

AWARENEWS

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



The Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities (ACPD) serves in an advisory capacity to the Office of the Commissioner, addressing issues of concern to employees with disabilities and promoting the representation of individuals with disabilities within the workforce. The ACPD is composed of dedicated uniformed and professional staff members who are either persons with disabilities or allies of the disability community. In partnership with the Equal Opportunity and Access Section, the ACPD identifies best practices to enhance the recruitment, hiring, and retention of employees with disabilities, while fostering an inclusive work environment. Throughout the year, the ACPD leads impactful projects and initiatives that raise awareness about how the Department ensures equal opportunities for employees and applicants with disabilities. The committee actively supports the Department's recruitment efforts. This support is reflected in several key initiatives, including:

- The Disability Awareness Poster distributed to each command every October,
- The Disability Awareness Award, an annual award given to a Department employee whose work with persons with disabilities merits recognition,
- The National Disability Employment Awareness Month Career Fairs, which inform the public about applying for state jobs through the Limited Examination Appointment Program,
- The AWARENEWS newsletter, and,
- Additional projects and initiatives carried out throughout the year.

The ACPD's mission is to assist the CHP by promoting disability awareness and equal opportunities for all employees and applicants through education, recruitment, and community engagement. We invite you to learn more about our mission and efforts by visiting our SharePoint site via the link below—and we encourage you to join us in our work and become an ally of persons with disabilities.

<https://chp2go.sharepoint.com/sites/EOAS/SitePages/ADVISORY-COMMITTEE-FOR-PERSONS-WITH-DISABILITIES---ACPD.aspx>



SHARED LIVES. SHARED STRENGTH. STORIES FROM WITHIN

Phillip Mackintosh

INVISIBLE Disabilities

What do you see in your mind's eye when someone says, "I have a disability"? You may see a person in a racing wheelchair. You might see someone with a red and white striped cane making their way down the street with a guide dog. Did you ever consider that what you might see is a person that looks just like you?

The Americans with Disabilities Act defines a disability as "a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities." In one study from 1995, 74% of Americans with a severe disability did not use a wheelchair or other similar assistive device (Americans with Disabilities

94-95). Three quarters of people with disabilities have impairments that limit one or more major life activities, and we can't see them! These are the Invisible Disabilities. Issues that cause invisible disabilities range from mental health challenges to fibromyalgia to multiple sclerosis to traumatic brain injuries to vertigo. Diagnosis of these challenges requires testing and expertise. They are often completely invisible to co-workers, family, friends, and passers-by. As with many health conditions, symptoms can vary from day to day, and an individual's abilities can change significantly even during the course of a day. And remember, people with visible disabilities may also have invisible disabilities we might not recognize.

So, what can we do to help?

The first step is awareness. Great job! You have just taken some steps to become aware. Although a list of every potential invisible disability would be impractically long, a simple solution appropriate for almost every situation is simply being a little more patient. Give a little grace when somebody needs it, and you will be an ally!

Another excellent way to help is simply being willing to believe when somebody says, "I can't." We may not always understand why but being willing to let people set personal limits without pushback can help them feel understood and respected. This can be especially helpful for family members and close friends.

Lastly, be a communicator. Be willing to talk and even more

willing to listen. Providing a communication venue to those with hidden disabilities and visible disabilities can provide opportunities for increased understanding and validation. Effective communication helps us value individuals and see past visual

Brian Thomas

Support and Resources

In 2016, my life changed forever in ways I could not have imagined. My first child was born, and unbeknownst to my wife and I, she would be giving birth to a son with a genetic defect. After two surgeries and a month in the NICU, we finally had a diagnosis, Type 1 Congenital Myotonic Dystrophy. With no family history of such and no forewarning, we were scrambling to find out what that meant for him, for us, or how best to take care of him. Our story is one that many people have experienced and will continue to experience. Like many before us and many after that will come, we were at a loss of information for resources to help assist our child. Fast forward eight years, I want to share a list of resources that can help you, your family, your friends, or anyone you know that is in need of assistance. I've put together a short list of resources that can start you off and get you in contact with If you would like to expand your understanding of the invisible

distractions that can hinder our understanding.

If you would like to expand your understanding of invisible disabilities that surround you, there are many wonderful websites with additional information, and I recommend

many people and agencies that can provide assistance, therapies, and insurance. This is not an all-inclusive list, but a list that will help you to take that first step forward and will likely garner you contacts that can provide further support and insurance. The California Department of Developmental Services (DDS), <https://www.dds.ca.gov/>, can connect you to many resources in your area. From their website, Under the Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act, DDS is responsible for overseeing the coordination and delivery of services and support to more than 400,000 Californians with developmental disabilities including cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, autism, epilepsy and related conditions. The state's service system is designed to meet the needs and choices of individuals at each stage of their lives, and, to the extent possible, serve them in their home communities, providing choices that are reflective of lifestyle, cultural and

invisibledisabilities.org as an excellent place to start.

linguistic backgrounds. Their website can also direct you to your nearest Regional Center. The largest public assistance department for special needs people and their families will be county specific through the Regional Center. The Regional Center helps individuals with developmental disabilities and their families plan, access, and coordinate services. Each county operates independently from each other, so some services will vary. We meet with our Regional Center case worker once per year and they can provide various resources such as helping apply for a Medicaid Waiver to access In Home Supportive Services, CalAim, and respite hours for needed caregivers.

<https://www.dds.ca.gov/rc/listings/#RCOC>

California Children's Services (CCS) is a statewide department that also operates on a regional and county level and is designed for children with certain diseases or health problems. Through this program, children up to 21 years old can get

health care and services they need. CCS will connect you with doctors and trained healthcare professionals who know how to care for your child with special health care needs. coordinate services.

<https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/cs/Pages/CountyOffices.aspx>

Medi-Cal Insurance is something that you also may be eligible for to provide additional insurance services. Medi-Cal waivers are programs that provide additional services to specific groups of individuals, limited services to specific geographic areas of the state, and provide medical coverage to individuals who may not otherwise be eligible under traditional Medicaid rules.

<https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/Pages/Medi-CalWaivers.aspx>

CalAIM is a program designed to provide person-centered care to integrate care coordination across physical health, behavioral health, and local service providers.

<https://calaim.dhcs.ca.gov/>

The In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) program provides in-home assistance to eligible aged, blind, and disabled individuals as an alternative to out-of-home care and enables recipients to remain safely in their own homes.

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/in-home-supportive-services>

There is always hope in your journey and people available to help you through it.

Our Department's Peer Support Program consists of officers, dispatchers, and staff throughout the state available 24/7 to speak with. They can also help provide and coordinate therapy for you and your family through all the added stress while keeping it all completely anonymous.

24-hour peer support phone number: (916) 843-3320



Brittan Planinz

What Is the Disability Parity Rate, and Why Is Taking the Change in Disability Survey Important?

The history of California’s statewide disability parity rate is closely tied to the broader evolution of disability rights and policies across the nation and state. California has long been a leader in advancing civil rights for people with disabilities, but achieving parity, a state of being equal or equivalent, has been a complex journey.

Around 2005, California set an ambitious goal for all state agencies: one sixth, or 16.6%, of the government’s workforce would be filled by persons with disabilities which would reflect the state’s diverse population and offer good jobs and benefits to an underserved community. This standard, set by the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR), is known as the disability parity rate, and the Department works hard to meet the parity rate CalHR has put into place.

The Department’s parity rate, which currently stands at 10.9%, is measured through the Change in Disability Status Survey (Survey) hosted by CalHR. This is the only metric used to measure persons with disabilities in the Department. Although the Department makes a big push each October during National Disability Employment

Awareness Month for the Survey to be taken, the Survey is always open and can be taken at any appropriate time by Department employees. Such times would include during onboarding of new employees, when employees are granted a reasonable accommodation, when employees become temporarily disabled, or any other time when an employee experiences a disability. The Survey is a simple, single-paged list where employees check all boxes that apply to them. It takes just seconds to complete and consists of the following 10 options:

- I am deaf or I have serious difficulty hearing.
- I am blind or I have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses.
- I have difficulty reading or driving without corrective lenses or have a limited field of vision.
- I have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition.
- I have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs.
- I have difficulty dressing or bathing.
- I have difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor’s office or shopping, because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition.
- I have one or more physical or

mental impairments or medical conditions that limit a major life activity.

An impairment or condition is considered a disability even if it is episodic or in remission if it would limit a major life activity when active. Additionally, an impairment or condition may be considered a disability even if a mitigating measure such as medication, assistive devices, prosthetics, or other accommodations eliminates or reduces the symptoms or impact of an impairment.

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- I do not have a disability.
 - I choose not to identify.

The Survey is hosted by CalHR, and the Department does not participate in collecting Survey information. The last name of the employee and last four digits of the employee’s social security number are used to verify that the person taking the Survey is in fact a state employee. The information shared on the Survey is confidential and is not shared with the Department or any other party. The only information shared with the Department is the total of people that have taken the Survey, and how that result factors into the Department’s current disability parity rate. While all employees are welcome to take the Survey, only non-safety classifications are counted towards the parity rate. The Survey can be taken by using

the following link or QR code. We ask that Department employees take the Survey as it is the only metric used to gauge the success of the hard work the Department and Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities has done, and continues to do, to show our efforts in hiring and retaining

persons with disabilities. With all employees' participation, the Department can be a leader in meeting the standard set by CalHR and show our continuing commitment to persons with disabilities.

<https://eservices.calhr.ca.gov/Survey/Disability>

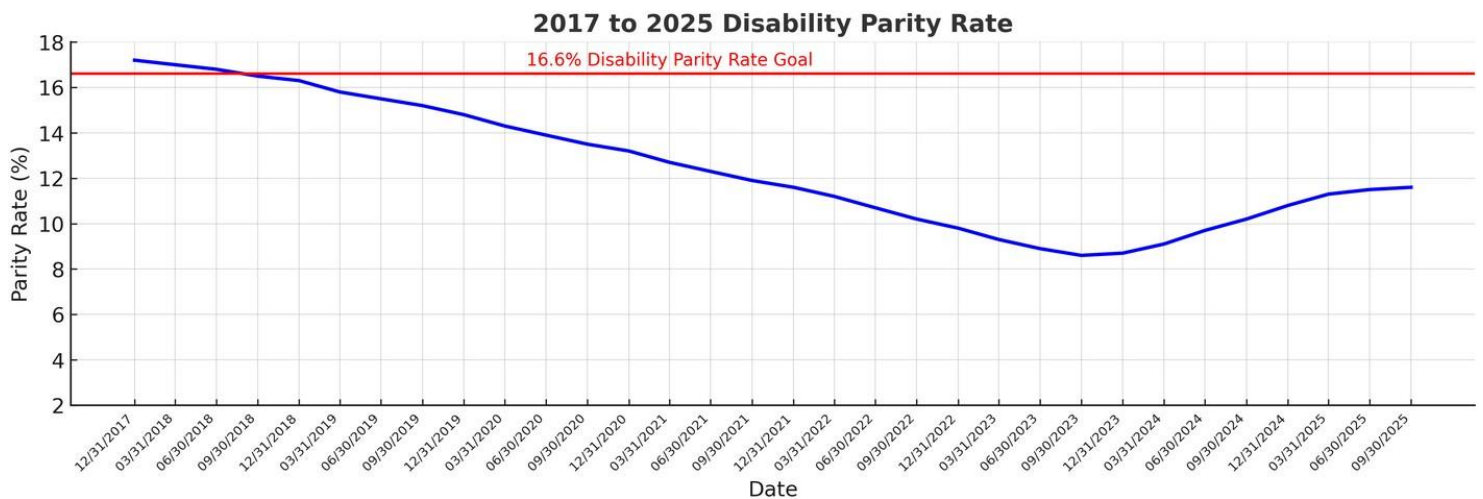


Figure 1: This chart shows the Department's disability parity rate from late 2017 to the last current update in 2025. While the trend had been moving away from the goal of 16.6% in recent years, the Department has seen improvement in 2024 and 2025. Data source: CalHR Report 5 – Disability Parity by Department.

Gerardo Serrato

Night to Shine

As the Chairperson for the Department's Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities, I am committed to strengthening our relationships with every community member we serve. This year, Dublin Area personnel had the honor of participating in the Night to Shine event in Pleasanton, CA—a global celebration held annually on the Friday before Valentine's Day to create joyful, empowering

experiences for individuals with disabilities.

At Night to Shine, I witnessed firsthand the dedication of our officers alongside members of the Golden Gate Special Services Unit, all coming together in a spirit of inclusion and celebration. While volunteering, I met a remarkable young boy named Tyler. His curiosity and compassion immediately stood out when he asked about Officer Andrew Camilleri, who tragically lost his life on Christmas Eve in 2017, and Officer Kirk Griess, who was taken from us in 2018 by a distracted

driver. Tyler's thoughtful awareness and sincere sadness not only reflected his deep admiration for law enforcement but also highlighted how the values of community and respect are shared across all ages and abilities. During the event, at one of the art stations, Tyler created a heartfelt drawing of a badge and gifted it to me—I took it as a symbol of his respect and connection. In return, I offered him a CHP patch as a token of our shared appreciation. This meaningful exchange underscored the importance of truly listening to and learning from those we aim to

serve, reminding me that our community's strength lies in its diversity of experiences and perspectives. Reflecting on this experience reinforces my belief that attending events like Night to Shine is essential. Such gatherings not only raise awareness about individuals with disabilities but also provide a platform for education, community support, and meaningful dialogue.

By continuing to engage with our community in these settings, we can foster a culture of mutual respect and inclusion that enriches our public safety mission and the quality of life for all residents. I am proud to work for a Department that constantly strives to enhance community relations, and as such, I encourage my colleagues and community partners to continue their efforts.

Together, we can build a future where every voice is heard, every story is valued, and the bonds between law enforcement and the communities we serve continue to grow stronger.



Ivan Sandoval

My name is Ivan Sandoval, and I am the Public Information Officer for the San Bernardino Area. My journey in philanthropy began in the private sector while working in the banking industry. I started with Junior Achievement and developed a strong passion for giving back to the community. That passion led me to pursue my dream career in law enforcement.

I began with the Sheriff's Department, and after three years, I transitioned to the California Highway Patrol. From the start, I became deeply involved with the Special Olympics, beginning with

the Law Enforcement Torch Run. That connection has grown over the years, and I now proudly serve on the Special Olympics Leadership Council, where I advocate for inclusion and help create opportunities for athletes to be seen and celebrated.

As the Public Information Officer, I am fortunate to have a platform that allows me to connect with all members of the community, including children, adults, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. I recently had the opportunity to connect with Vocational Improvement Program Inc., whose mission is to maximize the potential of individuals with disabilities. I was

invited to meet with them because one of their participants felt intimidated by law enforcement. It was an honor to engage with them, break down that barrier, and show them that we are here to support and stand alongside them.

I look forward to continuing that relationship and supporting their incredible mission. My commitment to inclusion and advocacy is also why I proudly serve on the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities. It aligns perfectly with my values and gives me a greater platform to represent the California Highway Patrol and speak up for those whose voices deserve to be heard.



Sabrina Dimassimo

I have been a part of the CHP for four and a half years. I started as a Public Safety Dispatcher in 2020 at the Border Communications Center and furthered my career in the professional staff as their timekeeper. I transferred in 2021 to the CHP Riverside office learning all the roles from timekeeper, benefits, subpoenas, traffic collisions, arrests, and even some Office Services Supervisor I duties. In 2023, I promoted to Office Technician at Inland Communications Center as a timekeeper and benefits liaison between Human Resources Section and the command. In May 2024, I promoted again, this time to CHP Headquarters under Human Resources Section as a Personnel Specialist, and six months later in

December 2024, I promoted to Staff Services Analyst with Classification and Hiring under Selections Standards and Examinations Section (SSES). A little fact about me, I am disabled as well, and I am honored to work for the Department. I am hard-of-hearing with a 65% hearing loss in my right ear. I overcame a difficult job hiring process to fulfill my goal of becoming a Public Safety Dispatcher with the accommodation of a properly fitted hearing aid. With this hearing aid, I was properly able to take calls and radio traffic just like my colleagues with normal hearing levels. My disability did not hinder my dream of fulfilling my career path; with the proper guidance and resources I was able to do it all.

Since transferring to SSES in December 2024, I've learned a lot in the aspects of classification and hiring within the nonuniform side, and I want to be able to share my knowledge in being a part of the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities by helping others achieve their goals as they start their career with the CHP. Another reason I joined the committee was to show that anyone can strive beyond their disability and achieve a career with our Department. I would like to achieve this by helping people with disabilities be prepared for employment, building the necessary skills, finding and applying to jobs that best suit them, and most importantly be successful and confident in the job.



*Sharing stories and images that bring **visibility** to a community too often **unseen**, reminding us of their **strength** and **value**.*

CHAIRPERSON MESSAGE

I am filled with immense pride for the members of the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities (ACPD) and the many dedicated employees within our Department who actively support our mission.

Last year, our ACPD art contest saw a remarkable increase in participation, inviting individuals with disabilities from across the state to showcase their creativity at no cost. This was all thanks to the exceptional contributions of former ACPD committee member Office Services Supervisor II Sharon Palacios, from the Santa Ana Area, who received a Commissioner's Commendation from Commissioner Sean Duryee for her work in building this program, and I am thrilled that this year's turnout exceeded all expectations.

Additionally, our annual career fair at the State Capitol in October continues to flourish, with various state agencies present to seek out individuals with disabilities for opportunities within the state workforce.

This year, we are excited to announce a new goal: launching a recruitment fair in Southern

California. I am proud of the work and commitment of Officers Resa Rombouts and Brian Thomas, along with Public Safety Dispatch Supervisor I Joni Miller, who are all based in Southern California, demonstrated to make this event a success.

We also welcomed new members to the ACPD who are passionate about furthering our mission. Please join me in welcoming Public Safety Dispatch Supervisor I Dara Mezger, Program Technician I Matthew Clark, Office Technician Aurora Carlson, Staff Services Analyst Sabrina Dimassimo, and Officer Ivan Sandoval. I eagerly anticipate the impactful contributions these new members will bring.

My goal is for the ACPD to continue strengthening the Department's dedication to raising awareness about individuals with disabilities while also informing the community about job opportunities within the California Highway Patrol. The Limited Examination and Appointment

Program (LEAP) provides a valuable alternative pathway into state civil service for individuals with disabilities. If you know someone seeking employment with excellent benefits who could benefit from the LEAP program, please assist them by sharing the California Department of Human Resources' information about the LEAP program via the provided link or QR code:

<https://www.calhr.ca.gov/about-calhr/divisions-programs/equity-accessibility-management-services/limited-examination-and-appointment-program-leap/>



By sharing this information, we all can support the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities in the Department.



LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT



Captain Gerardo Serrato, Chairperson of the ACPD, exemplifies leadership through service and advocacy. As Chairperson, he guides the committee’s initiatives to promote inclusion, equal opportunity, and meaningful engagement for employees and applicants with disabilities. Under his leadership, the ACPD has continued to strengthen partnerships, expand awareness campaigns, and ensure that every voice is represented in shaping the Department’s future. His dedication reminds us that leadership provides direction and builds bridges that empower communities and foster lasting change. Captain Serrato helps drive efforts that highlight the power of collaboration, reminding us that progress is made when we move forward as one.



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