**The 2025 Public Policy Agenda of The Arc of Colorado (The ArcCO) is shaped by our mission, beliefs, and values.**

**The ArcCO mission** is to promote and protect the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes.

**The ArcCO believes** that all people have moral and civil rights providing them with opportunities to love, work, play, learn and worship in communities where they choose to live. All people with IDD have inherent value with individual strengths and abilities, are equal before the law and must be treated with dignity and respect.

## AREAS OF LEGISLATIVE, PUBLIC POLICY, AND ADVOCACY PRIORITY

### I. CIVIL RIGHTS

The ArcCO believes that individuals living with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have the same basic legal, civil, and human rights as other citizens. While they may require accommodations, protections, and support to fully exercise these rights, those rights should never be limited or restricted without due process. It is essential that the rights of people living with IDD are upheld, protected, and promoted. Key issues such as guardianship, supported decision-making, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and voting rights all fall under the umbrella of civil rights for people living with IDD, who must be treated with dignity and respect as equals before the law. The following priorities were identified and emphasized under Civil Rights:

1. **ADA, Protections and Enforcement:**
   The ADA, a landmark civil rights law, must be protected and enforced to prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities. This includes ensuring effective communication, using universal design to increase access to housing, and providing additional protections to improve accessibility within communities. Areas of focus include parking, travel, outdoor recreation, and inclusive playgrounds.

2. **Guardianship/Supported Decision-Making:**
   Promoting supported decision-making and modernizing guardianship laws is essential to ensure that decisions are person-centered. This includes incorporating an individual's preferences and values into a guardianship order, while requiring courts to use the least-restrictive means necessary to protect individuals who are unable to fully care for themselves.

3. **Voting Rights:**
   Many people living with IDD are unaware of their right to vote. Voting is a fundamental civil right that should be protected and promoted for individuals with IDD. This includes ensuring accessible voter registration, accessible voting options (including in-person, mail-in voting), voting materials in plain language, and providing necessary communication accommodations to help individuals meaningfully engage in the voting process.

### II. COMMUNITY LIVING AND HOME & COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES (HCBS)

All individuals, regardless of age or disability, should have the opportunity to live independently and participate fully in their communities. Every person has the right to make choices and control the decisions that affect their life, with the goals of inclusive participation, self-direction, self-determination, personal responsibility, community integration, and independence. This includes addressing and

reversing the historical bias toward institutional care. HCBS is a critical component of community living for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). For many individuals with IDD, living in their community of choice is made possible through supported community living. HCBS waivers are essential for providing the services and funding necessary to sustain community living. The following priorities were identified and emphasized under Community Living & HCBS:

1. **Barriers to accessing services and support needed for community living:**
   - A shortage of direct support professionals
   - The need for case management and provider training
   - A lack of trained, knowledgeable care management and providers
   - The need to improve the processes for eligibility, enrollment, and resolving emergency issues

2. **Funding and Quality of Care Issues:**
   - Waitlists for HCBS waivers
   - Insufficient funding for HCBS waivers and the Consumer-Directed Attendant Support Services (CDASS) program
   - The need to increase provider reimbursement rates
   - The lack of agency or state oversight of host homes, which impacts safety

3. **Level of Service Tools:**
   This includes the Supports Intensity Scale (SIS) and similar tools. The level of service tools should focus on the individual's needs and not be tied to funding limitations. Concerns exist over the new level of service tools, the evaluation process, and the need to overhaul the needs assessment system.

## III.  EDUCATION

The ArcCO is working to ensure that measures protecting the safety of students and school personnel do not violate due process, civil liberties, or the right to reasonable accommodations, nor result in profiling based on disability or other related status. This includes early childhood education, where children with IDD require supportive environments before kindergarten, as well as K-12 and post-secondary education.

It is crucial that measures protecting the safety of students and school personnel do not infringe on due process, civil liberties, or the right to reasonable accommodations, nor result in profiling based on disability or related status. This applies to early childhood education, where children with IDD need supportive environments before kindergarten, as well as K-12 and post-secondary education. The following priorities were identified and emphasized under Education:

1. **School Discipline**: Students with disabilities face disproportionate discipline, including suspensions and expulsions, compared to their nondisabled peers. Restraint and seclusion are also disproportionately used, with lasting effects on achievement and health.

2. **Increased Funding for Public Education**: More investment is needed in special education to support students with IDD, especially in rural districts, to address geographic funding inequality. Colorado schools lack staff trained to meet the needs of students with IDD. More training and workforce expansion are needed, as well as addressing licensure issues to increase qualified staff.

## IV.  MENTAL HEALTH AND ACCESS TO CARE

The ArcCO continues to recognize and work to improve the interdisciplinary nature of care, addressing barriers to access, the need for services, and accommodations for a diverse range of disabilities, including those involving Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) and other mental and/or behavioral health challenges, as well as physical health concerns. Treating mental health and/or behavioral issues as a "stand-alone" policy concern can perpetuate stigma by reinforcing the false notion that mental health is separate from overall health. Instead, mental health and access to care barriers must be approached within the context of whole-person care, where both mental and physical wellbeing are equally important and interconnected. This approach promotes a more person-centered model of health for individuals living with IDD.

The disability, mental health, and physical health systems are complex and difficult to navigate. People with both IDD and mental health challenges—along with their families—often struggle to identify available resources and services within each system. The following priorities were identified under Mental Health and Access to Care:

1. **Lack of trained providers**: There is a critical shortage of trained providers equipped to address the mental health needs of individuals with IDD. Significant investment is needed to support workforce development. Current providers also require additional training and support to effectively meet the needs of individuals with IDD.

2. **Limits in coverage**: Mental health and IDD funding are often siloed. For whole-person care, funding structures must be redesigned to center around the individual, rather than being restricted to specific waiver services. This would allow for more tailored and integrated care based on an individual's unique needs.

3. **Accessing crisis services**: Individuals with IDD face challenges in accessing crisis services, as there are often no dedicated support options available. There is a critical need for crisis prevention and intervention training for mental health providers and first responders.

## V.    SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH (SDOH)

The social determinants of health (SDOH) break down the silos surrounding housing, transportation, and economic security, emphasizing the importance of improving conditions in communities where individuals with IDD live, work, learn, love, play, and pray. These factors influence social connectedness, physical and mental health, and full community integration. The following priorities were identified and emphasized under SDOH:

1. **Transportation**: For individuals with IDD, transportation can be physically inaccessible (e.g., lack of elevators and sidewalks) or cognitively challenging (e.g., complex schedules and problem-solving). Accessible transportation improves health, independence, self-determination, and social well-being. However, transportation to health appointments and other services remains a barrier, particularly in rural areas, and limits access to recreation and employment opportunities.

2. **Housing**: Access to affordable, accessible, and integrated housing is a growing challenge across Colorado for people with IDD. Many live in congregate settings due to inadequate community living infrastructure. Accessible housing, including for individuals who use mobility devices, is limited. Colorado needs more affordable and inclusive housing for both individuals with IDD and the workforce supporting them, such as direct care professionals and healthcare providers.

3. **Economic Security, Benefits, and Programs**: Government benefits, including Medicaid and Social Security, should have less restrictive asset limits that prevent low-income individuals from saving. There is also a need for more education to help individuals with IDD access ABLE accounts, which are crucial for economic security.

4. **Sense of Community**: Full community participation leads to better outcomes for people with IDD, even those with higher support needs. Everyone with IDD deserves access to education, recreation, and activities integrated within their community. Addressing ableism and creating inclusive environments is essential to fostering a sense of community and supporting justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI).