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KIMBERLY G. JACKSON

LAW, POLICY, AND ADVOCACY



PROUD ASPY MOM · SEPTEMBER 2026

Take a DEEP Breath



The disability community is collectively experiencing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Parents, caregivers and loved ones have anxiety over changes in Community Home Based Support, how to pay for ABA therapies, loss of educators who are either certified or have significant experience with persons with disabilities, administrative overload, transitions or aging out and overall balance.

Please Pause and take a minute to breathe. My older daughter recently reminded me that we cannot pour from an empty cup.

Is CHOICE an option?

Parents have difficult decisions in our state.

> *Should they send their children to public school?*
>
> *Should they send their children to private school?*
>
> *Should they send their children to a charter school?*
>
> *Should they homeschool their children?*
>
> *How should families pay for school?*
>
> *Most importantly, will the school meet their children's needs?*

Parents with children with unique abilities have tougher decisions. In Florida, the educational system is complex. Students with physical and/or invisible disabilities often require accommodations. While these accommodations are protected under federal and state law, those protections do not port over to the private educational system. This means students may take state funds in the form of vouchers but may not have the ability to use the support provided.

A recent article shed light on this issue. The story follows a family struggling to utilize state structural support, but unfortunately they cannot use the funds because the private

schools the family was interested in could not provide accommodations.

> *"Therein lies the catch in "school choice" for children like Amelia. Unlike public schools, private ones generally aren't required to educate students with disabilities. And they often don't.*
>
> *The choice wasn't hers, Johnson realized. It was the schools'. The vouchers "are basically designed to make you go to private school," Johnson said, "but my kid can't access private school."*
>
> JENNIFER BERRY HAWES AND JENNIFER SMITH RICHARDS, PROPUBLICA ›

We have work to do in our state. Florida has more than 500 new residents **EACH** day. Many of these new residents will come to our state with a loved one with a disability. We will have to educate parents on their options and provide a realistic view of what accommodations look like in all educational settings.

READ THE PROPUBLICA INVESTIGATION

FLORIDA CHAMBER MID-YEAR REPORT

Right to Work!

Recently I have received several calls about how recipients with Social Security Income keep their benefits while they work. Working should not be complex. If a person with a disability wants to work — we should encourage them to do so. While some persons with disabilities have more elaborate issues that require legal guidance — persons with less complicated resources should utilize Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA).

The Ticket to Work program created in 1999 allows individuals to contact WIPA staff and learn how to maintain their benefits as they enter the workforce or while they continue to work.

The goal is simple — help people HELP themselves.

On October 28th the Organization will hold a webinar to educate beneficiaries.

The more you know!

SSA WORK INCENTIVES (WIPA) | SSA PROTECTION & ADVOCACY

JOIN THE OCTOBER 28 WISE WEBINAR

Why does Florida have MILLIONS of dollars of unspent funds for persons with disabilities?

Over the summer I took time to explain what the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) is, the purpose of the Agency, its history and why families are suffering because they do not have true access to the support available from the agency. Many families have reached out to me directly to share their stories and lament over losing their jobs, becoming full-time caregivers or the toll that lack of support takes on their families. I do not have much more to say on this issue, but I will continue to shed light because education is a key component of my value system. If you know someone with a disability, please let them know they are not alone. Our leaders know we have to deal with the waitlists associated with the APD, particularly in a challenging economic climate.

> *"Children die on the waitlist. It is absurd. What are we doing? The money is sitting there, sitting there. A billion dollars unspent on*

> *people who need care. It's unfathomable," State Rep. Kelly Skidmore (D-Boca Raton) said.*
>
> STATE REP. KELLY SKIDMORE, VIA FOX 13 ›

We can and should expect more when resources are available. If the money is there — what are we using it for?

READ ALICE IN FOCUS | READ THE FOX 13 REPORT

SPOTLIGHT



We are Empty Nesters again

At some point you are not in charge anymore. Parenting has a rhythm that you cannot predict. Our daughter made a firm decision to return back to school to continue her journey of independence. This stage of life is difficult for all young adults, and for those on the spectrum even more so in some ways. It is never lost on my husband and I how much we prayed for her ability to make decisions, understand them and take the lead

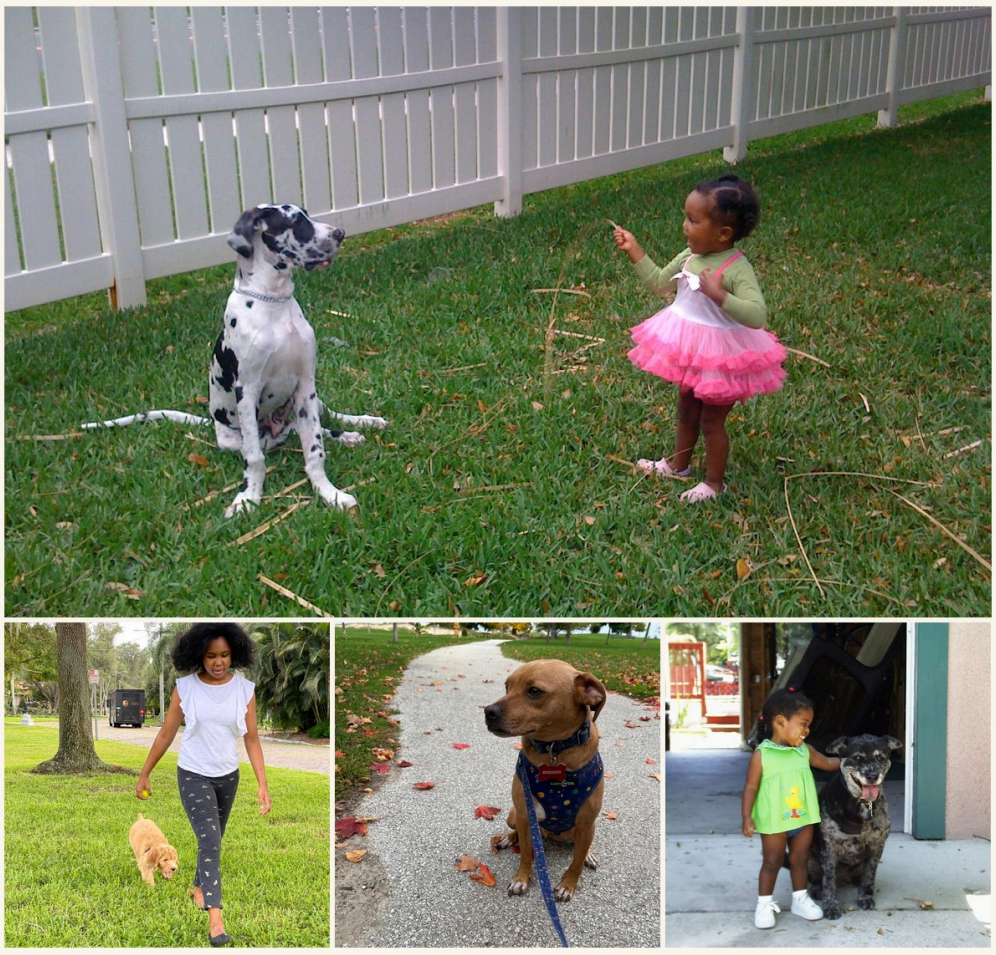
in her own story. She is off on another new adventure and we could not be prouder of her determination to grow.

Teen's Best Friend — Makes Sense

Our family loves dogs. In fact, we have had a dog our entire lives. Hamlet was our first dog. He was our first "child," a Chow mixed with an Akita. Magic was our second dog and our first true family member. He was a Harlequin Great Dane.

And now our youngest daughter has Milo, a sheepadoodle.

(I would be remiss if I did not mention our older daughter's dog, Schmidt — a beautiful complex mutt).



The point is our family understands the importance of the unconditional love an animal brings to one's daily life. A new

study by Tufts confirms this notion and highlights the positive impact dogs have on teenagers.

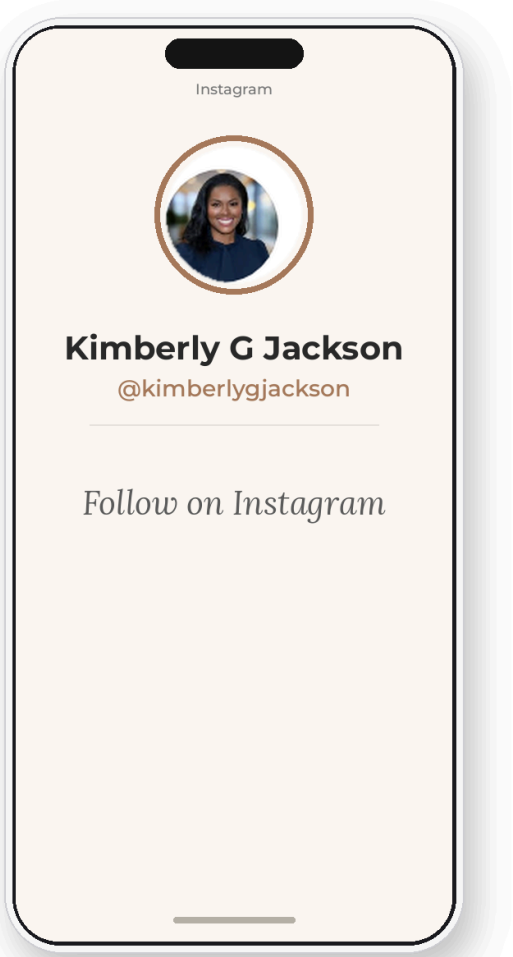
The study found that both companionship and caring for the dog were linked to adolescents coping with peer stress in healthier ways, such as through problem solving, positive thinking, emotional regulation, and emotional expression.

I could not agree more and believe their companionship is more important to persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder. We brought Milo home during COVID. It was at a time when we thought our daughter would suffer without true companionship. Little did we know the many ways Milo would enhance our daughter's life. His constant protection, emotional connection, and devotion help our daughter process in immeasurable ways. Dogs are more than man's best friend.

> *"Future studies will help us understand that relationship and other potential dynamics at play more clearly," Mueller said. "We're now following teens and their dogs over time to better understand how these relationships develop and whether factors such as a dog's personality, behavior, and compatibility with a teen influence their coping and well-being."*
>
> MEGAN MUELLER, TUFTS NOW ›

READ THE TUFTS NOW ARTICLE

ON INSTAGRAM



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Keep up between issues — on the blog, in the archive, and online.

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With gratitude,

KIMBERLY G. JACKSON

ATTORNEY · ADVOCATE · SPEAKER

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kimberlygjackson.com

You are receiving this because you are part of the Proud Aspy Mom community.

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