



**FLORIDA DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL, INC.**

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**Reinstate the Statewide and Local Advocacy Councils for the protection of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities**

**The Council urges the legislature to reinstate the Statewide and Local Advocacy Councils to offer protection to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities from abuse and neglect.**

Nearly 90% of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities will be the victims of abuse, neglect or exploitation. One in five individuals served by the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) has been the subject of a report to the abuse hotline in the last five years. However, Florida currently does not have sufficient mechanisms in place to monitor, prevent, and detect abuse and neglect.

In the past and as recently as 2010, the Legislature had worked with a system that included the Florida Statewide Advocacy Council (SAC) and local advocacy councils that served as an independent consumer protection mechanism. The local advocacy councils were made up of volunteers with training and expertise who monitored settings serving vulnerable individuals to discover, monitor, investigate and determine conditions that constitute a threat to the rights, health, safety and welfare of these individuals.

The Statewide Advocacy Council provided oversight and supervision to the operation of local advocacy councils and served as the body for complaints that the local advocacy councils were not able to resolve. The SAC was defunded in 2010. In its 2009 OPPAGA report, it was noted that the main advantage to continuing to fund the SAC was that they provide an independent check and balance on the provision of state services to vulnerable clients.

The statutory framework still exists and can be changed to focus the program on APD. A modest budget appropriation to reinstate this program will provide a critical protection mechanism of volunteers, with training and expertise, who can monitor all APD services settings, whereas APD only routinely monitors facilities they license, such as community residential homes ("group homes"). Volunteer services will provide an opportunity to increase the monitoring of providers through citizen involvement without growing government.