



FY 2024

Dear Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services and Centers for Independent Living participants, staff and stakeholders,

The Maryland Client Assistance Program (CAP) had a successful year supporting participants of Maryland vocational rehabilitation programs. We assisted over 600 individuals through Information and Referral services. In addition, more than 100 individuals became CAP clients. This year, we increased our outreach efforts, provided additional training, and launched monthly "Chat with CAP" sessions for the DORS team to connect with the CAP team.

In May 2023, we welcomed Marla Friedman as the new CAP Director. Marla brought more than 20 years of experience in the vocational rehabilitation field from her work at Sinai Hospital, where she held various positions. In November 2023, Jhoselin Beltran Contreras joined the CAP team. Before joining CAP, Jhoselin served as the Assistant Ombudsman for Special Education in Washington, D.C. As a native Spanish speaker, Jhoselin has been instrumental in reaching out to many underserved and unserved individuals about the vocational rehabilitation services available across Maryland.

CAP engaged in national vocational rehabilitation activities, including the National Disability Rights (NDRN) Conference in June 2024. We also participated in the monthly national CAP Community of Practice. In addition, Maryland CAP is a member of the Advocacy Working Group (AWG), contributing to national advocacy efforts to strengthen the Protection and Advocacy (P&A) and Client Assistance Program (CAP) networks.

CAP is excited to highlight our achievements this year, as detailed in the report below. We extend our gratitude to our collaborators at the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and the Centers for Independent Living (CILs). These robust partnerships enable us to better support individuals with disabilities in Maryland in achieving their employment goals.

Please contact us if you have questions or want to learn more about CAP. We can be reached at 410-554-9361 or cap.dors@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

Marla Friedman

Marla Friedman, MS
Client Assistant Program Director
Marla.Friedman@maryland.gov

Jhoselin Beltran Contreras

Jhoselin Beltran Contreras, MA
Client Assistant Program Specialist
Jhoselin.Contreras@maryland.gov

Purpose

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is a federally funded program that provides information, advice, and advocacy to Marylanders with disabilities who are applying for or receiving services from the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and the Maryland Centers for Independent Living (CILs).

CAP is mandated to resolve issues at the lowest possible level, which includes information and referral and support with self-advocacy. In this fiscal year, CAP provided over 600 instances of these services, which include providing information about vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs, CAP, independent living (IL) services, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and providing general referral to community resources. CAP also serves as a member of Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC).

CAP Team

Marla Friedman, MS – Client Assistance Program Director

Marla has more than 20 years of experience in the vocational rehabilitation field, having held various roles ranging from Transition Specialist to Vocational Manager before joining the CAP team as the Director in May 2023. She is also an active member of the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) and regularly attends meetings with the State Independent Living Councils (SILC) to stay informed about the services available across the state.

Jhoselin Beltran Contreras – Client Assistance Program Specialist

Jhoselin Beltran Contreras is a dedicated advocate with experience supporting individuals with disabilities. In November 2023, Jhoselin began serving as the CAP Specialist. In May 2024, she joined the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) Advocacy Working Group (AWG), contributing to national advocacy efforts to strengthen the Protection and Advocacy (P&A) and Client Assistance Program (CAP) networks.

CAP Satisfaction Survey

A total of 21 CAP satisfaction surveys were collected this year. CAP received a 4.76 out of 5 overall rating for satisfaction. Comments are very much appreciated and help the CAP team to know what is and isn't working. Some responses to the question, "Anything you would like us to know about the services you were provided?" included:

- "Excellent – ALWAYS VERY prompt/helpful responses and resolution provided!"
- "I don't think I would have gotten my DORS services without the support and advocacy from Marla. It has been immensely helpful to me the last few months. Thank you so much!!!"
- "Mrs. Contreras was concerned about my situation."
- "Wonderful job – really appreciated how fast everything were able to be done, and the great support that CAP provided leading to success in my appeal. Thank you!"

Outreach and Training

CAP attended several community fairs and conferences throughout the year. CAP went to the Anne Arundel Community Fair, the Montgomery County Special Education Fair, City School's Transition Expo, and the Brain Injury Association of Conference. Some of the conferences that the CAP team attended to network with other agencies and share information about CAP's services included the Maryland Rehabilitation Conference, National Federation of the Blind, and Raising the Bar Conferences.

CAP, in collaboration with DORS, presented to students from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore Campus to explain CAP's role, purpose, and day-to-day responsibilities. The presentation aimed at providing these students (who are learning about the VR field) with valuable insights into the work CAP does to support individuals with disabilities.

CAP participated in the DORS Quality Rehabilitation Training (QRT) on two occasions. There was a total of approximately 34 new DORS employees between the two sessions. Information regarding CAP was presented to the new employees. The CAP team reviewed the structure and the purpose of CAP, when consumers should be informed about CAP, as well as the statistics associated with the end of year reporting by CAP. In addition, the CAP staff attempted to answer all the new counselors' questions regarding the CAP. The new counselors and the CAP staff worked through several hypothetical situations involving clients and concerns raised about services throughout DORS that helped the new counselors develop a better understanding of how CAP works.

CAP attended meetings throughout the state to present to DORS units and regional teams. CAP presented 12 sessions with a total of 160 participants. CAP presented interactive sessions to inform staff about CAP's role, when participants should be informed about CAP, and what services CAP provides.

Throughout the year, CAP initiated and offered "Chat with CAP" sessions for DORS staff members. These sessions provided counselors with the opportunity to meet with CAP staff, learn more about our organization, ask any questions about CAP's role, and receive reminders on when to share CAP information with participants. We held four sessions in total throughout the year.

CAP staff remotely attended all Maryland SILC meetings to receive updates regarding the SILC and Centers for Independent Livings. As needed, CAP was available to provide outreach and information to Independent Living consumers, applicants, and referral sources.

CAP Opened Cases

Demographics

Gender:

- 47 Female
- 63 Male
- 1 Nonbinary

Age:

- 9 age 18 and younger
- 25 age 19-24
- 33 age 25-40
- 38 age 41-64
- 6 age 65+

Primary disabling condition of individuals served:

CAP serves individuals with a broad variety of disabilities, many of whom have multiple disabilities. Only primary disabilities are tracked for Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) reporting, using RSA specified categories. Common disabilities included:

- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD),
- Autism Spectrum Disorder,
- Blindness,
- Deafness,
- Mental Illness,
- Orthopedic Impairments
- Specific Learning Disabilities

Problem Areas

Communication problems between client and VR Counselor	83
Conflict about VR services provided	18
Related to VR application/eligibility process	14
Related to assignment to order of selection priority category	3
Related to IPE development/implementation	8
Individual Requests Information	4
Related to VR application/eligibility process	6
Other Rehabilitation Act-related problems	4

Reasons for Closures

All issues resolved in the individual's favor	103
Some issues resolved in the individual's favor	5
CAP determines VR/CIL position/decision was appropriate	2
Individual withdrew	2
Individual not responsive/cooperative with CAP	4
