




IMPACT REPORT

Disability Rights Maryland
Oct 2022 - Sept 2024



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Mission and Vision

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that protects and advocates for the rights of people with disabilities in Maryland by providing free legal services.



Photo caption: Three young people taking a photo in a garden.

Mission

To create an integrated and just society by protecting the legal rights of people with disabilities.

Vision

A world where people with disabilities are fully included in the workplace, neighborhoods, and all aspects of community life.

History

For most of the 20th century people with disabilities were either locked away in institutions or isolated at home with no services, not even an education. They were often abused, neglected, and forgotten.

In 1973, ABC News exposed the horrendous living conditions and inhumane treatment of people with developmental and intellectual disabilities who lived inside New York's Willowbrook School. The exposé shocked the nation.

In response, Congress created a system of Protection and Advocacy (P&A) agencies to protect and advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. Each U.S. state and territory has a P&A agency. Together, we form a network of agencies to empower people with disabilities across the country.



Photo caption: An artist surrounded by colorful paintings.

DRM's New Look

In 2024, DRM introduced a new logo and color palette! This update marks an important milestone in our journey. As our organization continues to evolve and grow, it's essential that our visual identity reflects who we are and what we stand for. Our new logo embodies our refreshed commitment to providing high quality legal services for people with disabilities.



Photo caption: The before and after version of the DRM logo.



Program Activities

Employment

DRM helps people who receive Social Security benefits to overcome barriers to work.

Charting the Life Course

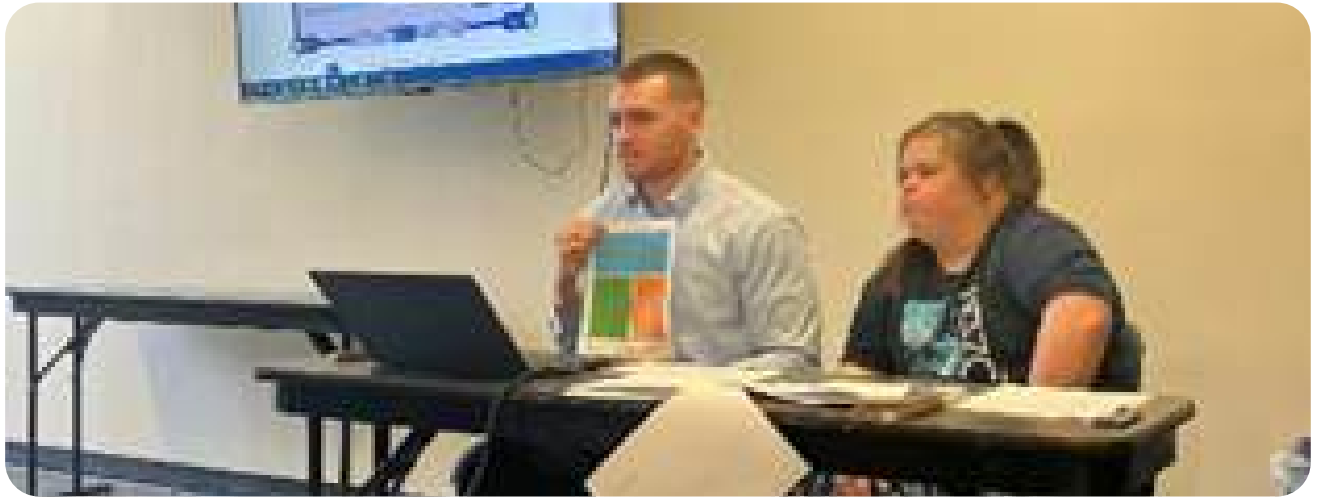


Photo caption: DRM Staff Attorney Braden Stinar and a Charting the Life Course participant.

The Charting the Life Course program is designed for students who receive Social Security benefits, ages 14-21, and their families. DRM hosts workshops using this framework to guide students as they envision future careers and create school-to-employment transition plans. Students leave feeling confident, clear, and excited about their paths to employment.

12

Young people participated in workshops to plan for their future.

Mental Health

DRM works to ensure Marylanders with psychiatric disabilities can make their own choices and receive safe, voluntary services.

Fighting for Dignity in Psychiatric Facilities

DRM helped “Noor”, a man in a state psychiatric hospital who was stripped of his power wheelchair, denied communication aids, and put on a restrictive diet he didn’t need. Frustrated, immobile, and unable to express himself, he was labeled ‘difficult and uncooperative’. DRM fought for him to regain his mobility and voice. Today, Noor lives in assisted living, where he moves freely, enjoys favorite foods, and connects with others.



DRM’s Protection & Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) program provides legal services to those with psychiatric disabilities.

Photo Caption: A man who uses a wheelchair, wearing a blue shirt and black pants, smiling.

Legislative Win: Mental Health Treatment Plans for Individuals in Facilities

DRM testified in support of a landmark bill that promotes individualized care to support the mental health of people with disabilities statewide.



Equal Justice Works Fellow 2023 – 2025: Courtney Bergan

Courtney Bergan is working to reduce segregation of people with psychiatric disabilities, advocating for better community mental health support and fewer unnecessary hospitalizations.

Photo caption: Courtney Bergan with service dog Kiera.

Special Education

DRM helps students with disabilities receive the support they need to thrive in public schools alongside their peers without disabilities.

Supporting Families and Ensuring Safety

Imagine your child coming home with bruises, and not knowing why. Yina, a 5-year-old with a disability, was returning home with unexplained bruises, leaving her mom, who also has a disability and speaks only Spanish, at a loss. DRM attended an emergency meeting with interpreters, helped Yina access the supports she needed, and provided community referrals for ongoing assistance. Yina is now back in school safely.



A former DRM client, Sulayman, graduating high school in 2023.

244

Families received legal services in special education matters

Legislative Wins: Empowering Families

In 2023, Maryland passed a law allowing families to recover expert fees along with attorney fees after winning cases against school systems. This helps level the playing field, ensuring that families of all income levels can advocate for their children’s rights.

In 2024, Maryland established a new program to provide low and lower-income families with legal support for all stages of the special education process—not just during hearings—emphasizing support during IEP meetings and informal dispute resolutions. DRM and the Education Advocacy Coalition crafted this bill. Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS) will administer this new program.

DRM chairs The Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities (EAC), a group of almost 50 organizations and individuals concerned with special education policies.



Photo caption:
Leslie Seid Margolis, DRM Managing Attorney and Policy Counsel, attended the bill signing in 2024.

Pro Bono

Through DRM's Pro Bono Program, volunteer attorneys provide crucial legal advocacy for people with disabilities. Most cases involve support with special education or access to medically necessary healthcare services.

47

Cases placed with pro bono attorneys

"I'm proud to volunteer with DRM. My family was a recipient of pro bono services via DRM on behalf of my younger sister when I was still a high school student and long before I imagined I would become an attorney myself. The pro bono support navigating a technical and often opaque system was profoundly impactful for not just my sister, but for everyone who cared about her. The fact that I am now able to start paying forward that support to other families (with the mentorship of my sister's original pro bono attorney who I now work for roughly 15 years later) is very special to me because I know firsthand the powerful sense of relief you can get from having someone in your corner."



Alexandria K. Montania Esq.,
Gordon Feinblatt LLC

“I’m helping a client get the support he needs to be successful at school. The impact is substantial. There’s a large, often overlooked population dealing with serious issues. When a lawyer steps in, the school systems that might otherwise ignore these families start to take them seriously. My presence brings accountability. My client’s mom and counselor are already great advocates, but having a lawyer there ensures they are taken seriously. It’s not a huge time commitment for the lawyer but makes a world of difference for the families.”



Tim Scott Esq., Wilson Elser

BECOME A PRO BONO ATTORNEY

Learn more at

DisabilityRightsMD.org/Probono-Opportunities

Legislative Advocacy

Every year, Maryland’s elected officials implement laws that impact the lives of people with disabilities. DRM educates lawmakers and provides testimony to support legislation that advances disability rights and opposes laws that discriminate and exclude people with disabilities. Throughout this report you’ll find examples of our legislative activity.





Photo caption: DRM Staff Attorney Daria Pugh attended the signing of a 2024 bill that will fund an independent study of the MobilityLink Paratransit service.

We can only use unrestricted funding to support our legislative advocacy work, which is why donations from individuals and organizations are crucial.

Housing

DRM works to ensure accessible, affordable housing for people with disabilities, allowing them to live safely and independently in the community.

Preventing Disability-Related Evictions

Imagine losing your home during a hospital stay. When Ivis, who lives with her adult son, temporarily lost SSI benefits while in a nursing facility, her son couldn't pay the rent by himself. DRM helped adjust their rent based on income changes, allowing them to stay in their home until benefits resumed.

389

**Households
received legal
services in
housing
matters**



Photo caption: Ivis and her adult son.

Keeping Commitments: DRM Monitors Agreements

During the past 20 years, The Housing Authority of Baltimore City, Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Baltimore County, and the Housing Authority of Prince Georges County have all agreed to:

- Create accessible and affordable housing
- Provide necessary reasonable accommodations and modifications
- Offer housing search assistance to people using housing choice vouchers

DRM monitors to make sure they all follow through on their agreements.

Equal Justice Works Fellow 2022 – 2024: E.V. Yost

E.V. Yost helps people with disabilities in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Prince George’s County stay housed by providing legal support to those facing eviction or disability-related housing issues.

Photo caption: A couple taking a photo as they are leaving a room.



Transportation

DRM works to ensure people with disabilities have quality transportation so they can access employment, education, healthcare, social activities, and essential services.



Photo caption: Paratransit rider waiting for her ride.

Legislative Wins: Quality Service for All

In 2023, Maryland passed the Transportation Equity Act. This law requires that people with disabilities be considered in state transit plans and mandates annual data reporting on the impact on people with disabilities and racial disparities. The act addresses the state's history of exclusionary policies and moves Maryland toward fairer, more accessible transit options for all.

In 2024, DRM supported a legislative independent study of the MobilityLink Paratransit service, conducted by the Maryland Transportation Institute (MTI). This study will assess service reliability, customer experience, and workforce quality, comparing MobilityLink with other U.S. paratransit services. "MobilityLink riders often face poor service—late pick-ups, long trips, and lengthy hold times," says DRM attorney, Daria Pugh. "We are hopeful MTI's recommendations will lead to meaningful reform and provide Marylanders with disabilities the safe, reliable transportation they deserve."



Photo caption: DRM Managing Attorney, Gabriel H. Rubinstein, attended the bill signing in 2023 with Governor Moore and other stakeholders.

Baltimore City Sidewalks: A Path to Accessibility

In June 2021, DRM, other advocates and law firms filed a class action lawsuit against Baltimore City for its failure to maintain accessible sidewalks and curb ramps, vital for residents with mobility disabilities to safely navigate the city and fully participate in civic life. After years of negotiation, the city has committed at least \$44 million over four years to enhance accessibility, with plans to install or repair about 3,000 curb ramps and 500,000 square feet of pedestrian pathways, prioritizing key locations like government offices, hospitals, and transit hubs. The agreement also establishes ADA oversight, regular monitoring, and upgrades to the 311 system for reporting and repairing inaccessible pathways. This consent decree is a significant step toward a more accessible Baltimore, and residents are encouraged to report accessibility issues to help shape a city that welcomes everyone.

Voting

DRM helps ensure Marylanders with disabilities can exercise their right to vote and participate in democracy, enabling them to impact policies that shape their lives.

Breaking Barriers to Participation

DRM registered over 100 Marylanders with disabilities to vote, including many nursing facility residents who had been left out of the voting process. We educated facility staff, dispelled the myth that people under guardianship cannot vote in Maryland, and helped residents vote by mail.

100+

**Voters with
disabilities registered**



Photo caption: DRM staff members Gillian Justice and Braden Stinar with partners from the ACLU, League of Women Voters, and Common Cause at a central command center in Annapolis, MD on election day.

Information is Power

DRM helped organize 17 educational events on voting rights, accessibility, and disability-related issues, equipping people with disabilities to vote confidently and independently. DRM also supported partner agencies in organizing a pre-election forum, giving voters the opportunity to hear about candidates' platforms. We reached 2,210 people through events.



Photo caption: Maryland Senate Candidate Forum hosted by Maryland Disability Forum

Social Media Campaign

DRM shared information on accessible voting options, registration deadlines, and resources to help people with disabilities navigate the voting process.

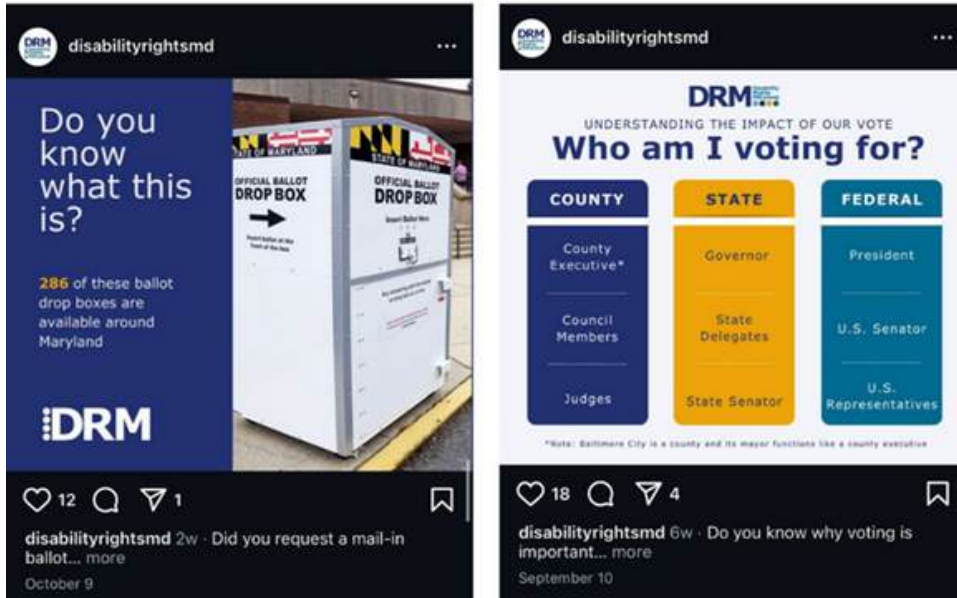


Photo caption: Screenshots of 2 social media posts about voting.

Support and Accountability

DRM operated a voter hotline to answer questions and resolve accessibility issues during the election. On election day, DRM joined partner organizations at a central command center. From this hub, they addressed questions raised by over 250 volunteers at polling locations statewide. They escalated 20 disability-related issues, which were all resolved quickly without causing any disruption to the casting of votes.

Monitoring

DRM monitors facilities that provide services to people with disabilities, to make sure people are treated with respect. We conduct thorough investigations when there is an allegation of abuse or neglect.



60

Average monitoring visits we conduct per year.

Photo caption: DRM Executive Director, Meghan Marsh and DRM attorney, Megan Jones looking through lawbooks.

Who We Monitor

- Psychiatric facilities
- Facilities for people with developmental disabilities
- Juvenile facilities
- Nursing homes
- Prisons
- Residential treatment centers
- Schools

Community Living

Community living reduces isolation and the risk of abuse often associated with institutional settings. DRM advocates for community-based living to support independence and social connection for people with disabilities.



Photo caption: Two men laughing.

DRM advocates for individuals using methods like self-advocacy assistance, negotiation, mediation, and sometimes litigation to resolve issues.

From October 2022 – September 2024, DRM closed legal cases for **1,117 individuals and families.**

Helping People Find Homes in the Community

Independence matters to everyone, including people with disabilities. Yet thousands remain in institutions due to a lack of community services. “Tyler”, a young man with a developmental disability, spent over 200 days in a hospital between 2022 and 2023 because no residential placement could meet his needs. DRM advocated for Tyler to receive services in the community, working with the State to secure him a group home. Since moving in, Tyler has flourished, experiencing stability, community connections, and ongoing support.



Photo caption: Young man holding a book, smiling at the camera.

Healthcare

DRM fights for access to affordable, consumer-centered health care, free from discrimination. For many, it means the choice to live in one's own home rather than an institution.

Restoring Vital Services for Marylanders with Disabilities

In June 2024, 293 Marylanders with developmental disabilities were abruptly terminated from Medicaid services, losing essential community-based supports that enable independent living. DRM, working with the Developmental Disabilities Coalition, pushed the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to review the cases. As a result, MDH determined that 273 people had been wrongly terminated, and their services were reinstated, allowing them to continue living safely and independently in their communities.



DRM builds, leads, and collaborates with local and statewide coalitions, bringing the disability perspective to diverse issue areas.

Additionally, we provide support and backup services to other programs, advocacy groups and agencies.

Photo caption: Team members sitting and standing around a table working on a project.

Promoting Supported Decision-Making

With Maryland's new Supported Decision-Making (SDM) law in effect since 2022, DRM has been actively working to educate professionals on the law's implications and promote SDM as an alternative to guardianship. Over the past two years, DRM staff have conducted presentations across the state to various groups, including social workers, case managers, healthcare providers, and community members. These sessions highlight SDM as a tool that preserves autonomy and provides a framework for individuals to make their own decisions with support rather than guardianship. DRM's outreach has reached thousands of participants, equipping them with knowledge and resources to better support the rights and independence of Marylanders with disabilities.



Photo caption: Mother giving her son a high five.

Outreach and Education

DRM conducts trainings, creates resources, and presents information about disability rights to groups across the state and nationwide.



Photo caption: DRM experts sit on panels at national conferences. Pictured here is Managing Attorney Randi Ames at the American Bar Associations' 2024 National Aging and Law Conference in Miami.

From October 2022 – September 2024, DRM provided information and referrals to **2,798 individuals and families who called our office. DRM shares information to help people know their rights and how to stand up for themselves or their loved ones. We refer people to other organizations when their issue is outside our scope of our services.**

Photo caption: DRM educates the public about how to follow disability related laws. In 2023, DRM attorney Randi Ames shared ways to ensure fair employment practices for individuals with disabilities.



Photo caption: DRM staff present information to people with disabilities about their legal rights and how to reach DRM if their rights are violated. Pictured here is Managing Attorney Gabriel Rubinstein speaking to a group at The League for People with Disabilities in Baltimore.

Photo caption: DRM provides information at resource fairs and festivals. Pictured here is DRM Advocate Susana Barrios.



Listening Tour

In 2024, DRM met with almost 150 people on a listening tour around the state. We are grateful to everyone who shared their personal stories. Their insights help us decide what issues to focus on.



Photo caption: Listening session with The League for People with Disabilities.



Photo caption: Listening session with The Freedom Center in Frederick.



Photo caption: Listening session at the Salem United Methodist Church.

Representative Payees

100

Average number of reviews we conduct every year.

Representative Payees manage Social Security benefits for people who need assistance with money management. DRM ensures payees follow Social Security regulations and use the funds to meet the needs of the person with a disability. We conduct home visits and interviews to make sure there is no financial exploitation, abuse, or neglect.



Photo caption: Man sitting at an outdoor table, smiling and holding a hot drink.

400–500

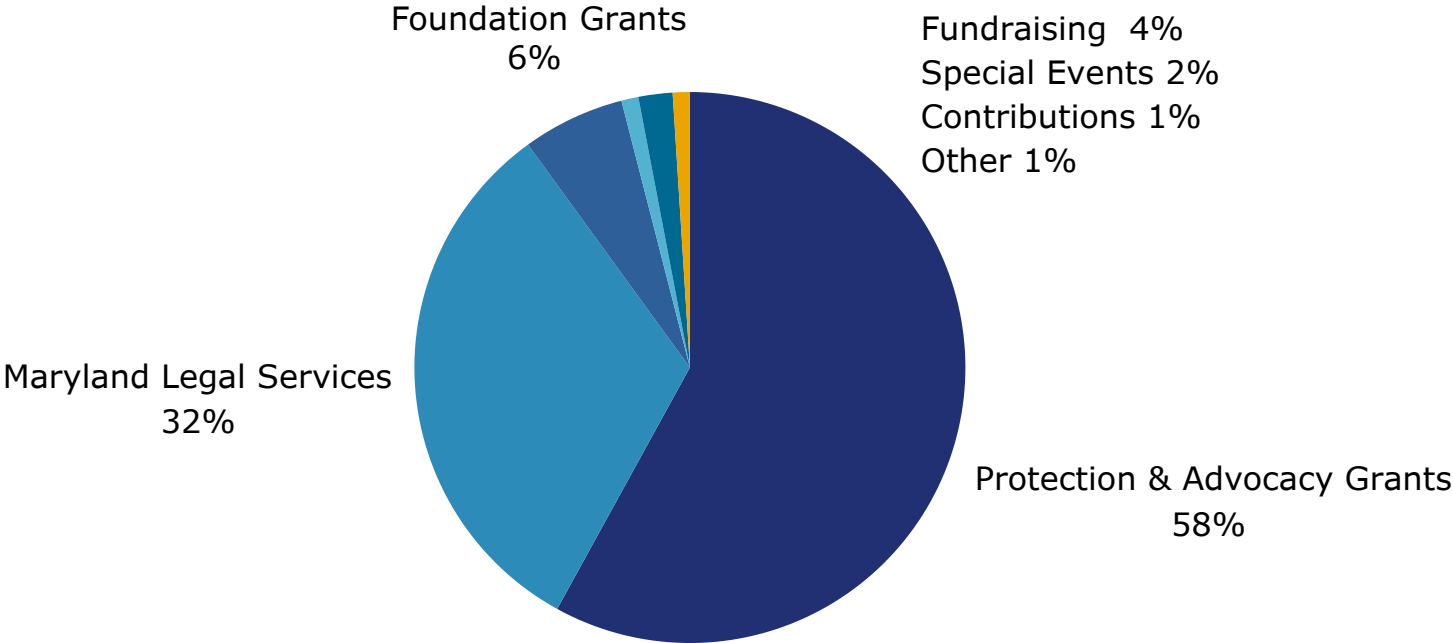
Average number of social security beneficiaries we meet with every year to ensure they are safe.



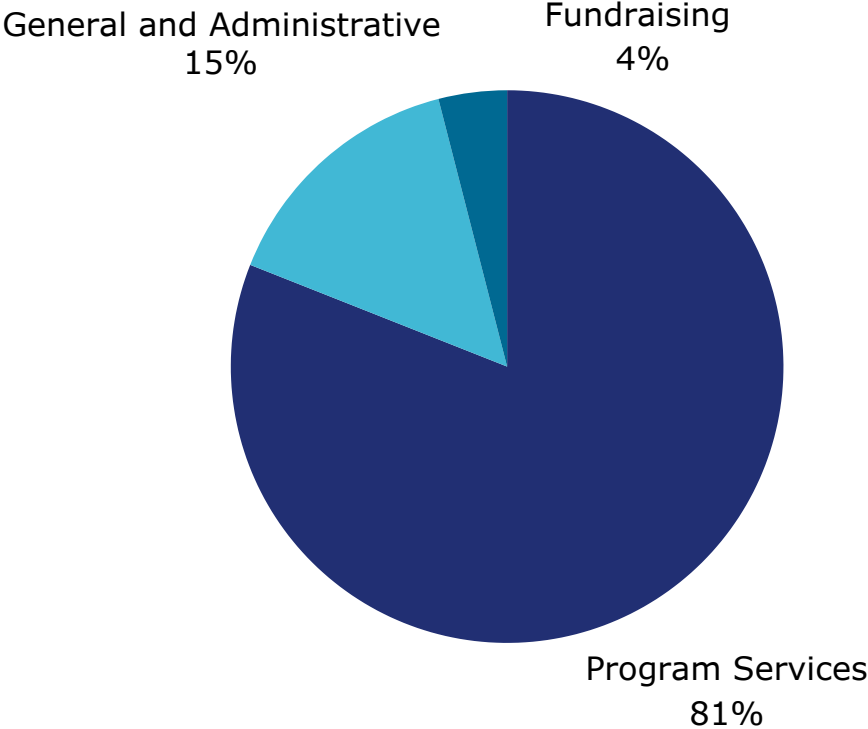
Financial Information

Overview

Revenue (Oct 2022 – Sep 2024)



Expenses (Oct 2022 – Sep 2024)



Gala

The Breaking Barriers Awards Gala is DRM’s signature celebration where we honor visionary leaders who further the rights of Marylanders with disabilities. Funds raised go towards ensuring that Marylanders with disabilities, regardless of income, age or race, have access to critical legal services.



Photo caption: In 2023, DRM honored Theodore Howard (Outstanding Legal Advocacy Award), Mitch Mirviss (Lorraine Sheehan Lifetime Achievement Award), Erik Luedtke (Public Policy Leadership Award), Mat Rice (Gayle Hafner Grassroots Advocacy Award), Rebecca Cokley (Judith Heumann Champion of Justice Award), and Senator Mary Washington (Public Policy Leadership Award – not pictured)



Photo caption: In 2024, DRM honored Maryland Senator Clarence Lam (Public Policy Leadership Award), Liz Bowie (Excellence in journalism Award), Mayer Brown (Outstanding Legal Advocacy Award), and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (Judith Heumann Champion of Justice Award – not pictured)



Photo caption: Members of DRM Board Matthew Reeds, Kimberly Jackson, Andrew Petrie, Ryan Perlin, Jessie Weber, Deanna McCray-James, Suzanne Sangree, and Emily Greene (Not Shown: JaMar Mancano, Steve Manekin, Neil Ellis, Amena Fine, and Susan Kadis).

Photo caption: In 2024, Philisa Rogers was honored at The Daily Record’s Leaders In Law awards ceremony for her work as DRM’s Director of Finance.



Leadership

Leadership Team

as of June 30, 2024

Meghan Marsh, J.D., Executive Director

Connie Kratovil-Lavelle, J.D., Deputy Director

Philisa Rogers, Finance Director

Megan Berger, J.D., Legal Director

Luciene Parsley, J.D., Litigation Counsel

Leslie Seid Margolis, J.D., Policy Counsel and Managing Attorney

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as of June 30, 2024

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