

Our mission is to support *County Boards of MRDD* in providing services and supports to individuals with disabilities.

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY BOARDS

CELEBRATING THE ABILITIES OF OHIO'S 80,000 INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES OF MRDD



House Bill 118 was hand delivered to the clerk's office to be assigned to a committee Wednesday by self-advocates, followed by legislators who introduced the bill. Above, a group of self-advocates takes time to get their photo taken before delivering the more than 1,000-page bill. Also pictured is State Representative Kevin Bacon (second from left), State Representative Debbie Phillips (fourth from the left, second row) and State Representative Kenny Yuko (third from right). Representative Phillips introduced the bill in the House. Previously, State Senator Jimmy Stewart introduced *Senate Bill 79*. The purpose of both bills is to strike out the words "mental retardation" from the *Ohio Department of MRDD*, as well as from all 88 *County Boards of MRDD*. If both bills pass and are signed into law by Governor Ted Strickland, the new name would be the *Department of Developmental Disability Services*.

Statehouse Rally Draws Hundreds

A crowd of about 500 people were on hand for a 90-minute rally outside of the Ohio Statehouse. Several legislators spoke to the crowd about issues ranging from the name-changing bill (HB118 and SB79) to insurance parity for people with autism to advocacy.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Spring Conference

The *Ohio Association of County Boards of MRDD* 2009 SPRING CONFERENCE is scheduled for May 21-22 at the *Embassy Suites Dublin Hotel*. For a complete schedule of topics, presenters and information, please click [here](#).

Registration begins April 6. Just as a reminder, please register as early as possible as the *Embassy Suites* location fills up quickly. If you have questions, please contact Ann Neu at aneu@oacbmrdd.org or 614-431-0616.

Golf Outing October 8

Mark your calendars now for Thursday, October 8. The annual *OPAC/MR* Golf Outing has been scheduled at the *Golf Club of Dublin* for this later date. As a result, we will be able to raise more money for the PAC because of the lower greens fees.

The later date should afford us cooler weather. As an added bonus, the golf outing will be held the Thursday before the Friday SEC meeting. To accommodate those who would like to stay the night in Columbus, please contact Ann Neu. She has arranged for a special rate at the *Embassy Suites* in Dublin. Contact Ann at aneu@oacbmrdd.org or 614-431-0616.

73 East Wilson Bridge Road, Suite B-1 • Worthington, Ohio 43085 • 614-431-0616 • Fax: 614-431-6457

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Dan Ohler is pictured with the Capital behind him. While in Washington D.C., Ohler and Linda Oda, *OACB* Director of Communications, met with most of *Ohio's Congressional Delegation*.

Ohio Reaps Benefits From Trip

A funny thing happened on the way to Washington, D.C. We spoke – and people listened!

March 8-11 was the annual *National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors (NACBHDD)* conference. Representing Ohio were Dan Ohler, *OACB* Executive Director; Dr. Terry Ryan, *Cuyahoga County Board of MRDD* Superintendent; and Linda Oda, *OACB* Director of Communications.

In addition to attending *NACBHDD* events, Mr. Ohler and Mrs. Oda visited with as many members of *Ohio's Congressional Delegation* as possible. While most of the legislators were in session throughout the visit, Congressmen Jim Jordan and Mike Turner took time out of their busy committee schedule to meet and discuss important issues facing individuals with developmental disabilities.

Some of the important information we learned was that there is an autism caucus in Washington, and many of Ohio's congressmen are actively involved. In

fact, Congressman Turner said that his office was involved in every aspect of the autism movement as his Chief of Staff, Stacy Palmer-Barton, has a daughter with autism.

Good meetings were held with several congressional legislative liaisons, and we will be doing much follow up to make the most for our time spent in Washington, D.C.

At the *NACBHDD* conference, Mr. Ohler was elected chair of the organization for the next two years. It was because of his position nationally that he was asked to visit with Rahm Emanuel, President Barack Obama's Chief of Staff, concerning issues facing people with developmental disabilities and healthcare reform.

While Mr. Emanuel was called away at the last minute, Mr. Ohler and several *NACBHDD* board members were able to meet with Kareem Dale, Special Assistant to the President for Disability Policy.

For the complete press release on Mr. Ohler's visit, please click [here](#).

License Plates Raise Awareness Of Cerebral Palsy

Reaching for the Stars, a national organization that promotes Cerebral Palsy (CP) research with the goal of creating new medicines and effective treatments for children with the disease, is petitioning the state of Ohio for the creation of a license plate that will promote awareness of CP. A portion of the proceeds from the plates will go directly to *Reaching for the Stars* and their researchers.

Local chapter president Pam Frank says, "These plates will help you get involved in a small way in awareness of CP ... You may get to explain Cerebral Palsy to a stranger, and that is a gift!"

The group needs to collect 1000 signatures by Summer 2009 for the plates to be created. If you're interested in signing the petition, or for more information about *Reaching for the Stars*, contact Pam Frank at (513) 385-6850 or Pam@frankbci.com.

OACB Website Always Has Something New

If you haven't visited the *OACB* website at www.oacbmRDD.org recently, you might be surprised.

Much effort is made to keep the website as updated and relevant as possible. You will find news articles, photos, upcoming training information, *NewsAlerts* – and much more!

There is no better resource to finding links to all the websites that we visit so often, including a complete rundown of government links. If we are missing one, let us know. The only way we can stay on top of these is with your help. Suggestions and comments are always welcome.

Call2Action Impacting Legislators

To date, 13 Call2Action trainings have been held across the state, and we are pleased to tell you that people are not only taking the training, they are responding. Our legislators are telling us that.

“It is very gratifying to hear through the grapevine that relationships between consumers, family members and legislators are forming, and the hundreds of people who have taken the training are influencing decision makers,” said Linda Oda, *OACB* Director of Communications.

Almost 500 people statewide have been trained, and the final Call2Action trainings have been or will be scheduled at Tiffin University (April 28), *Clark County Board of MRDD* (April 29) and *Knox County Board of MRDD* (September 16). *Cuyahoga and Athens County Boards of MRDD* are in the process of getting dates together.

New trainees did not get much time to digest the information before they were called to action. At the end of March, people were asked to contact their legislators concerning tangible personal property tax (TPPT). This revenue generator for *County Boards of MRDD* is due to be greatly reduced by December 2010.

“It is important for everyone – superintendents, staff members, parents and consumers – to have a strong working relationship with their legislator before we need them to act on a piece of legislation,” Oda said.

It is never too late to be added to the Call2Action listserve. To receive the emails and Call2Action alerts, email Linda Oda at loda@oacbmrdd.org, and she will make certain you have all the information you need.



Senator Karen Gillmor gives a big hug to a Seneca County consumer following the March 19 Call2Action training.

Call2Action Asked To Help With Tangible Personal Property Tax

For those of you who are new to our Call2Action network – welcome! We are happy to have you as a member! This is an important time for us. As you read this memo, legislators across Ohio are making important decisions that will affect the financial future of programs for the next two years.

Sometimes you feel like you are so far away from Columbus and the Statehouse, that you cannot make a difference. Nothing could be further from the truth! Right now is your opportunity to make certain your voice is heard.

In Section 3 of your Call2Action reference manual, there is information on the TPPT. It is a complicated situation, but here’s the good news – you don’t have to understand it completely to have an impact for your loved one!

We need everyone to write a letter to your senator and representative, asking them to help keep money in the budget to pay for services to individuals with developmental disabilities. In fact, we hope you will send this to your network of friends and family who care about someone with a developmental disability.

Please add any personal notes or stories that might help. You might include a photo of your loved one so that your legislator knows that this impacts real people!

If you are more comfortable or have time constraints, and would prefer to call your legislator, that is fine.

Please email Linda Oda at loda@oacbmrdd.org if you make that call or send a letter, so that we can keep track of the communications. Thank you for your time and energy!

Governor Calls For “Respect”

More than 300 people attended the annual MRDD Awareness Month kick off at the Statehouse Atrium in early March.

At right is a photo of Jeff Gates and Kristen Kuebler, age 4. Kristen is a *Fairhaven Preschool* student and Jeff is an employee of the *Madison County Board of MRDD*.

Below that photo are two of the featured speakers at the event, *OACB* Executive Director Dan Ohler and Governor Ted Strickland, who pledged his support for a *Department of MRDD* name change to the *Department of Developmental Disability Services*.

Governor Strickland said the name change was a long time coming, and that the new name would reflect the “respect” everyone should have for people with developmental disabilities.

The *Ohio Public Images (OPI)* group came up with this year’s theme, “Just Like You.” Billboards, posters, and various other promotional materials with the theme could be found throughout the state during the month of March.

Online Video Promotes Employment Awareness

County Boards of MRDD throughout Ohio creatively used the theme “Just Like You” to promote their consumers and programs.

Click [here](#) to see an inspirational video, inspired by consumers at the *Medina County Board of MRDD*, and used as a public service announcement.

Note: Consumers were asked what they wanted to convey to people, and it was through their input that this video was created.

Congratulations to Dr. Greg LaForme and Lynee Bixler, Public Relations Director, for this outstanding PSA.



D.C. Trip Results In White House Invitation

By Dan Ohler

Executive Director, OACB
dohler@oacbmrdd.org

Back in the early 1980's, I recall a song by the rock band Styx that included the lyrics, "The headlines read these are the worst of times, I do believe it's true..."; then later in that same song, "The headlines read these are the best of times, I do believe it's true...". I can remember thinking at the time, how is that possible? How can it be the best and worst of times during the same time span?



Dan Ohler

Welcome to the Spring of 2009! Ohio's economy is in the worst overall shape since the Great Depression. The state unemployment rate is approaching 10%; in fact, in some areas, it already exceeds 10%. The MRDD service system has lost over \$50M in state funding during the current fiscal year. Property tax values are falling, gas prices are rising (at least today), foreclosures are increasing, and interest rates have fallen so low some people think it is better to stuff cash under the mattress than to put it in a bank. Clearly, those are all signs that perhaps this really is the worst of times.

On the flip side, *Ohio's County*

Boards of MRDD are coordinating the provision of services and supports to more than 85,000 individuals – an unprecedented number. The *American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009* is going to result in millions of dollars being pumped into Ohio's economy, with an increase in the *Federal Medicaid Assistance Percentage (FMAP)* in many cases enough to offset the loss of state funding for a specific county.

Governor Strickland and Director Martin have demonstrated a true commitment to helping ensure the protection of individuals with developmental disabilities by finding creative ways to ensure adequate funding and reaching out to stakeholders for input as to what works and what does not.

Further, for the first time in the history of our nation, the President of the United States has appointed a Disabilities Policy Advisor! Those are all signs that perhaps this might be the beginning of the best of times for our service system.

In early March, I was in Washington, D.C. for a legislative conference. In addition to meeting with many members of *Ohio's Congressional Delegation*, I had the opportunity to meet with Kareem Dale, the President's Disability Policy Advisor. In turn, Mr. Dale invited me to participate in the White House's first Regional Forum on Healthcare Reform in Dearborn, Michigan.

As you are likely aware, healthcare

reform is one of the President's top priorities, and it is exciting that people like myself are included. The President recognizes that people who represent county agencies who coordinate care for people with developmental disabilities need to have their voices heard.

My trip to Washington brought home to me that we do have legislators from Ohio fighting for us in the Capitol.

We were welcomed in every office we visited, but we were able to get some immediate work done through the offices of Congresswoman Betty Sutton and Congressman Zack Space. Congresswoman Sutton is a member of the *House Energy and Commerce Committee*. This committee is one of the most important in Congress, with broad jurisdiction including healthcare, public health, energy, consumer protection, interstate and foreign commerce. She is very involved in Medicaid, and has asked us to stay in touch.

Congressman Space's office has pledged their support in a problem *Guernsey County Board of MRDD* has with county officials' interpretation of a law.

While the outcomes remain far from clear, the inclusion at this early stage is certainly encouraging. While our focus will remain primarily in Columbus, we certainly will take advantage of opportunities to promote our cause at all levels of government. We encourage you to do the same.



The Best Gift Ideas Are Just A Click Away!

Artwork created by consumers is available throughout the state. The OACB encourages people looking for unusual and beautiful gift ideas to click [here](#) to be taken directly to our website.

The listing posted is our most current one available, and is broken down by county.