

AFRICAN  AMERICAN  
CONFERENCE ON DISABILITIES

# 2024 Conference Recap

## June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Hyatt Regency, Downtown  
Phoenix, Arizona



A celebration of 13 consecutive years bringing  
the disability community together.

## Conference Summary

[Disability Rights Arizona](#) proudly hosted the in-person 2024 African American Conference on Disabilities at the [Hyatt Regency](#) in downtown Phoenix. It is the premiere comprehensive disability conference in the United States and had a record number of sponsors, vendors and attendees from Arizona and several states. The conference's 19 unique disability related workshops covered topics that addressed the intersection between race and disabilities and examined avenues for self-advocacy to ensure the effective provision of services, resources, and enforcement of civil rights in the African American and disability communities with a focus in Arizona.

Link to the conference workshop presentations: [2024 AACD Presentations](#)

[2024's Virtual Conference](#): Disability Rights Arizona held a virtual conference in February in honor of Black History Month as a platform to reach a broader national and international audience and as a prelude to June's in-person conference.

*We encourage you to forward this conference recap to your networks.*

## Message from

*J. J. Rico, CEO, Disability Rights Arizona*

Thank you to all of our supporters, attendees, presenters, organizers, and vendors for putting on our outstanding, dynamic 13<sup>th</sup> Annual African American Conference on Disabilities. We were impressed by the turnout and the community engagement at this year's conference.

It is an honor to be involved with a conference that has such a large impact on the community, not only locally in Arizona, but throughout the country and internationally, as well.

I encourage all participants to take what they have learned from the conference to empower their community. We also encourage everyone to vote in the upcoming elections to ensure their voice is heard and counted.

We will continue to hold our conference in 2025, but in order for that to become a reality, ***we need your financial support and sponsorship.***

Again, thank you and I hope to see you at the 2025 conference.

*-- J. J. Rico*

## Special Thank You To...

**Conference Founders:** Thank you for your vision and creating a conference that brings together organizations and individuals in the disability community.

- Renaldo Fowler, Disability Rights Arizona
- David Carey, Arizona Statewide Independent Living Council

**To all of the ASL and CART interpreters:** Thank you for making the conference fully accessible to all our attendees.

**Master of Ceremonies: Michael Kelly, Kelly Consulting Alliance.** Thank you for providing energetic narration and reminding attendees that the purpose of the conference is to inform, advocate, and collaborate on disability related issues.

### Video Welcomes:

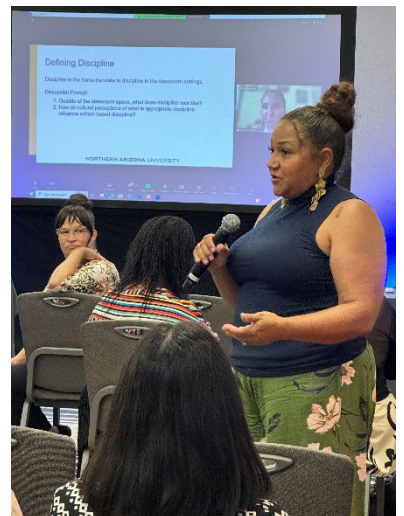
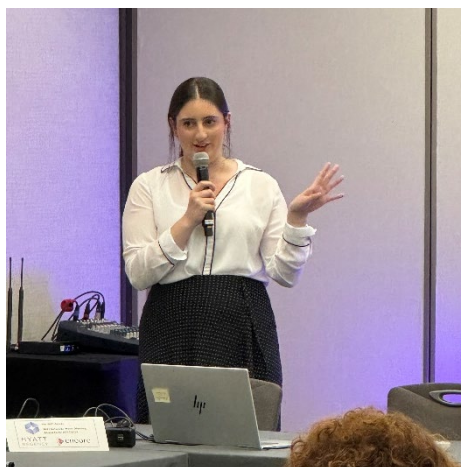
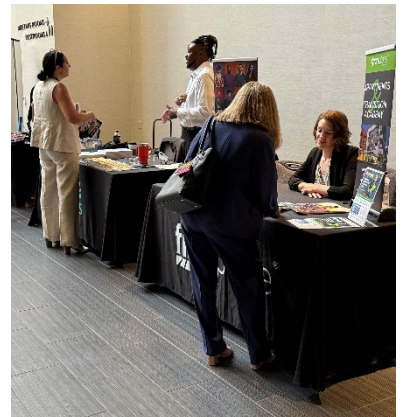
- **The Honorable Mark Kelly, U.S. Senate, Arizona.** Thank you for your continued support and advocacy for Arizona's individuals with disabilities.
- **The Honorable Ruben Gallego, U.S. House of Representatives, Arizona.** Thank you for supporting and protecting benefits for veterans with disabilities.
- **The Honorable Greg Stanton, U.S. House of Representatives, Arizona.** Thank your dedication to improve transportation and mobility for individuals with disabilities.
- **The Honorable Katie Hobbs, Governor of Arizona.** Thank you for striving for equal access for all Arizonans and the tools and resources to reach their full potential.

**Opening Keynote Speaker: Dr. Lydia Ocasio-Stoutenburg, Penn State University.** Thank you for sharing your personal stories with us and the legacies of family, disability, and community advocacy.

**Lunch Keynote Panel: Adrian Fontes, Arizona Secretary of State; Tom Collins, AZ Citizens Clean Elections Commission; and Thomas Hicks, US Election Assistance Commission.** Thank you for your passionate discussion to attendees on the importance of voting, especially, at the local level.

**Closing Keynote Speaker: Michael Moore, CISO, Arizona Secretary of State.** Thank you for your informative and chilling account on how generative AI will be used to deceive voters to impact the outcomes of elections and what to watch out for.

**The [Hyatt Regency Phoenix](#) Staff.** Thank you Jamie, Megan, Yardena, and all the Hyatt staff for their seamless efforts and excellent service to go above and beyond to provide us the outstanding facilities to host our conference.



Conference Host



Principle Sponsors



## Comments by Attendees

*“I had a very eye opening experience in this session. Learning where trauma comes from, especially in women from generation to generation and so on...”*

**- Conference Attendee**

*“We are all well taken care of during the conference. I appreciate the diversity the conference brings each year. I enjoy having time built into the schedule to visit with all the resource tables.”*

**- Conference Attendee**

*“I was happy to learn that there are more opportunities for people of color to get gainfully employed, I am still seeing that there is a great need in the rural communities, as far as rides, as in independence of the member, education, outreach, consistently in those areas.”*

**- Conference Attendee**

*“Great information on specific topics. Information is empowering and it promotes better advocacy.”*

**- Conference Attendee**

## Conference by the Numbers

- Workshops: 19
- Sponsors and Vendors: 53
- Attendees: 425 plus
- Attendees from throughout Arizona, several states, and Washington, D.C.
- United Healthcare Community Plan (UHCP) sponsored scholarships for 39 health care professionals
- Free Vaccination Clinic supported by UHCP: Attendees were able to receive vaccinations in a private setting
- Voter Registration Table: Registered numerous attendees and demonstrated new ‘accessible’ voting machines

## Master of Ceremonies: Michael Kelly, Manager, Kelly Consulting Alliance



Michael Kelly is currently the Manager for Kelly Consulting Alliance, a Phoenix based business consulting firm that specializes in state, municipal and local economic development advocacy, management, public relations, marketing consultation and power networking. He is also the Chair of the Ellis Center for Education Excellence - a support organization at the Arizona Community Foundation (ACF). Michael is also the President of The Leadership Consortium (TLC), a non-profit, that historically, provides scholarships to low income and special-needs children to attend private K-12 schools. TLC currently sponsors and hosts educational programs to the Congressional Black Caucus Annual Legislative Conference and is an advocate for all forms of education in Arizona.

## Keynote Panelist: Adrian Fontes, [Arizona Secretary of State](#)



In 2022, Adrian Fontes was elected as Arizona's 21st Secretary of State. Secretary Fontes is a proud Arizona native, an honorable veteran of the United States Marine Corps, and the father of three daughters, who has spent a lifetime fighting for justice and defending our Democracy. As Maricopa County Recorder, Secretary Fontes revolutionized the election system by ensuring that every eligible Arizonan had the access they needed to vote. Adrian enhanced ballot tracking technology and increased process transparency, winning recognition and awards from election organizations across the country. Secretary Fontes is committed to preserving integrity in our elections, making voting easier for registered voters, and ensuring that Arizona's business community has a non-partisan partner in the Secretary's office.



**Keynote Panelist: Tom Collins, Executive Director, [Arizona Citizens Clean Elections Commission](#)**



As [Tom Collins](#) is responsible for day-to-day operations for the Commission, a five-member board that administrates and enforces Arizona's Citizens Clean Elections Act, including its education and campaign finance programs. Collins was an assistant attorney general for the Arizona Attorney General's office, focused on election law, appeals, and attorney general opinions. He clerked for Justice Scott Bales (2005-06) and the late Justice Michael Ryan (2007-10) of the Arizona Supreme Court..



**Keynote Panelist: Commissioner Thomas Hicks, [US Election Assistance Commission](#)**



Thomas Hicks was nominated by President Barack H. Obama and confirmed by unanimous consent of the United States Senate on December 16, 2014 to serve on the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC). Mr. Hicks currently serves as the Designated Federal Officer (DFO) of the Board of Advisors.

Commissioner Hicks has focused his efforts on voter access. Under his leadership, the EAC developed a pocket-sized [voter card](#) that serves as a guide on voting rights for voters with disabilities. The card is provided in both Braille and large print.



Mr. Hicks continues to emphasize the need for more young people to become involved as poll workers and in the voting process.



**Opening Keynote Speaker: Lydia Ocasio-Stoutenburg, PhD,**  
Assistant Professor of Special Education, [Penn State Dept. of  
Educational Psychology, Counseling and Special Education](#)



As a researcher in special education, Lydia Ocasio-Stoutenburg employs qualitative inquiry, using ethnographic approaches to center the voices and opportunities for children and their caregivers at the intersection of racialized, disabled and other historically marginalized identities.

Her work focuses on students of color with disabilities and their families who have been historically and pervasively marginalized — excluded from opportunities due to systemic racism, ableism and other inequities.”

**Closing Keynote Speaker: Michael Moore,** Chief information  
Security Officer, [Arizona Secretary of State](#)



Mr. Moore gave an outstanding closing keynote on the threat to elections using the powers of generative AI including how it is being used to create “deepfakes” impersonations of people’s likeness and voice to deceive, disinform and misinform for the purpose of disenfranchising voters.

He gave a live demonstration on how easy it is to create false media using Commissioner Thomas Hick’s likeness and voice (with Mr. Hick’s permission).

## **Workshop 1: Exploring the Triple A Effect – through the many Hats of Advocacy**

**Kim Moore**, Disability Advocate.

**Natassia Williamson**, FNP-C, CHC, [Aurora Maternal and Family Healthcare](#)

Kim and Natassia explored the diverse roles that caregivers undertake to Articulate, Anticipate, and Advocate for themselves. They stressed knowing what to ask for, how to ask, when to ask, and how to influence favorable outcomes by being prepared to tell their ‘needs’ story. With a supportive community behind them, caregivers are encouraged not to hesitate in seeking assistance when needed!

## **Workshop 2: Pregnancy Experiences of Black and Latina Mothers with Physical Disabilities: A Peer Research Model**

**Janelle Mills**, MSW, [Brandeis University - The Lurie Institute for Disability Policy](#)

Janelle eloquently stated the higher disparities that Black and Latina pregnant women are experiencing and how her on-going research study is designed to understand their perspectives, unmet healthcare needs, and barriers to pre- and post-natal care. Her study’s goal is to gain insights to make recommendations to improve pregnancy health care outcomes for disabled Black and Latina women.

## **Workshop 3: An International Prospective on Trauma: Common Threads from Phoenix to Nairobi**

**Carlian Dawson**, PhD, Director, [Arizona Center for African American Resources](#)

Carlian guided attendees through the intersectionality of trauma, being disabled, and its effects and manifestations on individuals. Factors such as historical trauma, discrimination, lack of resources and support systems all play a part in the unique challenges facing individuals with disabilities and their caretakers. She discussed how to overcome these factors through resiliency, strength, and drawing on their community. Attendees shared their life experiences dealing with trauma through their emotional, heart-felt stories.

## Workshop 4: The Kingman Project

**Carol Bailey**, Kingman Correctional and Rehabilitation Facility

**Alycia Botkin**, Rehabilitation Services Administration

**Genise Burnett, SLPA, ATP**, Assistive Technology Professional

**Dr. Garner**, National Director of Vocational Programs

The panelists gave an overview of [The Kingman Project](#) roadmap to successful re-entry for prisoners with disabilities into the workforce. The panelist laid out the project's three action steps to achieve their objective through a collaboration with state and local agencies plus community organizations; sustainability, access to community resources, and to educate officers, re-entry centers, and other organizations.

## Workshop 5: AZ Able Accounts: Groundbreaking Accounts that Protect Benefits and Build Financial Security

**Brittaney M. Chipley MPA**, Executive Director, [AZ ABLE, State of Arizona DES](#)

Brittaney provided an overview of AZ ABLE Accounts during the workshop. She covered their fundamental aspects such as eligibility criteria and the application process for individuals with disabilities. Brittaney also detailed funding opportunities, gifting policies, investment choices, and guidelines on spending from the account, highlighting how AZ ABLE Accounts safeguard benefits while promoting financial stability.

## Workshop 6: Special Education 101

**Amanda Glass, Esq.**, Managing Attorney, Education Team, [Disability Rights AZ](#)

Targeted for audience with legal backgrounds, Amanda outlined, from an attorney's point of view, the basics of what special education is, who is eligible, relevant federal and state laws, and what parents and caregivers can expect for their child while enrolled.

## **Workshop 7: How to Reach a Successful Employment Goal with the Help of AZ Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services**

**Velda Crawley and Valerie Warner**, Vocational Rehabilitation Clients  
**Linda Fischer**, Sr. Staff Advocate, [Disability Rights AZ](#)

Velda and Valerie shared their personal stories on how using the federal and state funded Vocational Rehabilitation program enhanced their lives as individuals with disabilities to find and maintain employment opportunities. They also gave an overview of the Client Assistance Program (CAP) that advises clients and applicants of all the services and benefits that available to them.

## **Workshop 8: Fair Housing: Reasonable Accommodations and Modifications Under Fair Housing**

**Skylar Colavito**, Staff Attorney, [Disability Rights AZ](#)  
**Joseph Falcon-Freeman**, Staff Attorney, [Disability Rights AZ](#)

The presenters gave an overview, from a legal perspective, of the basics of Fair Housing Act protections that included reasonable accommodations, FHA definition of disability, undue burden, service animals, several real-life examples and their outcomes.

## **Workshop 9: Breaking Barriers, Creating Futures: Redefining Educational Pathways, Empowerment, and Unity for Black Girls and Women Across Generations – Part 1**

**Sakénya McDonald, PhD**, Assistant Director, Academic Programs, [Institute for Human Development \(UCEDD\), Northern Arizona University](#)  
**Rasheera Dopson, MPH**, Inclusive Excellence & Diversity Fellow, Institute of Human Development, PhD student at [Northern Arizona University, Interdisciplinary Health & Disability Studies](#), Northern Arizona Regional Behavioral Health Authority Fellow

Part 1 of this interactive workshop with attendees focused on exploring systemic barriers, and inspire action to address the inequities of educating Black disabled girls and women. Using the LIFT Model - Listen, Identify, Forward, and Trust attendees broke into small group discussions with specific actions to foster awareness and advocate for better educational and policy outcomes.

## Workshop 10: Patient Success: Accommodating Patients with Disabilities in Healthcare Settings and Beyond

**Sey In**, Esq., Staff Attorney, [Disability Rights AZ](#)

**Kim Minard**, Deaf Specialist, [Arizona Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)

**Madisyn Puchebner**, Staff Attorney, [Disability Rights AZ](#)

This informative workshop focused on the legal aspects of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) and the Affordable Care Act (ACA), actual case examples, communicating with patients with disabilities, and eligibility criteria for Arizona Disability Access Benefits.

## Workshop 11: Meeting the Needs of Students with Chronic Health Conditions

**Joyce Boudoin**, Safe at School Advocate, American Diabetes Association

**Madisyn Puchebner**, Staff Attorney, [Disability Rights AZ](#)

**Maa-Ohui Quarmyne**, MD, Staff Physician, [Phoenix Children's Hospital](#), Clinical Associate Professor, [University of Arizona College of Medicine](#)

The panel outlined federal and state laws that apply to students with chronic health conditions and strategies for developing a Section 504 Plan-Diabetes specific (accommodations and modifications). Attendees were given condition-specific legal statutes and outside resources to reference to assist them with meeting the needs of their student when dealing with school administrators and teachers.

## Workshop 12: Trust and Inclusive Elections

**Ben Jackson**, Sr. Subject Matter Expert, [U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#)

**Monica Wiley**, Voter Engagement Specialist, [National Disability Rights Network](#)

With the 2024 elections underway, Ben and Monica gave attendees the state of election accessibility, how it relates to voter trust, inclusivity, and accessibility best practices for individuals with disabilities. They emphasized that inclusive voting opens opportunities for marginalized people to access resources that will redistribute power and influence policy.

## Workshop 13: Refugee Perspectives on Accessing Disability Services in Arizona

**Jacy K. Farkas, MA, ABD**, Assist Director, UCEDD Training Director, [University of Arizona Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities](#)

**Julie Armin, PhD.**, Assoc. Professor, Dept. of Family and Community Medicine, Affiliated Faculty, [University of Arizona Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities](#)

The presenters highlighted the difficulty of refugees accessing disability services in Arizona and attendees gave their heart-felt personal and family accounts as well. Cultural and language barriers were amongst the top barriers, which were also reflected in a recent Arizona Refugees with Disabilities status report.

## Workshop 14: Breaking Barriers, Creating Futures: Redefining Educational Pathways, Empowerment, and Unity for Black Girls and Women Across Generations – Part 2

**Rasheera Dopson, MPH**, Inclusive Excellence & Diversity Fellow, Institute of Human Development, PhD student at [Northern Arizona University, Interdisciplinary Health & Disability Studies](#), Northern Arizona Regional Behavioral Health Authority Fellow

**Sakénya McDonald, PhD**, Assistant Director, Academic Programs, [Institute for Human Development \(UCEDD\), Northern Arizona University](#)

Part 2 of the interactive workshop focused on the barriers, biases and societal factor which de-prioritize the educational needs of Black Disabled Girls and Women (BDG&W) and the disproportionate use of disciplinary actions to dominate them. Group activities included a short ‘free-writing’ exercise for attendees to write what comes to mind as significant barriers facing BDG&W.

## Workshop 15: Employment Programs for Youth and the Impact on our Communities

**Lisa Ayo**, Vocational Specialist, [University of Arizona Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities](#)

Lisa outlined the opportunities and disparities facing disabled teens and post-secondary youth in Arizona. She included a historical data on the disproportionality Black disabled youth face when finding employment opportunities. Lisa also spoke about engaging with the University of Arizona's [Project SEARCH](#), which prepares young people with disabilities with a one-year transition program to successfully find and maintain employment.

## Workshop 16: Special Education Dispute Resolution: 2024 Update

**Amanda Glass, Esq.**, Managing Attorney, Education Team, [Disability Rights AZ](#)

Amanda outlined the process on how to file a special education complaint, procedural safeguards, methods of dispute resolution, Administrative State Complaints, and Office of Civil Rights Complaints. Families and service provider organization attendees also learned of the latest changes and updates on how dispute resolution systems operate and how to navigate them.

## Workshop 17: Embracing Identity – Arizona Young Adult Leaders

**Calvin Cook**, Alumni Relations Champion, [Diverse Ability Inc](#)

**Panelists: Claire Adams, Audra Paletta, Oakley Priddy, and Isaac Zwinger-Nathanson**

Calvin and the panelists had a lively and informative discussion with attendees on embracing who they are while managing bias and celebrating all their diversity within the disabled community. Numerous questions were asked regarding strategies to shift perceptions and beliefs in the wider community. Responses emphasized the use of empowered language—both person-first and identity-first—and encouraged individuals to embrace self-leadership.

## Workshop 18: Making Work, Work: Using the ADA to Improve Employment Outcomes for People with Traumatic Brain Injuries

Maya S. Abela, Deputy Legal Director, [Disability Rights AZ](#)

Maya outlined what is considered a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and how using the ADA can improve employment outcomes. Attendees asked several questions regarding employer accommodations and an employer's responsibility to provide them. Maya addressed hypothetical situations for attendee to consider on employer's accommodations for individuals with TBI in different scenarios.

## Workshop 19: Civil Rights and Adult Guardianship

Sey In, Esq., Staff Attorney, [Disability Rights AZ](#)

Tiffany Thornhill, MSW, MPA, Program Coordinator Senior, President, [Arizona State University Ed Pastor Center of Politics and Public Service](#)

Sey and Tiffany went through the troubled history of guardianship, the types of guardianship and five alternatives to guardianship. Attendees expressed their personal stories on the complexities of navigating guardianship along with asking questions to Sey and Tiffany. Due to the intricacies of guardianship, attendees left the workshop equipped with a better understanding of alternatives to promote greater self-determination for persons with a disability, their civil rights, and to seek legal counsel if necessary.

### 2024 AACD In-Person Conference Workshop Presentations:

Link: [2024 AACD Workshop Presentations](#)

### 2024 AACD February Virtual Conference Workshop Videos:

Link: [2024 AACD Virtual Conference workshop videos](#)



**To all Conference Sponsors and Vendors.** Thank you! Your generous support continues to allow us to give scholarships to families in need to attend the conference. Our attendees appreciated our vendors' in-depth information and sharing their expertise. Again, thank you, and we look forward to your continued support for 2025's conference.

- [American Association of People with Disabilities \(REV UP\)](#)
- [American Network of Community Options and Resources \(ANCOR\)](#)
- [Arizona Autism United \(AZA United\)](#)
- [Arizona Center for African American Resources \(AZCAAR\)](#)
- [Arizona Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)
- [Arizona Complete Health](#)
- [Arizona Dept. of Economic Security Division of Aging Services](#)
- [Arizona Dept. of Economic Security Division of Developmental Disabilities](#)
- [Arizona Dept. of Economic Security Division Early Intervention Program](#)
- [Arizona Dept. of Economic Security Vocational Rehabilitation Services](#)
- [Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council](#)
- [Arizona State University Disability Studies Program](#)
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- [Arizona Statewide Independent Living Council](#)
- [Arizona Talking Book](#)
- [Arizona Technology Access Program \(AzTAP\)](#)
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- [Southwest Human Development Parents Partner Plus](#)
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- [TD SYNEX](#)
- [The ARC of Arizona](#)
- [United Healthcare Community Plan](#)
- [University of Arizona Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities](#)
- [Valley Toyota Dealers](#)

## For More Information...

For more information about the African American Conference on Disabilities or to become a sponsor or vendor for 2025's virtual and in-person conferences, please contact:

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### **Disability Rights Arizona**

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