

JANUARY 2026

The Olmstead Commission's goal is to move North Dakota towards greater integration and inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT

NDDAC Advocacy Call: Money Follows the Person

January 5th at 12pm

NDDAC Advocacy Call: Money Follows the Person

January 5th at 7:30pm

Cross Disability Advisory Council

January 8th from 9am- 5pm

North Dakota Stakeholder Meeting

January 9th at 1pm

Olmstead Commission Advisory Council Meeting

January 7th at 1pm

Click here to
watch the full
documentary



NEXT OLMSTEAD

MEETING:

Wednesday, February 4th
1-3pm in the Peace Garden
Room at the Capitol

Discussion Topics:
Goal #7- Employment
Goal #4- Housing

Willowbrook: The Last Great Disgrace

Marking the Anniversary of the Exposé

Willowbrook State School, located in New York, opened in 1948 as the nation's largest institution for individuals with disabilities, promising care, safety, and support. Instead, it became a place of neglect, disease, and inhumanity. Understaffed and overcrowded, children were left for hours without basic care, while nearly every resident contracted hepatitis.

The truth began to emerge after Senator Robert Kennedy's 1965 visit, but real change came in 1972 when Geraldo Rivera's exposé *Willowbrook: The Last Disgrace* revealed the horrific conditions to the world. His unannounced visit showed children living in filth, many left unattended for long periods due to severe understaffing.

The public outrage that followed became a turning point for disability rights, exposing systemic abuse and promoting community-based care and respect for individuals with disabilities. This movement helped pave the way for the landmark *Olmstead v. L.C.* (1999) ruling, which affirmed the right to live in the community rather than institutions when appropriate supports are available.



Willowbrook showed us
the cost of segregation.

Olmstead shows us
the path to inclusion.



Geraldo Rivera, the investigative reporter who exposed the conditions inside Willowbrook, once explained how the title of his now-famous exposé came to be. On the day Rivera entered Willowbrook with his camera crew, Bernard Carabello, who had spent 18 years confined in the institution, was finally being signed out on his 21st birthday. Rivera interviewed Bernard for the documentary, and the two formed a lifelong friendship. During that first interview, Rivera asked him, "What do you think about this place?" Bernard replied simply, "It's a disgrace." From those words came the title: *Willowbrook: The Last Great Disgrace*.

Watch the interview from NYS Council on Developmental Disabilities:
[Remembering Willowbrook: A conversation with Bernard Carabello and Geraldo Rivera](#)



The 2025 ND Olmstead Commission Annual Report is now available on the Olmstead Commission website.

This year, we've worked hard to deliver on our mission, grow our initiatives, and strive for meaningful impact.

Our annual report highlights the progress, projects, and achievements that define this year.

DECEMBER 2025

NORTH DAKOTA OLMSTEAD COMMISSION

THE COMMISSION

- 11 Voting Members
- 8 Non-Voting Members
- 1 Commission Coordinator

OUR PURPOSE

Mission: Move North Dakota toward greater integration and inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

Vision: Individuals with disabilities can live, learn, work, travel, and enjoy life in the most integrated setting possible.

Values: Individuals with disabilities have the same basic human rights, options, and control over choices in their lives as any other citizen.

Objective: Implement the Olmstead decision by ensuring access to appropriate community-based services to individuals with disabilities.

6 PROGRAMS HIGHLIGHTED

Olmstead Conference learning, networking, six programs. Follows the Person, The Arc, 1915C, force and Technology Center all presented, resources available to North Dakota.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Community Services and Supports** Services and support for individuals with disabilities must be provided in the least restrictive setting.
- Employment** Individuals with disabilities must have access to competitive, integrated employment aligned with their interests.
- Housing** Homes should be affordable, accessible, and fully integrated into communities where those with and without disabilities live together.
- Healthcare** Individuals with disabilities have the right to participate in their healthcare needs, including choice of providers and services received.
- Transportation** Community transportation must be accessible, reliable, efficient, and available to individuals with and without disabilities.
- Education** Individuals with disabilities are entitled to education in the same setting as their peers, to the fullest extent possible.
- Cooperative Partnerships** State Agencies - Advocates - Non-Profits - Service Providers - Stakeholders - Community Partners

DELIVERING ON OUR MISSION

- Outreach**
- Collaboration**
- Advocacy**
- Communications**
- Community Engagement**

HOW WE STAY CONNECTED

- Monthly Check-Ins** Commissioner Co-Chairs in with the Commission Co-Chairs at least once a month to provide updates and ensure alignment on priorities.
- Quarterly Commission Meetings** The Commission convenes to review policies and systems, discuss statewide services, and offer recommendations aimed at better serving individuals with disabilities.
- Public Comment** The Commission welcomes feedback from the public through comments at quarterly meetings or via email and phone.

LET'S STAY CONNECTED!

Sign up to receive Olmstead news and updates. Visit our website and social media for more information and resources.



Stephanie Bouche
Olmstead Coordinator

WWW.OLMSTEAD.ND.GOV

