically and emotionally harmful. Sometimes they're deadly. The DRTx Education Team has represented many children in cases where harmful restraints were used.

This past year, we partnered with several other advocacy organizations in a focused effort to educate legislators on this serious issue. Our efforts led to the successful passage of Senate Bill 133, which limits use of physical force and restraints on elementary students.



Thelma's four-year-old little boy was having nightmares and meltdowns. She learned that he and other classmates were regularly dragged, forced into chairs, and strapped down. No action was taken after a Child Protective Services (CPS) investigation. So DRTx helped Thelma file a Texas Education Agency (TEA) complaint for unlawful restraint and failure to provide behavioral supports outlined in the child's education plan. TEA ruled in the child's favor and forced the school to provide the legally required education services.

"I don't want any more children to experience the trauma my son did," said Thelma. "Texas needs to do more to protect our children." She went on to work with other parents and organizations like DRTx to [educate lawmakers on this issue.](#)

Keeping Texans with disabilities safe during and after disasters

After the COVID-19 pandemic and the [unprecedented winter storm in 2021](#), our state's problems with accessible disaster response and recovery services became even more apparent. DRTx recently formed a team dedicated to inclusive disaster planning and resiliency that focuses on educating people with disabilities on disaster preparedness, working with public and private providers to ensure they have inclusive disaster plans.

DRTx also initiated [legal action against a major metro](#) in our state to afford inclusive, effective and meaningful response and recovery measures in disasters.



Addressing the lingering effects of the pandemic on housing

During and after the pandemic, many people with disabilities were forced to relocate due to inadequate services where they lived. Some landlords exploited the situation by charging remaining lease fees while re-renting units and then sending alleged debts to collectors.

Our housing team effectively secured reasonable accommodations for hundreds of clients experiencing this issue.

We were able to stop landlords from reporting to debt collectors and major credit bureaus. We also obtained accommodations for numerous clients to prevent landlords from imposing unnecessary fines.

Restoring rights for those in guardianships

A 2022 DRTx report, “[Overcoming Civil Death](#),” revealed that many people in Texas are trapped in unnecessary guardianships and not allowed to hire their own lawyer to have the guardianship removed, instead being forced to be represented by an attorney appointed by the court.

Thanks to the educational efforts of our policy staff and other organizations, the 2023 Texas Legislature passed a law that allows people in or facing a guardianship to hire a lawyer of their own choosing so they can retain or have their rights restored.

Also, the law states that hired attorneys representing these individuals have an attorney-client relationship and must represent the person’s expressed wishes.

For over three decades, **Linda** managed her life and took care of her four children. A few years ago, she entered a treatment facility and was placed under guardianship. After recovering, she tried to terminate the guardianship but was unsuccessful after numerous attempts to reach the court and her appointed lawyer. She called DRTx, and with our representation, we successfully had her rights restored.

“I feel like I can breathe again,” said Linda. “I have my freedom back. I have my family back.”



Fighting against laws that suppress voters with disabilities

DRTx and several other organizations filed a lawsuit on behalf of a variety of organizational plaintiffs and individuals that challenges Texas Senate Bill 1 (SB 1) passed in 2021. The suit asserts SB 1 unlawfully suppresses Texas voters with disabilities and communities of color, citing violations of the Voting Rights Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, and the U.S. Constitution. The 20-day trial began in September 2023, and we now await the judge's ruling. Since filing, parts of SB 1 were challenged and struck down.

Visit our online [FY 2023 highlights page](#) to learn about our other work such as:

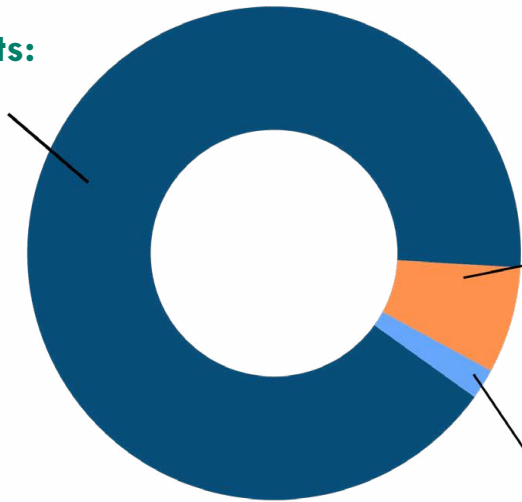
- **Representing** people with mental health disabilities forced to remain in jail waiting for treatment — despite being found not guilty.
- **Educating** school professionals to ensure justice-involved youth can successfully re-enter school so they stay in school and graduate.
- **Advocating** for healthcare, education and other needs of more than 80 foster care youth.
- **Informing** state lawmakers on the negative impact a proposed school voucher law would have had on students with disabilities.
- **Improving** accessibility of the Houston Rodeo.
- **Monitoring** facilities to ensure the safety of foster care children.



Daniel has autism and was in danger of being placed in an institution because a local service provider incorrectly told his mom that he did not meet criteria for crisis diversion services. DRTx took the case and was able to show Daniel was eligible, and within hours the request for services was submitted and approved. Daniel now receives what he needs to live successfully in the community.

Expense allocation

Program Costs:
\$18,522,405
(91.21%)



Administrative Costs: \$1,764,666
(8.69%)

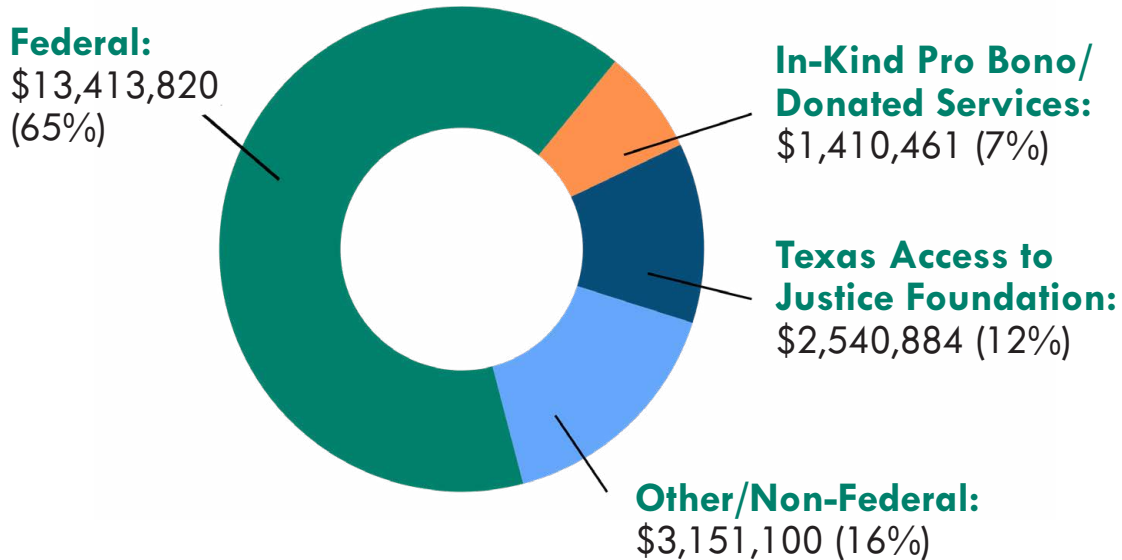
Fundraising Costs:
\$19,771 (0.10%)

Amounts based on our audited FY 2023 financial statement.



Funding sources

For more details on our federal grants, visit the [Funding](#) page on our website.



Amounts based on our audited FY 2023 financial statement.

Non-federal funding

- **Harris County Juvenile Probation Department:** Education advocacy for justice-involved youth.
- **Impact Fund Grant:** Financial support of long-term litigation costs.
- **Texas Access to Justice Foundation:** Basic civil legal services for low-income Texans with disabilities.
- **Texas Access to Justice Foundation OUD Grant:** Housing rights advocacy for people in recovery from Opioid Use Disorder.
- **Texas Appleaseed:** Monitoring of facilities housing foster care children.



Lone Star Champions of Access Recurring Gift Program

Your participation in our Lone Star Champions of Access Program allows us to expand our work to new areas. The amount given isn't what matters here — it's your continued support at any level that makes you a true champion.

Silver Spur Circle (3+ years)

Brandon Duke

Trailblazer Circle (2+ years)

Laurel Goodroe
Karen Hale
Kathryn Lewis-Peacock
Amanda Storer
Allison Walker

Live Oak Circle (12+ months)

Carl Gustafson
Amy Pierce
Edie Surtees
Jessica Toste

Bluebonnet Circle (6+ months)

Jennifer Covington
Laura Márquez
Jeffrey Schagren

2023 Annual Donor Hall of Fame

The generosity of these donors in the past year allowed us to continue to pave the way to a fully accessible Texas.

Supporters (\$100+)

- Charles Acquaah
- Mary Alexander
- Amanda Bowman
- Brigette Breaux
- Shirley DeBerry
- Dr. Alisa Elliot
- Eureka Chicken Inc.
- Evident
- Aamir Ghanchi
- Christopher Gilbert
- Laurel Goodroe
- Carl Gustafson
- Karen Hale
- Kathryn Lewis-Peacock
- Michela Marinelli
- Laura Marquez
- Annette Maxey
- Gerardo Mireles
- Jim Niezgoda
- Cathy Oliver
- Gina Pepchinski
- Amy Pierce
- Karen Rucker Chinn
- Jeffrey Schagren
- Amanda Storer
- Edie Surtees
- Jessica Toste
- Allison Walker
- Michael & Melinda Wilhelm

Legacy Circle (\$5,000+)

The Alternative House
Anonymous Foundation
Kirkland & Ellis
Winston & Strawn

Patrons (\$2,500+)

DLA Piper
Enterprise Holdings
Foundation

Ambassadors (\$1,000+)

Brandon Duke
Chava White



Pro bono law firms

Private law firms and company legal departments donated thousands of pro bono hours in FY 2023. Thank you to the following for their commitment to protecting the rights of Texans with disabilities.

- AT&T Legal Department
- Ahmad, Zavitsanos & Mensing PLLC
- Baker McKenzie
- Bank of America Legal Department
- Dell Legal Department
- Dentons
- DLA Piper
- Dykema
- Eversheds Sutherland
- Jones Day
- JPMorgan Chase
- Kirkland & Ellis
- McDermott Will & Emery
- McGuireWoods
- Perkins Coie
- Reed Smith
- Shell Oil Legal Department
- Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton
- Sidley Austin
- Susman Godfrey
- TDECU Legal Department
- The Buzbee Law Firm
- TOTAL Energies Inc Legal Department
- Verrill Dana LLP
- Vinson & Elkins
- Winston & Strawn
- Wright Close & Barger
- Yetter Coleman

**Disability Rights Texas
thanks you for your ongoing
generous support of our
advocacy efforts. We can only
do this work because of you.**

