



Arkansas House Newsletter

June 7, 2019

Creating a more inclusive Arkansas



The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that 1 in 4 of adults in the United States have some type of disability. In Arkansas, that number climbs to 1 in 3.

In the most recent legislative session, there were a number of acts passed to help better ensure that everybody has the same opportunities to participate in every aspect of life to the best of their abilities.

Act 59 amends the Achieving a Better Life Experience Program. This program allows Arkansans with disabilities to save up to \$15,000 in an account without impacting eligibility for many public benefits. Act 59 ensures that in the event of a death, the money in that savings account cannot be seized by Medicaid but can instead be transferred to a designated beneficiary.

Act 825 allows individuals to deduct up to \$5,000 in contributions to the Achieving a Better Life Experience Program.

We also passed legislation addressing mental health for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Act 664 states a certified mental health professional shall offer culturally affirmative mental health services and linguistically appropriate mental health services to a client in the client's primary communication method. It also states the Division of Aging, Adult and Behavioral Health Services of DHS shall do the same. The division is also instructed employ a coordinator to ensure linguistically appropriate mental health services are available and accessible statewide.

To protect our most vulnerable students, we passed Act 557. This legislation states that a school district shall not use corporal punishment on a child who is intellectually disabled, non-ambulatory, non-verbal, or autistic.

We also passed laws addressing how we write or speak about people with disabilities. It is important to put the person first. Catch-all phrases such as "the blind", "the deaf" or "the disabled", do not reflect the individuality, equality or dignity of people with disabilities.

Act 1035 amends laws regarding treatment for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This legislation ensures that respectful language is used within the Arkansas code including changing the term mental retardation to intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Act 236 concerns special license plates and certificates for persons with disabilities. It states the special license plate issued by the DFA should contain the international symbol of access and not display the word "disabled".

Together, we can create inclusive communities where people with disabilities can be healthy and lead full, active lives. To find out what your community can do, visit www.cdc.gov.