

# January 2024 Action Alert #1

**Make a Difference for  
the Autism Community**



Charlottesville Region Autism Action Group



## **2024 Virginia General Assembly (GA)**

Happy New Year to all our readers! Wishing everyone the very best for the coming year. Each January Virginia holds a General Assembly Session to pass new legislation and a two-year spending plan introduced by the governor.

Every year, the autism and developmental disability (DD) community needs to be seen in Richmond during the GA to fight for the attention

and respect it deserves, as well as the legislative action and funding sufficient to support the DD population in their communities.

Like it or not, our responsibility as autism advocates is to show our strength in Richmond.

Throughout the current 60 day legislative session, CRAAG will be coordinating with other advocacy partners, such as Virginia Autism Project (VAP), The Arc of Virginia, Autism Society of Central Virginia, Commonwealth Autism, Autism Speaks, and DThree - Decriminalize Developmental Disabilities.

## Why is Advocacy So Important this Year?

- Many of our community's long term legislative partners have left the GA.
- Thirty-five percent of the 2024 GA members are new this year.
- It is likely that many of the new legislators are not familiar with the immediate and long terms needs of people with autism and DD.
- The Governor's two-year spending plan offers advocates an opportunity to actually address the systemic issues plaguing the DD waiver system.

## How Can You Help?

We understand that this all feels a bit overwhelming. If you think that this advocacy stuff is not for you, please ask yourself, *"What if no one steps up? Then what?"*

We know that constituent feedback works! Legislators tell us this. Right now we have the opportunity to help ourselves and our families by educating new legislators and reminding incumbents about the autism community's needs. Here are some suggestions of some ways to meaningfully engage in advocacy and make a difference.

**#1 Join other autism advocates at the Jan. 30th Autism Advocacy Day at the new General Assembly Building in Richmond. This event is hosted by the Autism Society of Central Virginia with support from six other Virginia autism advocacy organizations.**

- Please register for the **Autism Advocacy Day on Jan. 30th from 8:30 am to 1:00 pm**. The link below has all the information you will need to register and participate. This activity requires that you meet indoors and in-person with other autism advocates and local GA representatives. You will be part of a large group of autism advocates from across the commonwealth. **CRAAG hopes 8-12 people from Charlottesville/Albemarle area will register to participate. Will you be one of them? We hope so.**

## **[Register Here for Autism Advocacy Day on Jan. 30th!](#)**

**#2 Can't join us on Jan. 30, The Arc of Virginia is hosting seven all-inclusive DD Advocacy Days during the GA.**

- Please register for **The Arc of Virginia's DD Advocacy Days**. This activity is indoors and in-person on Tuesdays and Thursdays throughout the GA: Jan. 25th, Jan. 30th, Feb. 1st, Feb. 6th, Feb. 8th, Feb. 13th and Feb. 15th.

## **[Register Groups or Individuals Here for DD Advocacy Days During the GA Session!](#)**

**#3 Stay informed throughout the GA. Sign up for Action Alerts and commit to taking action by sending emails/leaving voicemails for legislators to express support or opposition to proposed legislation. Sign up for the Action Alerts using the links below:**

- Good news! If you subscribe to the CRAAG newsletter, you are already signed up for our Action Alerts like this one.
- Sign up for the **[VAP 2024 Action Alerts](#)** right now! The VAP is closely watching the GA legislative process and keeps advocates informed on when responses are needed from them. Their concise talking points and easy to use email templates make it fast and easy to engage with our representatives.
- Sign up for **[The Arc of Virginia's Action Alerts](#)** right now! The

Arc of Virginia also is closely watching the GA legislative process and keeps advocates informed on when responses are needed from them. The Arc's easy to use templates and concise talking points make it easy to engage with your representatives.

- The [Autism Society of Central Virginia](#) is leading the advocacy around several important autism bills during this GA session as well as hosting the Jan. 30th event mentioned above.
  - Sign up to receive criminal justice alerts from [D3 Three - Decriminalize Developmental Disabilities](#) (formerly Legal Reform for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities).
  - Sign up to [Take Action](#) with Autism Speaks.
  - Check out [Commonwealth Autism](#) website for resources for families and professionals.
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**One Last Thing . . . Are You In?  
Will You Join Us on January 30th?**

**[Register Here for Autism  
Advocacy Day on Jan. 30th!](#)**

## **About CRAAG**

CRAAG began in 2010 in collaboration with Commonwealth Autism (CA). *CRAAG's mission is to raise awareness and enhance the quality of life for people with autism, developmental disabilities, and their families in Charlottesville City, Albemarle, Greene, Fluvanna, Louisa and Nelson counties.* We are a volunteer action group for families, self-advocates, and professionals who are interested in all age groups and levels of need. The daily concerns of CRAAG's active volunteers inform our focus on the needs of students transitioning out of high school, adults throughout the

lifespan, and their families. Our advocacy is person-centered aimed at maximizing independent living with supports; meaningful employment; social connectivity; and community engagement. CRAAG's 2021 Housing survey initiated a years-long initiative in our region to expand the number of housing options, supports and services available to meet the needs of adults with developmental disabilities.

**[Email CRAAG](#) | [CRAAG Webpage](#) |  
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