

Gov. Doug Ducey's executive order calls for more protection of Arizonans with disabilities

Stephanie Innes, Arizona Republic Published 4:52 p.m. MT Feb. 6, 2019



Gov. Doug Ducey (Photo: Anya Magnuson/The Republic)

After a patient's rape at a Phoenix long-term care facility, Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey on Wednesday issued an executive order calling for more state protection of people with disabilities.

Ducey is ordering three state agencies to strengthen protections for some of the state's most vulnerable residents.

Among other directives, any Arizona workers who have direct contact with patients with disabilities must undergo annual training in abuse prevention.

The three agencies tasked with the responsibility are the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System, the Arizona Department of Health Services and the Arizona Department of Economic Security.

The governor's executive order is a good "first step," but more work is needed to create policies that adequately protect Arizonans with disabilities, said Jon Meyers, executive director of The Arc of Arizona, which advocates for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

When he issued the executive order Wednesday, Ducey said Arizona has a "special responsibility" to protect people with disability. He's calling for increased accountability, stricter oversight and said he wants to "hold bad actors accountable" to guarantee protection of vulnerable Arizonans.

The executive order comes one week after the [Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council \(https://addpc.az.gov\)](https://addpc.az.gov), whose 23 members were appointed by Ducey to identify developmental disability challenges and solutions, issued a report that called for heightened protection of individuals with disabilities, including improved training for staff, family members and guardians.

"We'll continue to work with the governor's office and any other group throughout Arizona who wants to prevent abuse of vulnerable kids with developmental disabilities and adults statewide," council chairman John Black said. "This is just the beginning."

The council's report recommended strengthening Arizona's Adult Protective Services division and equalizing Arizona's "duty to report" laws governing mandatory reporters. Arizona law classifies failure to report abuse of a child as a felony. But the failure to report abuse of a vulnerable adult is a misdemeanor.

Additionally, the report recommended improved protections to protect mandatory reporters from retaliation from their employers, citing "anecdotal reports" of an "environment of silence at Hacienda" HealthCare where employees "feared for their jobs and their livelihoods if they shared what they knew of abuses and neglect at the facility."

