



## Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment

# Legislative Subcommittee Operations Manual

**GCDE Mission:** The Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment provides state level advocacy and leadership with the disability community to obtain equity in economic opportunity and community inclusion.

**GCDE Vision:** An equitable Washington where people with disabilities experience full inclusion, full participation, and economic vibrance.

### **Legislative Subcommittee Mission:**

The Legislative Subcommittee works alongside the GCDE Executive Director and GCDE Chairperson to identify legislative priorities, positions and actions during legislative session. The Legislative Subcommittee mobilizes GCDE members to influence legislative action through their respective personal legislators on issues of importance to people with disabilities.

**Legislative Subcommittee Purpose:** The Legislative Subcommittee sets state-level policy priorities for legislative session based on GCDE's values. Priorities are set in partnership with the GCDE Chairperson and Executive Director. Members work in a non-partisan environment.

**Legislative Subcommittee Structure:** The Legislative subcommittee is a standing subcommittee of GCDE. The group is led by a chairperson which is appointed by the GCDE Chairperson. The subcommittee may have a Vice Chair. The subcommittee Chairperson is part of the GCDE Coordinating Committee for leadership coordination and teamwork. The subcommittee is supported by a staff person who takes meeting minutes, sends invites, assists with agendas and reasonable accommodations. All official communication for the group comes from GCDE staff.

**Activities:** Legislative subcommittee learns about GCDE values and legislation. The group sets policy priorities prior to legislative session each year to assist in legislative advocacy. Legislative subcommittee members may be involved with external partners in specific areas of advocacy and can bring that experience back to the subcommittee.

Examples of activities include:

- Participating in coalition meetings for prioritized legislation

- Learning about policy priorities for partner organizations and educating other members about that
- Attending hearings either virtually or in person to track legislation
- Researching bills
- Learning how to share your story with a purpose
- Attending meetings to coordinate and share legislative information
- Reaching out to personal elected officials about priority legislation

**Legislative Subcommittee Chair Role Description:** The Legislative Subcommittee Chairperson coordinates with agency staff and the GCDE Chair to set agenda topics, monitor work plan progress, and to ensure close collaboration. The Chair runs the meetings and encourages all members to take an opportunity to speak and share their thoughts. If the Chair is absent, the co-chair or another subcommittee member may run the meeting. The Chair and Vice Chair of Legislative Subcommittee are appointed by the Chair of GCDE and must work in partnership with GCDE staff.

**Legislative Subcommittee Member Role Description:** Legislative Subcommittee Members participate in discussions about legislation and priorities. Members are respectful of diverse opinions, listen to various information, and share their thoughts and experiences. Members must be able to focus on issues that impact everyone with disabilities and be able to accept the group’s decisions and boundaries.

**Legislative Subcommittee Meetings:** Schedule of meetings is to be determined by the Chair in collaboration with the subcommittee members and GCDE staff. Peak work times for the subcommittee occur January through March, however depending on GCDE’s role in pieces of legislation, work happens all year.

**Quorum:** Quorum is met if 50% plus one member are present at a meeting. The Chair is a member for the purpose of calculating quorum. GCDE staff members do not count toward quorum. Any meetings where a vote will take place must have quorum.

**Record Keeping:** Staff of GCDE are responsible for keeping meeting minutes and creating agendas. Staff must be part of all communication related to GCDE work. Staff also handle any requests for public comment or public record requests.

**GCDE Values**

The following values are emphasized in Executive Order 87-08 which forms GCDE and sets our purpose.

Value	Questions to evaluate whether the value is present
Participation	Can people with disabilities participate in all aspects of community life including: medical care, civic life, emergency planning, community events, fairs, concerts, meetings, school, shopping, etc.
Employment	Are people with disabilities getting jobs, getting raises, getting promotions, and retaining jobs with a wage that meets their needs without government subsidy? Do employers give applicants with disabilities what they need to be successful in sharing their experience and skills? Are workers with disabilities paid the same way as all other employees?

Equity/Equality	<p><b>Equity:</b> Are supports provided that give people with disabilities what they need to fully participate in work, school, community and all aspects of life? Does this level the playing field for people with disabilities? Does this close a gap?</p> <p><b>Equality:</b> Are people with disabilities receiving the same experience as others including equal pay, equal benefits, and equal access?</p>
Empowerment	<p>Are tools available that allow people with disabilities to do what they want to do? Are people with disabilities supported to solve their own issues and have power to make decisions in their own lives? Are people with disabilities treated as the decision maker in their own lives?</p>
Advocacy	<p>Are voices of people with disabilities at the table? Are people with disabilities giving input to policy and sharing lived experiences? Are people with disabilities in positions of power and authority?</p>
Accessibility	<p>Not specifically called out in our Executive Order (EO) but critical to all other aspects. Can people get into the building, read the website with screen readers, are items written in plain language, is there prominent information on how to get reasonable accommodations, are people with disabilities needs included in planning?</p>
Opportunity	<p>Are opportunities available in a manner that is accessible to people with disabilities?</p>
Independence	<p>Does this legislation support increased autonomy for people with disabilities, access to transportation, in-home supports, and other tools to ensure people can live life on their own terms. Are services integrated and community based?</p>

**Setting GCDE Legislative Priorities**

Like all GCDE’s work, legislative advocacy is done in partnership with the disability community. GCDE is seated within state government and is nonpartisan. Our focus is advocacy that impacts legislation in Washington state, and we do not support or rally against candidates or other have official stances on other partisan issues. While we may provide comments or input to federal legislation, state laws deeply impact people in Washington and our members have been appointed to work at the state level.

Huge amounts of legislation are proposed each year with more than a hundred bills being introduced in a single day of session. Both the house and the senate have committees who specialize in certain policy areas to hear legislation and make recommendations on what is being proposed.

With the high volume of legislation that is introduced, GCDE has developed a method to track legislation and inform members. The GCDE Executive Director researches and follows bills that have an impact on the disability community. Bills are documented on the GCDE legislation spreadsheet. After an initial review bills are sorted into three categories:

Category	Description
Tier 1	Tier 1 bills directly impact people with disabilities—for example a bill that requires employers to pay people with disabilities at the same rate as everyone else doing that job. Tier 1 bills are typically our highest priority bills.
Tier 2	Tier 2 bills are focused on things that disproportionately impact people with disabilities. For example: a piece of legislation that deals with homelessness would disproportionately impact people with disabilities due to the high rate of people with disabilities who are homeless. These bills may be priority bills for GCDE if they are bills that our members or staff have been working on prior to session or have passion to engage with during session.
Other	Bills that don't have a disproportionate impact on people with disabilities. For example, a tax increase that would impact everyone in Washington.

GCDE leaders review Tier 1 bills and may short list bills for a vote of the subcommittee. Alternatively, subcommittee members may review the spreadsheet and bring forward bills of importance. The list of priorities drives any testimony provided by GCDE formally via the Executive Director. It is important to note that different parts of the disability community may have different opinions on proposed legislation. GCDE reflects on our values and the focus of our members to identify legislative priorities. There are times when we may not reach consensus on our position on a piece of legislation.

**Ethics:**

GCDE as a part of state government is subject to rules and regulations. Specific rules apply to legislative work. When GCDE members are working on legislation on behalf of GCDE the following rules apply:

- GCDE legislative work is nonpartisan. We do not support any political party over another, nor do we have any political ideology.
- GCDE members cannot use state owned facilities, equipment, or staff time in any partisan discussion or debate. We may not influence an election or hold public office if it interferes with our duties at GCDE.
- GCDE may not influence initiatives or ballot issues.
- GCDE may not participate in election campaigns even if it is for a nonpartisan office.
- GCDE appointed members must adhere to the same ethics rules as state employees when they are doing the work of GCDE.

- If GCDE members are involved with political activity they may not identify themselves as being part of GCDE,
- Political activity is defined as: lobbying, demonstrating, and fundraising designed to influence a political decision. GCDE may educate legislators or provide a disability perspective.
- GCDE members may not receive gifts or favors to support legislation, nor give a gift or favor to garner support for legislation.
- GCDE members must be specifically appointed to be the spokesperson for GCDE.
- If members are meeting with their legislator or other leaders, they may only tell someone else's story with that person's permission. Sharing your own story is the most effective approach.
- Members are encouraged to join other groups working on legislation to strengthen partnerships for GCDE and share that information with staff and the legislative subcommittee.
- If a member does not agree with GCDE's position on legislation, please share those thoughts with leaders and other GCDE members. While we may not all agree, discussion is important. If you are attending a meeting where GCDE is expressing its official support or opposition for a bill, please support the group decision to the elected official.
- Political activity of spouses or relatives should be seen as separate from the work of GCDE.
- If a member or staff is sharing their political views on social media or to the media or in public venues they should not identify themselves as a GCDE member.
- Members may sign petitions.
- Members are encouraged to engage with their legislators, community leaders and engage in legislative activity.
- GCDE members are appointed to be a voice for the community. Bringing personal needs to the group or using your position on GCDE to address personal needs is not allowed per state ethics laws.
- GCDE members may not use their positions on GCDE to gain advantages for themselves.
- GCDE is subject to the [Sunshine Laws](#). Members must remember that every meeting of GCDE is subject to the [Open Public Meetings Act](#) and therefore the public is always welcome to come and observe. Additionally, any emails or other documents are public records and may be requested by the public for review.

### **Policy Areas that Disproportionately Impact People with Disabilities**

- Housing – independent housing is out of reach for people receiving Supplemental Security Income.
- Homelessness – people living with behavioral health disabilities are disproportionately homeless and housing prices make housing insecure for many people with disabilities
- Income security/poverty: People with disabilities disproportionately live in poverty due to receiving income from social programs such as Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance administered by the Social Security Administration
- Incarceration – people with disabilities are disproportionately living in jails and prisons and may face segregation and loss of civil rights in carceral settings
- Employment – the employment participation rate remains lower for individuals with disabilities who are also a higher rate of joblessness. People who have intersectional identities, such as a

black individual with disabilities, face even more difficult barriers and have the highest unemployment rate in the United States.

- Transportation – Individuals with disabilities are disproportionately non drivers and therefore reliant on public transportation. Public transportation often doesn’t meet the basic needs for people to get to medical appointments, jobs or even to be able to get to an accessible route of travel from a bus stop. Ride share programs are often inaccessible for folks using wheelchairs, autonomous vehicles can’t accommodate wheelchairs; people who travel via air are often separated from their equipment such as wheelchairs, and in hotels bed heights are often inaccessible.
- Language Access--People who are Deaf, late deafened, DeafBlind, or Hard of Hearing often lacks basic access to emergency alerts, public events, emergency planning resources, and equal access to goods and services. Policy areas where this shows up is in emergency planning, language access legislation, and many other areas
- Accessibility--both the built environment and the virtual environment are often inaccessible. Towns and cities still have many inaccessible sidewalks and buildings.
- Health Equity -- People with disabilities experience inequity both in delivery of healthcare services and in access to diagnostic testing. Additionally, recent research shows that many doctors see people with disabilities as having a lower quality of life and that they would discourage people with disabilities in getting healthcare from their practice.

**Scope of Advocacy**

<b>In Scope</b>	<b>Out of Scope</b>
Washington State Legislation	Legislation in other states
Washington State Budgets	Cities, counties, municipalities
Transportation issues that affect people with disabilities	Personal issues that benefit specific members
Advocacy on issues the disproportionately impact people with disabilities	National issues except on urgent issues as voted on by the group
Creating legislation with partners to impact people with disabilities	Advocacy outside of our values and principles

GCDE members are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the process by which a bill becomes a law in Washington state. Here are some great resources:

- Legislative Information Center: has short videos and tutorials that provide quick information on the legislative process in Washington [Legislative Information Center \(wa.gov\)](http://leg.wa.gov)
- League of Women Voters: nonpartisan group with information about voting [League of Women Voters of Washington - Home](http://www.lwv.org)
- Disability Rights Washington Cross Disability Action Network: [Public Policy and Community Mobilization - Disability Rights Washington](http://www.drw.org)

Other resources:

Information from the Washington State Attorney General’s Office on Sunshine Laws: [Open Government Resource Manual | Washington State](http://www.wa.gov)

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