

Application: Autism Alliance of Michigan / Systemic State Complaint Project

Autism Alliance of Michigan
Administration of Justice Grant Program

Summary

ID: AOJ2025--0000000077

Last submitted: Oct 9 2025 06:47 PM (EDT)

Eligibility Criteria

Completed - Oct 9 2025

Form for "Eligibility Criteria"

Criteria

For this source of funding, grant proposals that include the following are favored.

You must check all that apply to this funding request.

Responses Selected:

Demonstrate innovative approaches or new ideas
Benefit Michigan residents
Demonstrate community support, collaboration, partnerships, and links with other entities doing similar work
Avoid duplication of service
Have multiple funding sources
Have potential for applicability or replication in other parts of the state
Include a meaningful evaluation component
Show a history of quality service and fiscal responsibility

For this source of funding, grants are not made for the following.

Please check any item(s) below which applies to this funding request (check all that apply).

No Responses Selected

Administration of Justice Grant Application

Administration of Justice Grant Application

Organizational Overview

1. Describe how you learned of this grant opportunity:

We learned of this opportunity through the GrantWatch directory of available grant opportunities.

2. If you are not an annual grantee of the Michigan State Bar Foundation, please briefly describe your organization's mission:

Guided by the vision that people with autism will lead lives that meet their greatest potential, AAoM's mission is to lead efforts to raise expectations and expand opportunities for autistic people and their loved ones across the lifespan. Autism is a lifelong and complex neurological disability affecting behavior, social communication, and all areas of daily life. It is found across all races and languages as well as geographical and socioeconomic communities.

AAoM's work is rooted in the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice – with a strategic focus on dismantling systemic barriers in education and related systems. Through its Education Pillar, AAoM drives student-centered advocacy, equips families with knowledge and tools to navigate the special education system, and works to ensure all students with disabilities have access to high-quality, inclusive learning environments. Central to AAoM's mission is improving schools and community supports, expanding access to care, strengthening special education outcomes, and promoting employment and independent-living opportunities for people with disabilities. By addressing systemic inequities and empowering families, AAoM strives to make Michigan a top-10 state in preparing students with disabilities for the most independent life possible.

3. If you are not an annual grantee of the Michigan State Bar Foundation, please briefly describe your organization's history:

Founded in 2009 by parents committed to changing the landscape for people with disabilities, AAoM has grown to serve over 50,000 Michigan residents. AAoM strives to be a place of hope. Where autistic adults and children can feel understood, valued, and accepted, and where caregivers can feel heard, supported, and embraced. Through our three Pillars of Work—Early Access, Education, and Adult Life Pathways—AAoM provides tools and resources to help autistic individuals and families thrive.

In its early years, AAoM played a pivotal role in the 2012 autism insurance reform legislation, expanding access to essential services for thousands of Michigan families. This policy win underscored the need for long-term, systemic change in both healthcare and education—laying the foundation for AAoM's continued work in policy, family support, and systems transformation.

This momentum laid the groundwork for the formal launch of AAoM's Education systems level efforts in 2019, which aimed to address the persistent disparities and barriers facing Michigan students with disabilities. The Education pillar is a leader statewide encompassing coalition-building, data-informed advocacy, policy reform, and public education.

Today, AAoM's Education Pillar leads initiatives such as the Michigan Parent, Advocate & Attorney Coalition (MiPAAC), the Special Education Experience (SEE) Survey, the Special Education Finance Reform Blueprint, and Michigan's first-ever Special Education Benchmark Report. Central to these efforts is the State Complaint Project, a bold, data-driven initiative designed to expand access to justice, highlight systemic trends, and equip families with the knowledge and tools to understand and exercise their legal rights in the education system.

4. If you are not an annual grantee of the Michigan State Bar Foundation, please briefly describe your organization's major achievements:

Briefly describe your organization's major achievements:

- Navigation Program: Supported over 14,000 families statewide through AAoM's MiNavigator line; in 2024, assisted 3,311 new and returning families with individualized consultation.

- Safety Program: Distributed 730 GPS tracking units to families of children at risk of wandering; 96 devices provided in 2024.

- Outreach: Conducted 146 presentations, attended 189 events, delivered 58 trainings reaching 3,124 caregivers and professionals, and distributed information to 21,587 individuals who reached out to us for resources.

- Education Initiatives: Advanced systemic reforms to remove barriers and improve outcomes through policy advocacy to broaden literacy access for all students across Michigan, served as the backbone organization for coalition-building through a grassroots network of over 400 members (parents, advocates, attorneys) alongside partner organizations, and led a statewide stakeholder process through a legislative-appropriated project to develop a new finance structure for special education.

- Employment Program: Expanded supports for autistic adults transitioning into the workforce, including resources for employer education and candidate skill development.

5. List the dates, purposes and outcomes of any prior applications for Michigan State Bar Foundation funds submitted within the last six years. (Date, Title of Project/Purpose, Approved/Denied/Pending)

N/A

Project Overview

1. Title of project:

Know Your Rights: Empowering Michigan Families on Special Education Rights

2. Amount Requested:

\$ 50,000

3. Anticipated beginning date (mm/dd/yyyy):

11/01/2025

4. Anticipated completion date (mm/dd/yyyy):

10/31/2026

5. In 125 words or less, describe a brief summary of the grant request covering the needs to be addressed, methods, target audience and anticipated outcomes.

This grant will support hosting ten “Know Your Rights” workshops across Michigan to educate families on their special education rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Each two-hour session will cover topics including child find/eligibility, least restrictive environment, procedural safeguards, and the state complaint process. Participants will learn how to file a written state complaint—a low-cost, accessible mechanism for addressing violations of students’ legal rights. Approximately 200 participants are expected, including parents of students with disabilities, advocates, educators, and community partners. Through these workshops, Michigan families will be empowered to advocate effectively for their children’s education while receiving practical tools and guidance to navigate the special education system. Outreach and promotion will support statewide participation.

6. List names/titles and describe the qualifications of key staff members or volunteers responsible for the project.

	Name/Title of Key Staff or Volunteer	Function/Qualifications
1	Heather Eckner, M.A.Ed.	Director of Statewide Education / Classroom teaching experience; parent of children with disabilities; extensive knowledge of special education eligibility and the continuum of services in Special Education; training emphasis in autism/dyslexia; dedication to advocacy driven by commitment to education and passion for social justice.
2	Judi New	Education Advocacy Unit / Lead attorney at Michigan Children's Law Center serving marginalized youth in Wayne County; expert in special education law.
3	Kelly Linton	ADA Specialist & Systems Advocate / Long-time disability advocate; extensive experience assisting families across eight counties with educational and disability-related advocacy in role with Disability Network Southwest Michigan.
4		

7. Describe how this project furthers the mission of your organization

The Know Your Rights workshops advance AAoM's mission to create inclusive, equitable, and accessible education systems by equipping families with practical knowledge of IDEA rights and skills to advocate effectively for their child(ren). This project ensures students with disabilities can access high-quality education and aligns with the Education Pillar's four core focus areas:

1. **Building Community Engagement & Advocacy:** Empower families and partners through statewide coalition work (MiPAAC) and the Parents Advancing Change in Education Systems (PACES) cohort to raise awareness, amplify voices, and drive meaningful systemic change.
2. **Transforming Learning Environments:** Promote inclusive, high-quality education by addressing disparities, supporting least restrictive environments, and advocating for improved policies and practices.
3. **Investing Resources Equitably & Effectively:** Advance fair and adequate funding structures through research-informed advocacy to ensure all students with disabilities receive the resources they need.
4. **Redefining Accountability Systems:** Strengthen transparency and accountability in special education through public awareness, grassroots mobilization, and advocacy campaigns like the SEE Survey: Report to the Community and State Complaint Project.

As leaders of the special education reform movement, AAoM is focusing this project on family empowerment, which will help ensure students with disabilities access education that prepares them for the most independent and successful lives possible.

8. Describe how this project advances the stated priorities of the Michigan State Bar Foundation

This project directly supports MSBF priorities by:

- Educating Michigan families on their legal rights and responsibilities in special education.
- Increasing access to the state complaint process through practical, step-by-step guidance.
- Promoting transparency and clarity around effective advocacy strategies for families.
- Providing families with tools to seek remedies for potential IDEA violations, advancing equitable administration of justice.

By addressing these areas, our project seeks to contribute to more efficient and equitable administration of justice, in line with the MSBF's vision.

9. What will happen to this project if the Michigan State Bar Foundation denies the grant request?

If the Michigan State Bar Foundation is unable to support this request, AAoM will continue seeking additional funding through our broader fund development strategy, which includes state, federal, foundation, and individual giving opportunities. However, without dedicated funding, we will be limited in our ability to fully execute the public education campaign and deliver statewide “Know Your Rights” workshops. This would significantly limit our reach to families who could most benefit from support in navigating the complexity of the special education system. We are committed to the project’s mission and will pursue all available avenues to ensure its future implementation; however, MSBF support is essential to launch this work at scale.

Needs to be Addressed

1. What are the needs to be addressed?

Students with disabilities in Michigan have a legal right to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) under IDEA. When families encounter barriers or disagreements with school districts, dispute resolution options—like due process hearings—are often costly and inaccessible. The state complaint process provides a lower-cost, accessible alternative, but many families are unaware of it. By educating parents and caregivers on how to effectively file complaints, AAoM addresses systemic inequities and empowers families to ensure their children receive the education they are legally entitled to.

2. What is the target audience?

- Primary audience: Parents and caregivers of children/youth with disabilities connected to the public education system in Michigan (birth through age 26).

- Secondary audience: Advocates, attorneys, educators, and community partners.

3. What outreach will be undertaken to inform the audience of this project?

AAoM will promote workshops statewide via email, social media, coalition networks (e.g., MiPAAC, MPEO, MEJC), and partner organizations (e.g., 482 Forward, Detroit Parent Network, Michigan League for Public Policy, Michigan's Children, Ed Trust-Midwest, Launch Michigan) to maximize awareness and participation.

4. List the counties in which services will be provided or indicate statewide.

This project will be implemented on a statewide scale. AAoM will conduct outreach and education in each of Michigan's ten prosperity regions, with additional focus in the major metropolitan areas.

Project Activities

1. How many people will be served?

Approximately 200 people will be served through this project; this includes parents of disabled children (estimated 20 families x 10 workshops) and community agency personnel (estimated 10 advocates/educators).

2. Described any services in this project that will be provided by pro bono attorneys.

N/A

3. Describe any services to be done by other volunteers.

Some of the initial computation and analysis of state complaints was conducted by a dedicated group of volunteers from the MiPAAC coalition. The phases outlined in this proposal do not incorporate this group, but we are grateful for their valuable input and contributions.

4. Describe the timeline for major activities in this project.

1. Develop workshop/training materials: November - December 2025
2. Conduct statewide outreach and promotion: January - February 2026
3. Deliver "Know Your Rights" workshops: March - October 2026

AAoM staff will coordinate logistics, recruit participants, manage registration, distribute ongoing communications, facilitate workshops, and provide ongoing guidance on state complaint filing for interested parties. Each session will include interactive discussions, step-by-step instructions for completing complaint forms, opportunities for Q&A, and program evaluation.

5. Describe any technology used to undertake this project.

- Email, phone, website access (social media platforms) for outreach / coordination
- Network mobilization platform for online registration and participant tracking
- Survey platform for pre- and post-event participant information gathering
- Zoom for hybrid participation
- Digital and printed presentation materials

6. Describe supervision for the project.

AAoM's Director of Statewide Education will oversee project execution, ensure content alignment, coordinate with AAoM staff and project volunteers as well as manage participant support and ongoing communications.

7. If applicable, list up to three materials that will result from this project.

1. Workshop curriculum and training materials
2. State complaint guide for parents

8. If applicable, how many people will be served? Complete chart below. (Enter numbers without punctuation: 1000 rather than 1,000.00)

Type of legal problem	Cases closed after limited service	Cases closed after extended service	Total projected cases closed
Consumer/finance			
Education		50	50
Employment			
Family			
Juvenile			
Health			
Housing			
Income maintenance			
Individual rights			
Other*			
Total Cases	0	50.0	50.0

Collaboration/Coordination

1. Describe the support this project has from other individuals or organizations in your community.

	Organization/Individual	Describe Support	Upload Letter of Support
1	Michael Griffie	Strategic input, Education Committee Chair	✓
2	Judi New	Support (expert advisor) for training/workshops	✓
3	Kelly Linton	Support (expert advisor) for training/workshops	✓
4			✗
5			✗

2. If other organizations in your area perform services or meet needs in a way similar to those you have proposed, describe how your proposed project avoids duplication with other organizations.

Disability Rights Michigan provides direct legal advocacy for some families but does not offer statewide workshops or broad-based forums for resource sharing. AAoM complements this work with open-access training for parents and community partners, expanding reach without duplicating services.

While the scope of Disability Rights Michigan is somewhat limited based on their team capacity, AAoM intends to broaden the reach of a statewide awareness campaign, training opportunities, and ongoing support that complement and amplify existing efforts, making access more “open source.”

3. Describe how you will coordinate activities with other organizations.

AAoM Education pillar serves as the backbone organization for a statewide coalition (MIPAAC) of parents, advocates, and attorneys focused on student-centered advocacy in Michigan’s special education system. We convene monthly meetings with a membership of over 400 statewide (including representation of more than 30 organizations), and offer ongoing opportunities to engage in training and other policy advocacy efforts. Through activation of this broad and diverse network, we will disseminate information about the workshops in order to mobilize stakeholders.

4. Have you researched and utilized the information from other similar projects in developing this project? If so, describe.

We have been in ongoing consultation with The Advocacy Institute, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to efforts to improve the lives of people with disabilities. Director and Founder Candace Cortiella is a leading public policy consultant of over 30 years and has developed the IDEA State Complaint Resource Center.

We reviewed and developed best practice approaches from similar projects in other states including one completed by the Massachusetts Northeastern University School of Law as well as the law school at Duke University.

Evaluation of Project

1. List three anticipated outcomes of the project.

1	Families understand and can exercise their IDEA rights, including filing a state complaint.
2	Community organizations are better equipped to assist families.
3	Families report confidence in navigating the special education system.

2. Describe how you will evaluate the effectiveness of the project and include how you will measure the number of people impacted.

AAoM will track registration and attendance of participants by location, type, and other key demographics. To measure the effectiveness of the training sessions, AAoM will administer detailed pre- and post-workshop surveys for all program participants. These surveys will gauge the increase in knowledge and confidence attained through the programming. We anticipate an increased number of families filing written state complaints, which will be tracked through a secure database. Feedback will be sought for the toolkit provided and practical application of filling state complaints by users.

3. Describe to whom dissemination of project information or results will be made and how such dissemination will occur.

In addition to AAoM's 400-member grassroots coalition (MiPAAC) which includes attorneys practicing special education law and legal aid organizations, findings and materials will be made available to the Michigan Department of Education via the Office of Special Education, the State Board of Education, the Special Education Advisory Committee, as well as other key advocacy stakeholders in Michigan.

4. If this project can be replicated, describe the ways you will assist others in the process.

We have intentionally designed this project to be able to be replicated so that others will be able to help with scaling efforts and impact. The Autism Alliance of Michigan serves as a well-respected resource hub for partner organizations and state leaders. We will continue in this capacity for this project as well. The AAoM Education pillar also has close ties to the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA) organization, where this project will also be shared on a national level.

Administration of Justice Grant Financial Information

Completed - Oct 9 2025

Form for "Administration of Justice Grant Financial Information"

1. Describe how the project will be funded after these grant funds are spent.

Ongoing workshop support will be incorporated into AAoM's Education Pillar operations and supported through subsequent grant opportunities.

2. Describe any matching funds requirements from other sources for this project.

N/A

3. Complete the chart below to reflect the project’s estimated budget detailed by major line items. Include only what you are requesting for this project under the MSBF funds column. (Enter numbers without punctuation – for example, 1000 rather than \$1,000.00. In addition, you will need to manually total rows, but columns will total)

Category	MSBF Funds	Other Funds	In-kind Support	Total
Personnel - Existing	24250	9958		34208
Personnel - New				
Employee benefits	4275	1757		6032
Consultant fees	5500	2000		7500
Travel	1200	1000		2200
Space	1500	1500		3000
Equipment	1500	1500		3000
Supplies	1000	560		1560
Telephone	700	300		1000
Postage	125	125		250
Printing/copies	2450	1500		3950
Audit	5000	3300		8300
Other	2500	1500		4000
Total	50000.0	25000.0	0	75000.0

4. Please describe the personnel costs above, including positions, whether or not it is a new position and projected percentage of time that the staff will spend on this project.

Position New Percentage of Time

1. Director of Statewide Education No 8%
2. Education Engagement Specialist No 8%
3. Marketing & Communications Manager No 3%
4. Creative Content Specialist No 3%

5. If you requested funding for consultant fees, space, equipment or other expenses, please describe.

(No response)

6. Please list any funding sources that have changed in the last year, including source of funding and amount.

Karen Colina Wilson Foundation - 2024: \$10,000 / 2025: \$0

Funds will be allocated to a different project

7. List the other anticipated funding sources for this project by name and amount.

	Source	Amount Requested	Amount Committed
1	MI Dept Health & Human Svcs	104565	
2	Ethel and James Flinn Fdn		25000
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

8. Comments

Please add any comments you wish to provide.

(No response)

Administration of Justice Grant Application Assurances

Completed - Oct 9 2025

Please download and complete the [Administration of Justice Grant Application Assurances](#) form. Once completed, upload the completed copy.

[AOJGrant Assurances](#)