

# ADVOCACY DAY

FOR ACCESS & INDEPENDENCE

APRIL 8, 2025

10 AM-12 PM

## UNLOCKING BARRIERS

FOR SOUTH CAROLINIANS WITH DISABILITIES

The following stories show what's possible for the 1.3 million people in South Carolina living with a disability. That's nearly one in three of our friends, family members, and neighbors whose daily lives are shaped by decisions made right here in South Carolina.

South Carolina lawmakers hold the keys. Keys that can unlock barriers standing in the way of independence, opportunity, and the God-given right to live freely in our communities.

It's up to us to protect their rights, tear down government red tape, and make sure every South Carolinian has the freedom to thrive.

Now's the time to stand firm—for independence, for equality, and for the simple freedom to live life on your own terms.

**#BARRIERFREESC**



# HOPE: A STORY OF THRIVING WITH A DISABILITY

Meet Hope, a hardworking young professional with Cerebral Palsy. She uses a wheelchair and lives life on her terms. She believes in perseverance, faith, and the power of personal merit. She takes pride in living independently, managing her own apartment, and pursuing a career. Like many South Carolinians, she values her freedom and the responsibility that comes with it.

Hope's journey hasn't been about handouts or government dependency. It's about removing unnecessary barriers so she has a fair shot—just like any other determined American. The tools she's used along the way—Medicaid, disability-inclusive policies, and protections under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act—have helped level the playing field, not tilt it.

When she was a child, Medicaid's Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) program gave her middle-class family the ability to afford critical therapies, equipment, and surgeries. It worked as a secondary insurer, keeping her parents in the workforce and off the brink of financial ruin. That's what common-sense policy looks like—making sure families stay productive and financially stable, not sidelined by medical debt.

Thanks to Section 504, Hope attended public school with her peers. She got an education, made lifelong friends, and learned personal responsibility. She kept up with her studies, even during tough times, because of basic accommodations that made success possible. No special favors. Just fairness.

In college, Section 504 ensured she had equal access to housing, classes, and campus life. She wasn't handed a diploma—she earned it. She graduated early because of her work ethic and readiness to contribute. Programs like Employment-First and disability-led service providers helped her sharpen her job skills, but it was her talent and determination that landed her a job.

Today, Hope rents her own apartment and pays her own bills—just like any other hardworking South Carolinian. Section 504 ensures she's treated fairly in housing and employment decisions, and her Medicaid Waiver provides Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS), like meal assistance and transportation. These are cost-effective services that save taxpayer dollars by preventing costly emergency room visits and institutional care. They make it possible for Hope to live freely, remain self-reliant, and stay engaged in her community.

[Learn more about EPSDT & HCBS Continuity of Care:](#)



For Hope, these policies aren't about dependency. They're about opportunity, fairness, and hard work. Protecting these policies ensures folks like Hope aren't held back by unnecessary red tape or outdated barriers. It's about standing up for merit, equal opportunity, and the freedom to thrive.

Because, at the end of the day, that's what America is all about.



## LEE: A STORY OF BARRIERS

Meet Lee, a middle-aged man who survived a childhood accident that led to limb loss and traumatic brain injury. He is determined and has a strong work ethic, but without access to Medicaid, disability-inclusive policies, or protections like Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, he faces immense barriers that limit his independence and opportunities.

From the start, Lee struggled to access the same education as his peers. Without Section 504, his school was not equipped to accommodate his needs, leaving him unable to navigate classrooms, participate in extracurriculars, or keep up with his studies. Lee was left behind. The lack of accommodations and support ultimately made education impossible, forcing Lee to drop out of school.

Lee's medical needs placed a significant financial burden on his family. Without Medicaid, his necessary surgeries and treatments came at an overwhelming cost. His parents, though hardworking, were forced to make impossible choices—pay for critical care or cover basic expenses. Consistent medical care was uncertain, and his family's financial stability was constantly at risk. Ultimately, Lee's mother left the workforce to care for Lee, causing his family to lose much-needed income. As Lee approached adulthood, his challenges grew. Without Medicaid's financial support, hiring personal care attendants was out of reach, meaning Lee would continue to rely on his aging parents or go without essential daily assistance.

Finding employment was even more difficult. Without legal protections against disability discrimination and a lack of governmental support to reduce stigma, many employers dismissed Lee's applications outright, assuming his disability made him unfit for the job. Those willing to hire him often failed to provide accessible workplaces, forcing him to either struggle through impossible conditions or forgo employment altogether. His potential to contribute to his community and pursue a meaningful career was unrealized.

Housing was another major obstacle. Without Section 504 ensuring accessible and affordable housing options, Lee had limited choices. The few apartments that could accommodate his walker were either too expensive or located in areas lacking transportation or accessible medical offices. Without Medicaid-funded or accessible transportation options, even simple trips to the doctor became a logistical and financial nightmare, often leaving him without regular medical care.

Without the support of Medicaid, Medicaid services via EPSDT and HCBS, disability-inclusive policies, and disability rights protections, Lee's independence is severely restricted. Instead of living on his own, pursuing a career, and contributing to society, he faces daily struggles just to meet basic needs. The lack of necessary accommodations and services isolates him, leaving him dependent on family members who must make significant sacrifices to provide care. He won't have these family caregivers forever, making the risk of being forced to live alone in an expensive taxpayer-funded institution as his parents age, a reality.

Lee's story is a stark reminder of what happens when essential disability rights and programs are unavailable. Without support, talented, hardworking individuals like Lee are denied the opportunity to thrive, contribute, and live with dignity. Ensuring access to Medicaid services, disability-inclusive policies, and legal protections allows people with disabilities the chance to live full, independent lives like anyone else.

# THE STORIES OF HOPE AND LEE ARE NOT JUST STORIES; THEY ARE LIVED REALITIES.

Through Hope and Lee, we have woven together true tales: Hope represents people who benefit from Medicaid services, disability-inclusive policies, and disability rights protections and the ways those protections and services come together to promote community living; Lee represents the history of life before disability protections, inclusion, and services. **We are at great risk of repeating this history, undoing decades of positive progress to create an engaged and productive citizenry.**

*When South Carolina prioritizes access to community living for people with disabilities, our communities thrive. Further, our taxpayers see better and more positive outcomes for their dollars, both in goodwill and savings.*

## UNLOCKING THE BARRIERS TO COMMUNITY LIVING FACED BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IS POSSIBLE WITH THE RIGHT SOLUTIONS.

**Today, you can support these solutions, and unlock the barriers with these 5 keys:**



### UNLOCK THE BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT:

People with disabilities are twice as likely to face job loss and unemployment, and South Carolina ranks #9 nationally for the highest unemployment rate among this group. **Employment First Initiative Act of 2022 requires the governor to appoint members to the Employment First Oversight Commission (Section 41-5-110). This has not been done.** This crucial step will turn past efforts into real progress, improving employment opportunities for disabled South Carolinians.

**Further, H.3927 is a bill that would directly harm programs promoting best employment practices for hiring and retaining people with disabilities.** Without state-supported funding for programs that remove the stigma associated with disabled workers, our community will continue to get left behind, forced to depend upon others for our livelihood.



### UNLOCK THE BARRIERS TO TRANSPORTATION:

People with disabilities are twice as likely to lack reliable transportation, especially in rural areas. **A statewide transportation plan can help local governments secure funding for Public Transit Authorities and mobility programs. State-funded Medicaid programs and waivers can also support transportation for employment.** Every \$1 invested in public transit returns \$4 to the local economy (APTA). Lawmakers can prioritize coordination and connecting local governments with federal funding to expand access while reducing state costs.



### UNLOCK THE BARRIERS TO HOUSING:

Without affordable, accessible housing, disabled individuals risk losing independence, facing institutionalization—costing over 2x as much as community living—or becoming homeless. In South Carolina, **nursing home care now exceeds \$100,000 annually, while HCBS (sometimes called Medicaid Waiver) costs around \$45,000** (as reported by KFF, SCDHHS, Care Scout, and Business Wire). Yet, **over 41,000 people remain on HCBS waitlists, and more than 45,000 live in institutions** (as reported by US DOJ and SC DDSN).

**UNLOCK THE BARRIERS TO HOUSING CONTINUED:** Lawmakers can redirect funds from institutions to home and community-based services to address this crisis and protect disabled people’s right to thrive!

**South Carolina lawmakers have a real opportunity to stand up for freedom and common sense by supporting S.2.** This bill cuts through government red tape by consolidating services under a streamlined Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities. It’s about making government more efficient and accountable, not bigger. **By putting services under one roof, we make sure resources actually get to the people who need them—without waste or bureaucracy getting in the way.**

**S.2 also creates a Director of Community Living Integration, whose job is simple: make sure South Carolinians with disabilities have the freedom to live in their communities—not institutions.** That means more independence, more personal choice, and a better quality of life. It also establishes an Americans with Disabilities Coordinator to ensure policies stay focused on fairness and opportunity, not government overreach.

An advisory committee—including healthcare experts and voices from the disability community—will provide real-world insight and keep the focus on what works. No bloated programs, just smart decisions that respect personal responsibility and individual freedom.

Most importantly, S.2 supports Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS), which give people with disabilities the tools they need to live independently, contribute to society, and keep their families working and thriving. **And here’s the best part: HCBS costs a third of what institutional care does. That’s a win for taxpayers and families alike.**

This is a chance to uphold the principles South Carolina is built on—freedom, fairness, and personal responsibility—while delivering real results for our citizens.



## **UNLOCK THE BARRIERS TO HEALTHCARE:**

Medicaid plays a vital role in protecting the freedom and independence of South Carolinians with disabilities. It provides long-term services and supports (LTSS), including Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS), that make it possible for people to live and work in their communities—rather than being pushed into costly, restrictive institutions.

For many, Medicaid fills the gaps left by private insurance. **Programs like Medicaid Buy-In reward hard work by allowing individuals with disabilities to earn a living and stay in the workforce without losing the essential supports they need to remain independent.** That’s good for families, good for our communities, and good for South Carolina’s economy.

Cutting Medicaid would threaten the dignity, independence, and personal responsibility that folks with disabilities strive for every day. It could force people out of their homes and jobs and into costly government-run institutions—exactly the kind of big-government dependency we should be avoiding. Medicaid access actually reduces dependence on costly emergency services and institutional care. **It’s a smarter, more efficient investment.**

**UNLOCK THE BARRIERS TO HEALTHCARE CONTINUED:** Right now, South Carolina covers only 24.6% of our Medicaid spending—the rest comes from federal dollars. If Washington makes deep cuts, South Carolina taxpayers will be left holding the bag, and we can't afford that. We need to protect these programs from harmful reductions that would undermine personal freedom, responsibility, and opportunity for thousands of hardworking South Carolinians with disabilities.

Lawmakers can stand firm by supporting the continuation of Medicaid services and opposing harmful cuts that would weaken our communities and increase long-term costs.

**This is about protecting freedom, personal choice, and fiscal responsibility. Let's keep South Carolinians working, independent, and thriving.**



### **UNLOCK THE BARRIERS TO COMMUNITY LIVING:**

Hope and Lee's stories remind us of something simple but powerful: **when people have access to employment, transportation, housing, and healthcare, they contribute to stronger, more self-reliant communities.** They work hard, pay taxes, and live independently—without relying on costly government institutions.

But right now, South Carolina's Attorney General continues to back a lawsuit that threatens Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act—a cornerstone of disability rights for nearly 50 years. **If we lose Section 504, we're not just threatening the independence of people like Hope and Lee. We're risking serious economic consequences.**

#### **Here's what's at stake:**

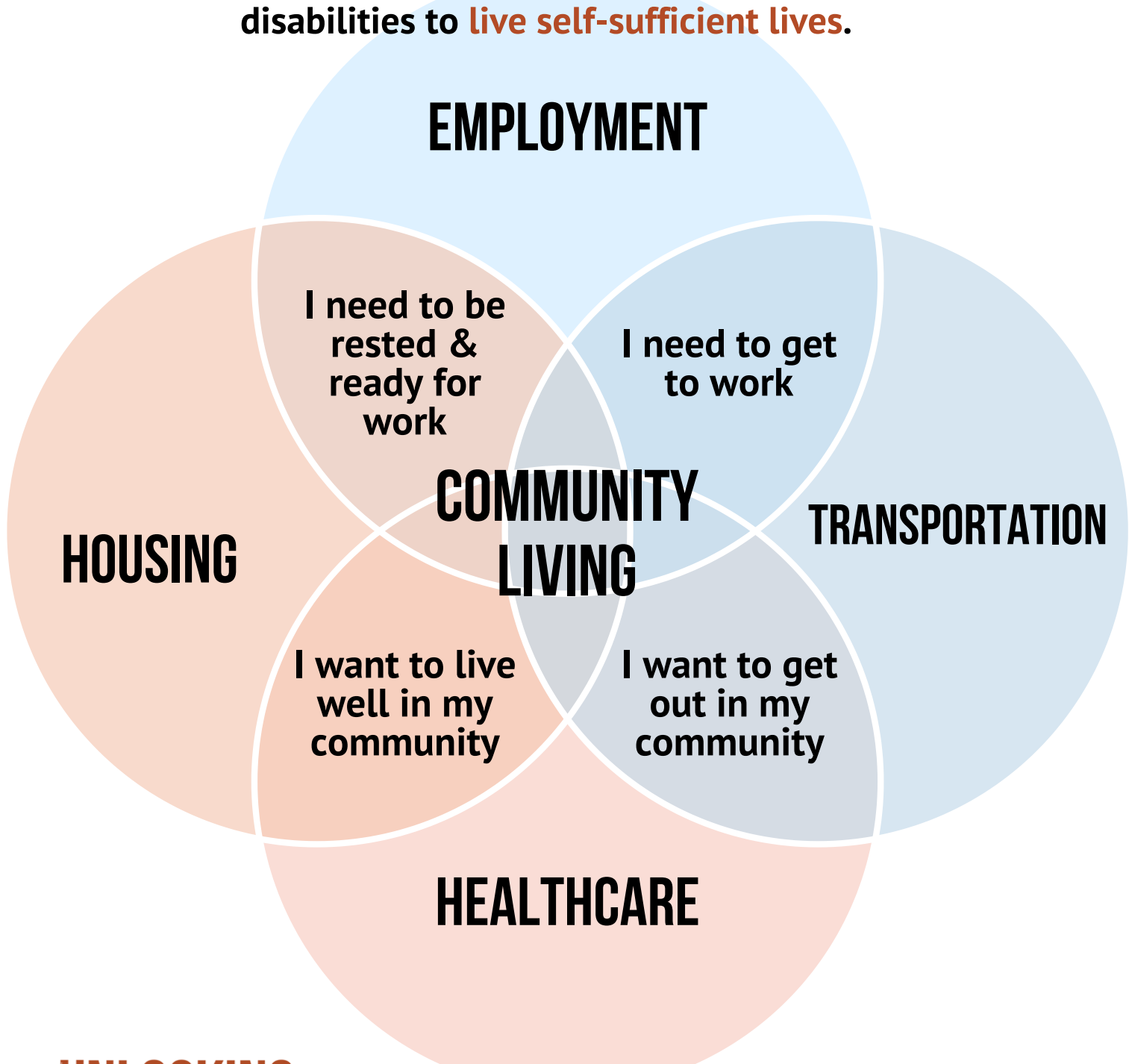
- Without Section 504 protections, businesses could lose qualified, hardworking employees who simply need basic accommodations to do their jobs—accommodations that make it possible to hire on merit, not outdated barriers.
- More people could be forced into costly, taxpayer-funded institutions, instead of living independently and contributing to their communities. Institutional care costs taxpayers three times as much as community-based services.
- Families could be pushed out of the workforce to care for loved ones, shrinking our labor force at a time when we can't afford it.

**This lawsuit is not just harmful—it's expensive.** It threatens freedom, personal responsibility, and common sense. South Carolina can't afford to go backward. People with disabilities are found in every community, every walk of life, and every political party. They aren't looking for special treatment—just the same freedom and opportunity that Section 504 protects—not just a slice, but the whole promise of equal rights.

Lawmakers have the opportunity to take a stand—end this harmful, costly lawsuit, protect Section 504, and ensure people with disabilities can keep working, living independently, and strengthening their communities. **It's about defending the right to work, reducing government dependency, and protecting taxpayers. South Carolinians are against this lawsuit.**

Let's make the smart choice. Let's protect freedom and opportunity for all South Carolinians.

When we remove the barriers to community living, we make it possible for the 1.3 million South Carolinians with disabilities to **live self-sufficient lives**.



When we remove the barriers to community living, we make it possible for the 1 in 3 people living in our state to become **productive and engaged citizens** who bring great value and benefit to our communities.

# ADVOcAcY DAY 50 + ORGANIZATIONS STRONG!

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