



Defending UCEDDs Messaging Guide



Key Messages

In any public-facing materials, conversations with elected officials or staff, and communications with other organizations, we need to:

1. **Clarify the distinct roles of UCEDDs** compared to Independent Living (IL) programs, Protection & Advocacy agencies (P&As), and DD Councils—highlighting how UCEDDs provide university-based research, training, technical assistance, and community service that are not duplicated elsewhere in the DD Network. Distinguishing the role and value of UCEDDs should be done without criticism or negative framing of the IL programs, P&As, DD Councils or others—we all need each other.
2. **Reinforce that UCEDDs are established under the DD Act** and must meet specific federal requirements that support their mission and accountability.
3. **Emphasize the importance of maintaining UCEDDs as independent, university-affiliated centers**, which ensures their ability to respond flexibly and effectively to state and community needs.

If you need support framing the topline messaging, we have provided talking points below.

Why is this proposal bad?

1. **This proposal is bad for all programs involved.** By eliminating discretionary funding for the University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs) and these other programs*, and collapsing them into one single funding stream under the Independent Living (IL) program, the Administration's FY26 budget proposal threatens to undermine and erode the efforts of each program. If Congress were to take up these recommendations, it would make these systems inefficient, directly conflict with federal law, and result in immense nationwide harm for people with disabilities, research institutions, and the disability workforce.
2. **This proposal is bad for states.** This proposal would effectively block-grant funding to states without clear guidance, governance, or accountability mechanisms, creating scarcity at the state level and undermining years of collaboration and harmony between programs. Once again, this Administration proposes to shift the burden to states to replicate national infrastructure without the capacity to do so.
 - UCEDD elimination and block granting jeopardizes decades of progress in areas like early intervention, inclusive education, health equity, and workforce development. It would mean state and local communities could lose things like important data about developmental disabilities in their community, and supports and services for families. Here's what the Administration is risking in our state: [example of your UCEDD]

**Projects of National Significance (PNS), Limb Loss Resource Center, Paralysis Resource Center, and the Voting Access for People with Disabilities Program.*

3. **This proposal goes against established disability law.** The Administration’s budget proposal not only ignores the authorizing statute for UCEDDs, but also the fundamental differences in scope, expertise, and infrastructure. UCEDDs are purposefully situated within the university system so they can pull in the expertise of the academic community to focus on the needs of people with disabilities and implement an interdisciplinary approach to the training of physicians, nurses, therapists, and many types of educators and psychologists with opportunities for clinical exposure. The [DD Act](#) mandates that UCEDDs maintain this structure and remain fully funded as a core component of the national DD Network.
 - UCEDDs are intentionally positioned to link the resources of the university with the disability community. They leverage their core funding to partner with other federal, state, and local resources. They use federal funding for operations and generate seven times that amount through partnerships and grants that fund their work.

Background Information

The Administration’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget justification proposes folding the UCEDDs and four other unique programs into the Independent Living (IL) program under a single, broad allocation:

“The FY 2026 request for Independent Living is \$228,183,000. It includes a proposal allowing the expanded funding to be used to continue the activities previously provided by University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Developmental Disabilities Projects of National Significance, the Limb Loss Resource Center, and the Paralysis Resource Center, and providing Voting Access for People with Disabilities. Allowing funding in each state to be distributed based on state need increases program flexibility and improves the ability to target funding as needed.”

These programs serve distinct populations, have specialized goals, and operate through targeted delivery systems. Each of the five programs proposed for consolidation was created to address distinct and urgent needs in the disability community:

- **UCEDDs** develop and implement evidence-based practices, train the disability workforce, and partner with states and communities on policy innovation and systems change. They are longstanding, congressionally authorized programs with over 60 years of bipartisan support. They serve as trusted institutions that bridge research, training, and community services to support individuals with developmental disabilities across the lifespan. Their elimination would not only dismantle essential state-based infrastructures but also jeopardize decades of progress in areas like early intervention, inclusive education, health equity, and workforce development.



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- **Projects of National Significance (PNS)** support cutting-edge demonstration projects that inform national policy and generate scalable solutions.
- **The Limb Loss Resource Center** provides education, peer support, and service navigation for people with limb loss and limb difference.
- **The Paralysis Resource Center** addresses the needs of individuals with paralysis, including access to rehabilitation, equipment, peer mentoring, and independent living.
- **The Voting Access for People with Disabilities program** ensures that Americans with disabilities can fully exercise their voting rights through state-administered protection and advocacy efforts.

Furthermore, this shift is effectively block granting funding to states without clear guidance, governance, or accountability mechanisms. In practice, this approach would force programs, often with differing missions and constituencies, to compete against one another for limited funding. Programs that were once guaranteed federal funding based on national priorities and needs would now be pitted against each other, risking underinvestment, service gaps, and fragmentation of care. Block granting this funding threatens to erase decades of specialized investment in the disability community and shift the burden to states to replicate national infrastructure without the capacity to do so. The disability community deserves sustained, coordinated support, not funding models that sow competition and instability among critical programs.

Plain Language

The Administration released a document that describes how they want to stop giving money to University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs). The Administration wants to get rid of UCEDDs. They want to combine the work that UCEDDs do with the work of a few other disability programs and make the Independent Living Program do all of it. This would go against the law and would do a lot of damage to disability research, supports and services, and other programs that support people with disabilities.

UCEDDs do a lot of important work for people with disabilities and their families and have had support from both Republicans and Democrats in Congress. Now, it is up to Congress to decide how they give money to important programs like UCEDDs. AUCD does not want Congress to follow this budget suggestion because it will be extremely harmful to people with disabilities in lots of ways.



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When talking or posting about saving UCEDDs we need to:

1. **Explain what makes UCEDDs different** compared to Independent Living programs, Protection & Advocacy agencies (P&As), and DD Councils—show how UCEDDs provide university-based research, training, technical assistance, and community service. Explaining the value of UCEDDs should be done without saying bad things about the IL programs, P&As, DD Councils or others—we all need each other.
2. **Explain that UCEDDs are established under the DD Act** and must meet specific federal requirements that support their work.
3. **Explain that UCEDDs need to stay as independent, university-affiliated centers**, which keeps their ability to respond to state and community needs.

Resources:

- [The Origins of University Centers on Developmental Disabilities: Early Expectations and Legislation](#)
- [ACL Fact Sheet: University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service \(UCEDDs\)](#)
- [The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act](#)
- [Committee Report: The Training and Research for Autism Improvements Nationwide \(TRAIN\) Act](#)