Preparation takes place under cloud

By Jane McClure

The 2024 legislative session starts February 12, with caution that this is likely to be much more of a policy year than one focused on spending. That’s because a structural budget deficit is looming.

Disability advocacy groups are putting final touches on their legislative agendas. That includes the Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (MNCCD), which is expected to approve its legislative asks set by tier in early January.

The three tiers used indicate how much time and attention MNCCD will put on each issue. The tier status ranges from priority items for the consortium to focus much of its energy on to items groundwork is being laid for and then the lowest tier items, which are championed by other organizations.

One need consortium members discussed in December is to have a soon-to-be-hired lobbyist review the agenda and make suggestions before tiers are set. 2014 is a policy as well as capital projects bonding year. One intent in bringing forward items that have financial implications is to have those matters on state lawmakers’ radar for 2025, which will be a budget year. That may be what happens to such important issues as enhanced rates.

In early December, Minnesota Management and Budget officials announced that they estimate an extra $4.2 billion in the two-year budget cycle that began in July. While that may bring visions of new programs and services, it also brought a huge caution.

Higher spending estimates in health and human services, including long-term care for people with disabilities, free school meals for all, and education could mean that the state budget will not be balanced beginning in 2023. That prompted Gov. Tim Walz to indicate that he plans to hold the line on 2024 spending.

State officials are warning that the state budget surplus could be easily consumed by these and other programs added during 2023. Spending the latest project surplus would put the state in the crosshairs of a $3.5 billion shortfall starting in the summer of 2023.

State lawmakers used the $17.5 billion surplus to pass the largest budget in state history, at $74 billion for the biennium. The gains were widely celebrated as bringing needed supports and services to people with disabilities of all ages.

State budget officials said the latest state budget is just part of the picture. Education spending is up, projected $2.9 billion above budget for FY 24-25 and $12 billion for FY24-25. Enrollment in Minnesota schools is about 5,000 students higher than expected. That and higher costs for universal free school meals have driven numbers up.

But the greatest projected increases are in health and human service spending. For FY24-25 the projection is $495 million above budget. That grows to $564 million above budget for FY25-26. Much of the increase has been attributed to rising costs of home- and community-based care for people with disabilities.

Costs for services and compensation are rising, combined with more demand for such services. Services, that keep people out of nursing homes, are expected to cost $55 million more than previously estimated in the current two-year budget cycle and $53 million more in the next.

Skyway safety changes are eyed, but tower still closed after year

Cracking down on downtown property owners who don’t maintain skyways is a key focus of city ordinance changes made in St. Paul. But the next step disability rights activist want is to have a shuttered skyway tower reopened.

The ordinance changes take place in January, after approval by the St. Paul City Council in December. St. Paul City Council Member Rebecca Noecker championed the changes in an effort to make the downtown skyway system cleaner, safer and more welcoming.

The ordinance changes are among several ideas in the works for the downtown skyway system, which has been a flash point for crime and poor conditions in places during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Physical changes to parts of the skyway system are anticipated over the next several months, using almost $1 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars allocated to the city.

The area in question centers on the Central Station for Green Line light rail, where a stair and elevator tower has been closed since December 2022. The tower was closed after

Access Press takes a look back at the year 2023

Recycle those 2023 calendars! It was a year of historic legislative changes, big accomplishments and at times, tough losses. Here is our annual look back.

January 2023

There were high hopes for the 2023 Minnesota Legislature, as disability advocacy groups prepared for session’s start. One highlight was to be more appearances at public hearings, in contrast to the past COVID-19 pandemic years of everything online.

The Minnesota Council on Disability presented a comprehensive legislative agenda. The annual legislative forum had a twist. Rather than hearing from state lawmakers, attendees heard state council members and self-advocates outlining key issues.

Adequate and accessible housing, reforms for working people with disabilities, and dealing with the direct care crisis were among issues to be championed during the upcoming session. An array of other asks, on mental health, criminal justice and special education, also came forward.

The West St. Paul City Council and Dakota County Board approved a new mental health crisis center. Thirty-four people spoke during a council public hearing. A majority of the crowd—roughly four out of five—supported the crisis center, speaking in favor of mental health services. A minority of residents spoke in opposition, citing safety concerns. Dakota County and Guild Services proposed the facility.

The Minnesota Department of Health added irritable bowel syndrome and obsessive-compulsive disorder to the list of qualifying medical conditions for participation in Minnesota’s medical cannabis program.

February 2023

Stout chains and padlocks on the doors told the story as St. Paul’s downtown skyway tower remained inaccessible. People with disabilities had to trek at least a block away for elevator access, and dealt with limited overnight hours.

The skyway tower, which was at the center of a high-profile accessibility battle a decade ago, was closed in late December 2022. It was a fast start for the 2023 Minnesota Legislature. Typically the first weeks of session are spent on committee organization and
More must be done to make skyways safer, accessible to all

It's winter in Minnesota. If you live, work or enjoy activities in a city's downtown that has a skyway system, you are likely spending time in a downtown street or highway that is closed. Every skyway system operates differently in Minnesota. In Minneapolis, skyways are privately owned. St. Paul's skyway system was built by the city and operates through agreement with building owners. That system can hit bumps when property owners don't want to cooperate.

Every skyway system operates a bit differently in Minnesota. In Minneapolis, skyways are privately owned. St. Paul's skyway system was built by the city, and operates through agreements with building owners. The owners there are responsible for monitoring and maintaining the system. Owners work with police, a downtown management district and building owners to ensure the skyway system is safe and accessible to all.

But when there are no public restrooms or facilities to even wash one's face, it is difficult if not impossible to practice good hygiene. The impacts of that are felt by other skyway users.

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The question of whether skyways should be closed in the winter is a matter of debate. Some argue that closing skyways is a necessary safety measure, while others believe they should remain open to provide access to those who rely on them.

The History Note is a monthly column produced by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. Past History Notes and other disability history may be found at www.mnddc.org.

Mass transit actions opened the door for better rider access

Mass transit systems have operated in major U.S. cities since the 1860s. Horse-drawn streetcars and omnibuses initially carried passengers from downtowns to suburbs. The skyway system was built by the city, and operates through agreements with building owners. The owners there are responsible for monitoring and maintaining the system. Owners work with police, a downtown management district and building owners to ensure the skyway system is safe and accessible to all. Skyways can be dangerous places for people with disabilities. It was just another barrier that people with disabilities had to navigate.

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People with hearing disabilities have found help with COVID-19 vaccines.

**SKYWAY**

**From page 1**

Two men were shot and killed there. Metro Transit has not indicated when the tower will reopen.

The skyway area eyed for improvements centers on the tower. It extends from Alliance Place across the Victoria Ramp, East 4th and 5th streets, and over Cedar Street into the crime-ridden Press House Apartments. No set timeline when the work has been announced. All of this could be tied to a larger redevelopment plan. City and Metro Transit/ Metro Transit officials hope to market a vacant lot adjacent to part of that skyway for redevelopment next year.

The effort is to hire a consultant to look at skyway safety and improvements that could be made.

The closing of the tower has long been a sore point. Disability rights activists like the late Rich Cardenas challenged Metropolitan Council over the lack of a direct skyway connection between Green Line stations.

Metro Transit bus service and the skyway. As a growing number of people moved downtown, that connection became more critical.

The connection was finally approved, built and then dedicated in 2014. A large group of people had regularly attended the dedication. But the tower, which provided critical access, quickly became a hangout for loitering and other problems. But that can force skyway users to look for alternative destinations.

**SESSION**

**From page 1**

**Plan for rally days**

Many groups are holding their annual legislative updates and rally days. One of the first rally days announced is ARRM and MOHR Disability Services Day at the Capitol, on March 19. Access Press would like to feature that information in Jane McClure’s blog and in our events calendar. Contact the editor at jane@accesspress.org.

Events listings can be added on the website, at www.accesspress.org, under the listings tab.
**FROM OUR COMMUNITY**

**Active members are needed for the Access Press Board of Directors**

Serving on the Access Press Board of Directors is a rewarding way to serve Minnesota’s disability community and help support our newspaper and website. There’s still time to apply for 2024 board openings.

Your involvement is needed to help us bring news and information to Minnesotans with disabilities, and to keep Access Press thriving for years to come.

Access Press exists to promote the social inclusion and civil rights of people with disabilities by providing a forum for news, features and commentary to benefit people who are often invisible and marginalized in mainstream society.

Access Press got its start in 1990 – the same year that the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed. It is one of the few multi-disability news sources in the United States. Much has changed since then.

**PEOPLE AND PLACES**

**Whelping center for assistance dogs welcomes first puppies**

Can Do Canines, a nonprofit that raises and trains assistance dogs for people with disabilities, welcomed the first two liters of puppies to be born at its new Whelping and Growth (WAG) Center in November.

In August 2023, Can Do Canines purchased a property in New Germany—about 45 minutes southwest of its New Hope location. Can Do Canines bought this site, which is in addition to their current facility, to serve as a whelping center. Whelping is the process of a dog giving birth. The new WAG Center is where puppies born into Can Do Canines’ breeding program spend their first five to six weeks of life.

For several years, Can Do Canines volunteers had opened up their homes to care for these dogs. Whelping homes welcomed the expecting mom about ten days before her due date and continued the care through the first five to eight weeks of her puppies’ lives. The volunteers provided continuous care to the dog and pups, with Can Do Canines offering 24/7 support through the process.

The board oversees and works on fundraising efforts on behalf of Access Press including but not limited to annual giving, major gifts, planned giving, various gifts, advertising and corporate sponsorships.

Board members play a significant role in developing, implementing and monitoring advertising, editorial and social media policies. Board members will also be involved in upcoming strategic planning.

Board members serve three-year terms. Terms start in January, with a maximum of three terms or nine years. Board members who reach term limits may continue to serve on board committees.

Board membership requires attending regularly scheduled board meetings unless excused by the president. The board meets every third Tuesday of the month from 3:30-5 p.m.

The organization opened this new center to help ease the burden on these volunteers by instead offering shifts at this new location, where the Can Do Canines breeding coordinator will office.

The WAG Center’s first residents were momo-to-be, Sasha and Flurry, both yellow Labrador Retrievers. Sasha delivered seven Lab puppies (five yellow and two black) on November 6. Flurry followed closely behind, delivering eight Labs (four yellow and four black) on November 9. The puppies transitioned from the nursery wing to the toddler during their stay. It’s important to note that the puppies were not available for adoption or purchase. The next step for these puppies was each of the two prions that Can Do Canines partners with for this service. Can Do Canines works with seven prions throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin. While inmates at five of these help raise and train the organizations older dogs, litter of young pups spend time at either Federal Prison Camp – Duluth or Chippewa Valley Correctional Institute. At these sites, 11 inmates work with these pups from ages 5 weeks to 10 weeks to teach them from their mom and then establish independence. Soon, the puppies will join the household of one of Can Do Canines for further training before their eventual placement with a client with a disability.

More information about Can Do Canines, its WAG Center, and its Prison Program can be found at www.candocanines.org.

Several appointments are announced

Gov. Tim Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan have announced appointees, including people who will serve on disability-related groups.

The State Rehabilitation Council has two new appointees. Crystal Helleksen, East Grand Forks, is the disability advocacy group representative. Helleksen replaces Addyson Moore. Katie Legred, Minneapolis, fills a new seat as a current or former recipient of vocational rehabilitation services.

The State Rehabilitation Council is responsible for advising state government on policies, plans, and programs to benefit persons with mental illness, developmental disabilities, chemical dependence, and emotional disturbance.

The State Rehabilitation Council has four new members. Ben Coady, Rochester, is a business, industry or labor representative, replacing Leon Damm. Deanne Curnan, Farmington, is parent training and information center member, Barb Ziems.

The Ombudsman Committee for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities is responsible for advising state government on policies, plans, and programs to benefit persons with mental illness, developmental disabilities, chemical dependence, and emotional disturbance.

The Governor’s Council on Connected and Automated Vehicles has new and returning members. Heath St. Clair, Inver Grove Heights, replaces Vicky Rizzolo. Hannah Allstead, Minneapolis, replaces Amber Bucha. Ryan Daniel, St. Cloud, was reappointed.

Neal Foster, Jr., Eagan, replaces Dan Chen. Phil Magnay, Minneapolis, was appointed, as were Myrna Peterson, Grand Rapids, Damien Riehl, St. Paul, Kyle Shelton, Minneapolis; Brett Weiss, Golden Valley, and Patrick Welden, Medina.


The Governor’s Council on Connected and Automated Vehicles reviews developments in connected and automated vehicle technology and intelligent and emerging transportation technologies, offers partnership opportunities to remain prepared for the widespread adoption of new technologies, and proposes policies to safety test and deploy connected and automated vehicles.

Minnesota Assistive Technology Advisory Council members were announced. Harmony Kalloyer, Minneapolis, was reappointed. Nicole Peterson, Maplewood, was appointed to a new seat as a program representative.

The Minnesota Assistive Technology Advisory Council provides consumer-responsive, consumer-driven advice to the state for the planning of implementation, and evaluation of activities carried out under the federal Assistive Technology Act grant.

Participation from Greater Minnesota is especially welcomed. Board members will meet virtually.

Board members can typically expect to engage in board activities five hours or less per month, depending on committee assignments. Board members are expected to participate in one or more committees, attend extra meetings whenever necessary, and help plan and attend special events.

Candidates with expertise in legal issues, human resources, financing, and/or fundraising are especially urged to apply. To complete the initial application to join the board, visit https://accesspress.org/about/join-our-board/.

We look forward to you joining us! Access Press Board of Directors

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Our professionals who staff with you are able to maintain our freedom, dependence and community ties.”
At the 2023 Mental Health Day on the Hill, advocates gave legislators tiny foam bricks, to indicate the importance of building a quality mental health system.

Nationally known disability rights advocate Judy Heumann was honored for her pioneering work on an array of disability rights issues, after her death. She was known for her book Being Heumann.

**May 2023**

All eyes were on a federal class action lawsuit in Minnesota over disabilities who live or in operated in corporate adult foster care or group homes. The case returned to U.S. District Court in St. Paul on May 12. Before the court proceedings, disability rights activists gathered to protest what they saw as an inadequate proposed settlement. The “Integration Now” rally was meant to draw attention to the settlement, and the need for more time to be done to help Minnesotans with disabilities as they seek to integrate into their home communities.

Minnesotans for Direct Support Improvements raised objections to the case, which had been winding through the courts for several years.

Light 50 candles and sing “Happy Birthday” to the Minnesota Council on Disability (MCD). The council celebrated its founding in 1973. Countless staff members, volunteer council members and allies have worked under the council’s umbrella on a myriad of issues over the past five decades. The council was one of many initiatives that came out of the groundbreaking 1972 Governor’s Conference on the Handicapped, which was championed by then-Gov. Wendell Anderson.

Advocates were tracking the end of legislative session, and hoping that 2023 would not be a repeat of the chaos at the 2022 session’s end.

**June 2023**

The federal COVID-19 public health emergency declaration ended, but the disease is not. Especially for those with disabilities or compromised immune systems.

Changes started to kick in for state and federal programs.

An extension of a pandemic benefit allowed parents of children under age 18 and spouses to continue serving as personal care assistance (PCA) workers for their family members for another six months.

The federal government approved the extension until November 11, 2023, and the final human services budget bill signed by Gov. Tim Walz in May included funding for the extension. But timing caused some confusion. Advocates celebrated an unprecedented and successful legislative session, with financial and policy gains on numerous fronts.

The first state law changes began July 1.

**Veterans**

Veteran, known as Minnesota’s Helen Keller, was recalled in the History Note. Born in 1898, she was left blind by illness at age four. About two years later, she lost her hearing. Gammon’s life changed when she was placed at the Minnesota School for the Deaf (MSAD) in Faribault. In her first days there, she learned three words. She flourished, became a talented, communicator and writer, and developed many skills and interests.

**July 2023**

People with behavioral health disabilities are among the Minnesota Police Department (MPD) and City of Minneapolis discriminated against. An 86-page report from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) describes in great detail the longstanding issues of misconduct.

The report also announced that city and MPD leaders agreed in principle to resolve the issues found through a court-enforceable consent decree with an independent monitor. This is an option to contest litigation, which could take many years to resolve.

A settlement in a lengthy federal court case centered on living choices won approval. Male intervenors didn’t get what they sought in the class action case of Murphy versus Harspreet, they used the court case to mobilize on issues and draw new people into self-advocacy.

At issue was a legal settlement negotiated by the Disability Law Center and the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHHS), and whether that settlement addressed issues raised by the Disability Law Center on behalf of Minnesotans with disabilities who want to live in the least restrictive settings possible. U.S. District Court Judge Donovan Frank’s ruling concludes that the settlement warrants approval.

Summer ended the 2022-2023 adapted sports season for Minnesota prep athletes in track and field, bowling and softball.

**August 2023**

The death of Barnett “Bud” Rosenfield was felt all across Minnesota. Rosenfield, Minnesota’s ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, died suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart attack July 8. He was 75 years old.

Rosenfield had served as ombudsman since December 2001. He was appointed to the post with a long record of committed service to Minnesotans with disabilities. Before that he had served at the Minnesota Disability Law Center, where he had served as supervising attorney. Tributes poured in.

Many Minnesota families with disabled children celebrated changes to the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act or TEFFRA. Medical Assistance (MA) under the TEFFRA option allows MA eligibility for children with disabilities in families that have incomes too high to qualify for MA. TEFFRA in the federal law that sets the rules for this option.

TEFFRA often covers private insurance providers don’t or won’t cover. It is a very beneficial program in some ways, families note. It covers many costs of equipment, home and transportation modifications, equipment, therapies, home and community-based waiver services and much more. But the fees created

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    - Anoka: 763-437-7580
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    - Hanover Townhomes
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      - 1 & 2 BR
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      - 1 & 2 BR
    - Village Apartments
      - Hopkins: 952-938-5787
        - 1 & 2 BR
    - Village Apartments
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        - 1 & 2 BR
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**HOUSING FOR VETERANS AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS**

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**Doctors turned out for a legislative rally**
Grants help aging, disabled Minnesotans to stay in their homes

More than $5.5 million in new state grants will help aging Minnesotans stay in their homes longer through services such as caregiver support, housekeeping, retrofitting to prevent falls and other assistance.

Live Well at Home grants will go to 45 organizations to support aging Minnesotans. Research shows that people are happier and have better health outcomes when they can live in their homes longer, rather than moving into institutionalized care like nursing homes.

Projects funded in the Minnesota Department of Human Services’ latest round of grants include:
- Updating multiple assisted living units in Crookston to provide better accessibility and safety features for memory care residents.
- Reducing the racial gap in homeownership by preserving homeownership and generational wealth among older adults in Indigenous communities and communities of color.
- Expanding caregiver services in five west metro counties, including underserved Scott and Carver counties, with additional support in Hennepin, Sherburne and Wright counties.

These grants are critical to the well-being of aging Minnesotans and the organizations that support them, said Human Services Commissioner Jodi Harpstead. “Not only do most people prefer to stay in their homes as long as possible, but the services funded by the grants are also cost-effective and deliver better health outcomes.”

Among the nine Northern Minnesota grantees is Access North Center for Independent Living, Hibbing, which received $271,000. The project will help older adults with accessible entrances and improved accessibility throughout their homes. Access North also facilitates tub cuts, grab bars and other accessibility accommodations.

Another recipient is Aitkin County CARE, Aitkin, with $54,000. The grant will help older and disabled adults stay in their homes by assessing their need for help. Funds will also go toward emergency respite care, a chore program and food delivery, among other types of assistance.

Four programs in Northwest Minnesota received grants. One is the Villa St. Vincent/ Benedictine Living Community, Crookston, which received $475,000. The project will help people with dementia and physical disabilities, among other organizations. The Villa will purchase a wheelchair accessible van, eliminating a barrier to transportation.

Kip’s Funny Little Feet is based on the real life story of Hindermann’s youngest son, Kip Hindermann. The heartwarming story is beautifully illustrated by Lezanne Bianchini. Bianchini has illustrated other books.
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  mylegalaid.org/our-work/
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  www.wacosa.org

## HEARING DISABILITIES
- Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing  
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  mncdh.info@state.mn.us  
  mn.gov/deaf-commission

## INFORMATION/REFERRAL RESOURCES
- ADA Minnesota; a program within MCIL  
  V: 651-603-2015  
  711 relay service  
  www.adaminnesota.org

## LEGAL
- Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid - MN Disability Law Center  
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  mndcl@mylegalaid.org  
  mylegalaid.org/our-work/disability

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  TF: 888-826-4435  
  www.namimn.org
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  www.youngdance.org

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  info@wildenessinquiry.org  
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Vaccines: Protect Yourself and Others
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When you arrive at the vaccine site, make sure to let staff know you might need extra help.

Scan the QR code to visit:
health.state.mn.us/communities-equity/about/covid19/disabilities.html

Stay Safe MN
Metro Mobility riders ride free

In order to reduce demand on paratransit, Metro Transit officials are continuing to emphasize that Metro Mobility riders can ride regular route transit for free. The Free Fare Pilot program gives certified Metro Mobility customers an incentive to consider other transportation options.

“Metro Mobility is a critical service for many,” Carlson said. “For some riders, using the fringe benefits is a way to gain greater freedom and independence, and this can also help ensure there’s capacity for other riders on Metro Mobility.”

The pilot program continues through 2024. Learn more about the program and other changes coming to Metro Mobility at https://metrocouncil.org/Transportation/Services/Metro-Mobility-Home.aspx.

Anoka program in violation

An investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has found that the city of Anoka’s crime-free multi-housing program violated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Fair Housing Act by discriminating against tenants with mental health disabilities.

In a pattern or practice letter to city officials, the DOJ alleges the city discriminated tenants struggling with mental illness from seeking and maintaining housing — and from their health and safety were at risk.

Under the crime-free housing program, tenants who the city determines have “nuisance calls” are subject to eviction. The DOJ found the city considered mental health conditions and health care issues as “nuisance calls.”

It “is not a nuisance if you’re feeling sick,” said Sue Efte, a former executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness in Minnesota. Listing other illnesses that could qualify as a “nuisance call” is a “big problem” with the issues. And they shouldn’t be treated as a crime,” she said.

The DOJ also alleged the city notified landlords of potential nuisance calls and encouraged landlords to evict tenants who were the subject of the calls. Sometimes those communications included personal details about tenants’ mental illnesses.

“Local police notified the city of many of the calls for service, many times the city often did not enforce its nuisance ordinance against individuals with mental health disabilities who engaged in similar activity as people with mental health disabilities,” the DOJ said.

The DOJ report revealed this spring by the Minnesota Legislature, Mulrooney has issued a temporary injunction for the lack of healthcare services for individuals with developmental disabilities. However, as he is an attorney and a former chair of the Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities. There’s also a sensory room for those who may need it.

In a statement, DOJ Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clark said using a so-called “crime-free” housing ordinance to invade privacy and prevent people with mental health disorders from exercising their rights to access housing and seek emergency assistance is discriminatory. Clarke called the city’s practices a “scheme cloaked as a public safety measure that targets people with disabilities.”

The DOJ provided a minimum remedial measures necessary in its letter to the city. It’s asking the city to change its policies and procedures, designate an ADA coordinator, and train staff. The DOJ concluded if a recommendation is not made or is made and rejected, the city may face a lawsuit.

Business gets a boost

Highland Popcorn is meant to be a space for individuals with mental health disabilities, said founder Randi L. King. The business, which has been years in the making, got a $45,000 boost in December from the St. Paul City Council and outgoing Council Member Chris Tolbert.

The funding came from a longtime city sales tax program, which allows council members to earmark funds for projects in their wards.

The business will offer butter popcorn, chocolate, caramel corn and seasonal flavors like peppermint crunch. It will also sell other trinkets.

The store’s workforce will be predominantly people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, said who under Shamus O’Meara. O’Meara and his cousin, Connor, of the radio show Connor’s Corner, have planned the business for several years.

The work tasks and setup is planned for people with disabilities.

An original location on the University of St. Thomas’ St. Paul campus fell through at the last minute a few years ago, after many months of planning and negotiations.

Highland Popcorn is meant to be a space to hang out, O’Meara told the Pioneer Press. So it’s leaving out different and different textures, too, from traditional chairs to benches to soft pillows on modular boxes. The space is bright and colorful, and they’ll have a portable stage to host live events or podcast recordings, O’Meara said.

Light fixtures are designed to look like popcorn. There’s also a sensory room for those who need it.

By day, O’Meara, who lives in Highland Park, is an attorney and a former chair of the Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities. However, as he admitted with a laugh, “35 years as a lawyer doesn’t prepare you for anything in the retail popcorn business.”

To support various aspects of the business, O’Meara has assembled a who’s who of partners, including some of the top names in marketing, disability services, and, yes, the popcorn industry.

(Source: Pioneer Press, Access Press staff)

Injunction issued in disability case

Ramsey County District Judge Timothy A. Doherty has issued a temporary injunction blocking enforcement of a measure, passed this spring by the Minnesota Legislature, which could reduce the size of disability pensions for some former law enforcement officers and firefighters.

The law would provide state-reimbursed treatment of public safety workers, mainly police, diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A surge in PTSD claims since 2020 — largely within the Minneapolis, where George Floyd was murdered by a police officer, but also across the state — has stressed the state’s public safety disability pension funds, PERA officials told lawmakers.

It also has had a major impact on local police departments who have seen their numbers drop as officers go on permanent disability.

The legislation requires public safety workers diagnosed with PTSD to undergo 24 to 32 weeks of therapy, paid for by the state, in a program that many claim will not be able to return to work. Most of the law, including the provision, remains in force and is not scheduled for temporary injunction issued Monday.

However, the legislation also specifies that public safety workers already receiving disability payments could see those payments reduced, under a complicated formula that depends on how much they earn in non-public safety jobs after they leave their departments.

The Minnesota Duty Disabled Association sued PERA and sought the temporary injunction.

(Source: Star Tribune)

New delivery method for patients

Minnesota will add dry herb vaporization to the list of approved delivery methods in the state’s medical cannabis program. Under state law, the new delivery method will be available to patients beginning Aug. 1, 2024.

Minnesota Commissioner of Health Dr. Brookell Cunningham approved the new delivery method to provide an additional fast-acting option for patients. Currently, patients enrolled in Minnesota’s medical cannabis program have three fast-acting options — sublingual tinctures, oil-based vaporizers and combusting smoking.

Fast-acting products can take any where from one to five minutes for the effects to set in. These products tend to last anywhere from one to four hours. Dry herb vaporization provides patients with an alternative to combustion smoking.

The Minnesota Department of Health’s Office of Medical Cannabis (OMC) received seven petitions to add new delivery methods during the 2023 process. Petitions for plants, concentrates, and oil nuggets, and rosin were dismissed, while the petition for dry herb vaporization was moved forward. The failed petitions were not supported by peer-reviewed studies that demonstrate evidence of benefit to patients.

OMC also received petitions to add conditions including anxiety, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and opioid use disorder. None were approved due to a lack of evidence or because they had been previously considered.

As in past years, OMC conducted a formal petition process to solicit public input on potential qualifying medical conditions and delivery methods for medical cannabis. Minnesotaans submitted petitions in June and July.

When the Minnesota Legislature authorized the creation of the state’s medical cannabis program, the law included nine conditions that qualified a patient to receive medical cannabis. Today, the list of qualifying conditions is 19. Under state rules, the commissioner of health each year considers whether to add qualifying conditions and delivery methods.

For a complete list of qualifying medical conditions visit https://www.health.state.mn.us/po/ people/cannabis/patients/conditions.html
What can be better than an afternoon or evening out at the movies? Whether a new feature is out or an old favorite has returned for a showing, movies are a great escape. While many home options are available for movie buffs, going to a theater is a fun experience.

Access Press focuses on Minnesota theaters that offer accessibility. Almost all theaters have some area for wheelchair or power scooter seating, as well as companion seating. Many theaters offer assisted listening devices of some type. Accommodations for other visual, hearing or sensory disabilities vary by theater and can change over time, so call or email a theater to see what is new.

Keep in mind that some small town theaters, which may be operated by a solo owner, volunteers or a mix of volunteers and staff, may not have the same accommodations found in larger theater chains. Minnesota has almost 160 theaters according to the website Cinema Treasures. Find these theaters at https://cinematreasures.org/

Be aware that not every movie is designed to be accessible, so having assistive technology available doesn’t guarantee the chance to see a new movie. Here’s an overview of technologies and technology resources:

- **Rear Window Captioning** displays reversed captions on a light-emitting diode (LED) text display which is mounted in the rear of a theater. Patrons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing use transparent acrylic panels attached to their seats to reflect the captions, so they appear superimposed on the movie screen. The reflective panels are portable and adjustable, enabling the captain user to sit anywhere in the theater without bothering patrons in surrounding seats. DVS Theatrical presents concise descriptive narration of visual cues, including actions, settings, scene changes, facial expressions and silent movement, through an FM or infrared system, making movies more meaningful to people with vision loss. The moviegoer hears the narration on a headset.

- **CapiView closed caption viewing** systems allow moviegoers to read movie dialogue.

- **Digital Theatre Systems or DTS** superimposes open captions over the bottom of movie theater screens. Fidelio is a wireless audio system that delivers descriptive narration for people with vision loss and amplified sound for people with hearing loss. Patrons can get a compact audio receiver with a plug-in headset at the box office or bring their own headset. Descriptive narration and closed captioning availability are subject to the content made available from distributors.

- Additional options are available. The American Council of the Blind has an audio description project to enhance movies as well as museums, national parks and live events. It includes many links to audio-described DVDs, Blu-ray discs, television programs and more. Visit www.acb.org for more information.

- **Captionfish**, at www.captionfish.com, can help moviegoers find captioned films by city and theater. Here’s a list of theaters and access options:


  **CEC Theaters** has theaters in Albert Lea, Alexandria, Andover, Benilde, Fergus Falls, Marshall, Mountain Iron, Owatonna, Winona and Hudson, WI. Sensory-friendly showings are offered at locations that have had requests from the community. Theaters offer audio description, closed caption devices, disability access and hearing assisted listening devices. FFI: www.cectheatres.com

  **Cinemark Theatres** operates Cinemark River Hills Movies 8, Mankato. Contact the theater to ask about accommodations. FFI: www.cinemark.com

  **Emagine Theaters** are in Delano, Eagle, East Bethel, Lakeville, Monticello, Plymouth, Rogers, Waconia and White Bear Township. Theaters offer open captioning, assisted listening devices, personal open caption devices and descriptive narration devices. FFI: www.emagine-entertainment.com/accessible-screenings/

  **Landmark Theatres** has closed the Edina Cinema and Uptown Theatre. Lagoon Cinema in Minneapolis remains open. Landmark offers several types of accommodations. FFI: www.landmarktheatres.com

  **Mann Theatres** has locations in Baxter, Champlin, Edina, Grand Rapids, Grandview and Highland in St. Paul, Hibbing and Plymouth. Contact theaters to learn about accommodations. FFI: https://manntheatres.com

  **Marcus Theatres** are in Duluth, Elk River, Hastings, Hermantown, Oakdale, Rochester, Rosemount, Shakopee and Waite Park. Marcus has assisted listening devices and CapiView at all of its Minnesota locations. Closed captioning, open captioning, descriptive narration and assistive listening devices are also available. FFI: www.marcustheatres.com/amenities/theatre-technology/accessibility-devices

  **Odyssey Theaters** are in Detroit Lakes, Hutchinson and Rochester. Ask about accommodations. FFI: http://www.odysseytheatres.com

  **Science Museum of Minnesota** has an omni theater. Theater admission is separate from museum admission, and tickets should be purchased in advance. Amplified audio units and written scripts are available, as is audio description or DVS Theatrical for most films. Wheelchair and companion seating are available, if a group is bringing its own ASL interpreter, special lighting is available with one week’s notice. FFI: 651-221-8444, https://new.smm.org/visit/accessibility-amenities

  **ShowPlace ICON** has one Minnesota theater, Showplace ICON at West End, St. Louis Park. It offers assistive listening devices, closed captioning and descriptive video services. FFI: www.showplaceicon.com

  **St. Anthony Main** in Minneapolis and was taken over by the MSP Film Society. Ask about accommodations at https://mspfilm.org/access-services/ FFI: https://mspfilm.org/meet-the-new-main/

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**January 2024   Volume 35, Number 1   Pg 12**
and communities to identify barriers for these engagement across multiple systems, sectors during its 2023 session, charged with FFI: the community. The board has a few open seats signed into law by Gov. Tim Walz. How the as to how students can be physically restrained. Minnesota’s schools, law enforcement overdue for rulings that protect people with rulings back that up. Recognition is long family members. The winner is chosen by the from community members. The winner is from community and justice system. Disability.” From page 10

PEOPLE AND PLACES From page 10
to public policy to improve the lives of people with disabilities through building awareness, providing education, and engaging the community. The board has a few open seats for organizational and community members. FPI: www.mncdc.org/

股权 Health Care Task Force members named The Equitable Health Care Task Force was established by the Minnesota Legislature in 2019 to fulfill the 2015 mandate examining inequities in how people experience health care based on race, religion, culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, age and disability. The task force will identify strategies for ensuring that all Minnesotans can receive care that averages the respect and ensures optimal health outcomes. Members will conduct community engagement across multiple systems, sectors and communities to identify barriers for these among members.” Task force members represent an array of constituencies, while some are general members. Sonjya Weislawski is a member representing disability communities MDH will convene the first meeting of the Task force members represent an array of constituencies, while some are general members. Sonjya Weislawski is a member representing disability communities MDH will convene the first meeting of the

October 2023 Debate over use of restraint tiled people with disabilities, and how the state communicates and manages the condition. The law change was part of the 2019 education bill passed by the Minnesota Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Tim Walz. How the law is interpreted has generated weeks of controversy, with many law enforcement agencies statewide removing student resource officers or SROs from school campuses. In a key win in a 2021 class action lawsuit filed by Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid’s Disability Law Center, U.S. District Judge Richard Scott Schiltz ruled that special education students are entitled to comprehensive school instruction in an academic year leading up to their 22nd birthday. Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid’s Disability Law Center took up the class action on behalf of students whose special education services were cut short in violation of federal law. Under state law, school districts had ended instruction for special education students on July 1 following their 22nd birthday. Four out of five Minnesota nonprofit leaders said they’re grappling with job vacancies and reported more workforce shortages than peers nationwide, according to a new national survey. That includes nonprofits that serve people with disabilities. November 2023 The wheels turned toward the start of Minnesota 2024 legislative session, with bonding requests falling into place. 2042 is a bonding year. The budget will shape many months in advance, in some repeats. Many requests would provide accessibility improvements, compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Those include state buildings, colleges and university facilities and state parks. An array of facilities that specifically serve people with disabilities also have requests in their bonding request. How these requests were structured, prepare for winter, inside and outside. Information was provided about everything from home heating assistance to keeping sidewalks cleared of snow and ice. People need to learn their local union of government rules on when walks should be cleared and about available help. Robin Harkenson, executive director of the East Range DMC, is the new president of the Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation (MOHR). Red Wing resident Larry Bale was honored by ProAct, Inc., a non-profit providing()

GRANTS From page 6 wellness by supporting existing resources and adding new physical health resources. Elders will have opportunities for social interaction twice a week, instead of twice a month. Goals include better nutritional health and less isolation through increased participation in a new elder congregate dining program. Read the complete list of program recipients at https://mn.gov/dhs/media/news/# detail.uppdp/uid/604423

“Tactile Art,” he describes his relationship to visual art and breathtaking encounters with tactile sculpture. He offers a brief history of the term deafblind, distills societal discrimination against deafblind people into “distantism,” sheds light on the riches of online community, and advocates for “Co-Navigation,” a new way of exploring the world together without a traditional guide. Clark is currently Bush Leadership Fellow, a core member of Project Language Interpreting National Education Center, and a research consultant with the Reciprocity Lab at the University of Chicago. He is a member of the inaugural class of Disability Futures Fellows and the recipient of a National Magazine Award for the essay “Tactile Art” as well as the Frederick Rock Prize from Poetry magazine.

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Program changes and new books

Radio Talking Book is making a program change this month. Snippets, 6 a.m. Sun, now replaced by The Writer’s Voice. It is a new daily program for listeners with visual disabilities. Anyone with difficulty reading or turning pages can join in.

Enjoy programming on a hand-held Braille device, for the first time ever. Visit the Apple App Store for iOS, or Google Play for Android, and download the Minnesota Radio Talking Book app.

Information about the daily book listings is on the National Federation for the Blind/Newsline website.

All about Radio Talking Book

Radio Talking Book is designed for listeners with visual disabilities. Anyone with difficulty reading or turning pages can join in.

For help accessing the content, contact Ronnie Washington at 651-539-1424, or dan.gausman@state.mn.us.

Books broadcast on the Minnesota Radio Talking Book Network are available for loan through the Minnesota Braille and Talking Book Library in Faribault. The catalog is at www.mbtbl.org. Call the catalog search line, 612-220-7777, Mon-Fri, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., for updates.

Tech for Teens Club: Minecraft Design Challenges is 10:30 a.m.-noon Jan. 13 at PACER Center. Participants will be given a design challenge to be completed within one hour. Fees are $10 for PACER members and $15 for nonmembers. Snippets, 6 a.m. Sun.

Planning an IEP Team Meeting When Your Child has Mental Health Challenges is noon-1 p.m. Feb. 14 at the PACER Center. Participants will work in small groups to discuss strategies for being an effective IEP team member. The workshop is for parents/guardians and teachers. Snippets, 6 a.m. Sun.

“Your Personal World,” 1 p.m. Sat, Feb. 11, celebrates the 30th anniversary of NFB’s “Your Personal World” radio program.

A Film in Which I Play Everyone is a film directed by filmmaker and NFB freelance writer James Mangold, and stars Mangold himself. Snippets, 6 a.m. Sun.

How to Sell a Haunted House is a novel by Brian Freeman, 2022. New Wednesday Nighters* broadcasts; begins Thu, Jan. 31.


All times listed are Central Standard Time.

Abbreviations V – violent content   R – sexual content   L – strong language   S – sexual situation   G – gory descriptions
Emerging photographer Hannah Roussar is one of seven artists with disabilities who are displaying their work at Art for All's newest exhibition and sale in the gallery at the Masonic Institute for the Developing Brain. The show runs through Feb. 16 and includes paintings, mixed media, ceramics, and photography. It was created as part of Art for All: The Stephanie Evelo Program for Art Inclusion at the University of Minnesota’s Institute for Community Integration. Works by Katherine Fitzgerald, Sam St. John, Geordy Levin, Linda Hood, Donna Ray, and Paul Carlson are also included in the exhibition.

The shows advance the program’s mission of not only supporting emerging and professional artists with disabilities, but also bringing their work into wider community spaces to enhance understanding of the artists’ vision of the world. The exhibit is at 2025 East River Parkway, Mpls. FFI: https://uci.mn.edu

Save date for expo
Save the date of Sat, April 20, 2024 for the Discover Abilities Expo, a showcase of all-things adaptive sports and recreation in Minnesota. Organizers hope to have more than 60 organizations that provide some sort of adaptive sports or recreational opportunities in Minnesota on hand. Designed both for individuals with disabilities (primary user of services) to learn about and try adaptive recreational opportunities as well as healthcare professionals, educators, students, volunteers and more to learn about adaptive sports and recreational opportunities. University of Minnesota Recreation & Wellness Center in Mpls. and organized by the Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Institute Sports and recreation Team.

Save date for Fetching Ball
The 35th annual Fetching Ball Gala, celebrating Can Do Canines, at Radisson Blu Mall of America on Sat, Feb. 17. Enjoy dinner, inspiring stories, games, and silent and live auctions all benefiting the service dog organization. Emcee is Rena Sarigianopoulos of KARE-11. FFI: mherman@canandocanines.org

Open Flow Forum
The Artists with Disabilities Alliance meets via Zoom 7-9 p.m. the first Thu of the month. Upcoming dates: Jan. 4 and Feb. 8. Virtually join artists with disabilities and support groups to share visual art, writing, music, theater and artistic events list or specific lists for ASL interpreting, captioning, audio description, etc. Be sure to check the listing or venue to find out any COVID-19 protocols and if an advance reservation is needed for an accessibility service. Access@accesspress.org

Chill out at Art Shanties
Art Shanty Projects returns to the frozen water of Bdú Umán / Lake Harriet in South Minneapolis this winter for the organization’s 20th anniversary season. Jan. 20 through Feb. 11. Public hours are 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. every Sat and Sun. Kicksicles are available as mobility aids, and there will be ASL interpreters and audio describers available daily from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. The event is free, with a suggested $10-20 sliding scale donation at the gate. The program includes 18 shanties that stay up all month and more than 20 performances + art actions that pop up throughout the village at different times throughout the run. Visit a array of shanties, take part in numerous activities and enjoy music and performances.

The Minnesota Access Alliance (MNA) provides an Accessible Arts & Culture Calendar for arts patrons who use accessibility accommodations such as audio description, captioning, ASL interpreting and sensory-friendly accommodations. Link to more details at https://calendar.mnaccess.org. Be sure to check the listing or venue to find out any COVID-19 protocols and if an advance reservation is needed for an accessibility service. Access@accesspress.org

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RESEARCH STUDY - PARTICIPANTS WANTED
Looking for participants to assist with a research study being conducted at the University of Minnesota investigating how tactile defensive individuals describe their clothing requirements and their experienced clothing barriers. If you identify as neurodiverse and have experienced hypersensitivity and/or hyposensitivity to clothing or touch, please contact Chukwuma Udezeh udezeh01@umn.edu with the subject line “Identifying Clothing Requirements”. Participation will also require that you live in the United States, are at least 18 years old, and are able to respond to survey questions in English. Survey participants will also receive a $10 Starbucks digital gift card. Please reference our online ad for more details.

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Accessibility services (ASL-interpreted, audio-described and open-captioned performances) are available on select dates. Visit www.guthrietheater.org/access for details.