

MINUTES October 6, 2025

Present: Heidi Showstead, Myles Brawn-Husband, Mindy Highland, Jamie Harris Pfantz, Christina Battista, Zach Gauthier, Rebecca Beaton, Paul Scott, Kathy Gudmundson, Vincent DeJesus, Michael Matriacia

1. Welcome



Tanja welcomed everyone to today's meeting.



2. Mission Statement/Minutes



Rachel read the Mission Statement of the Coalition.

“The Coalition is for individuals with all disabilities to connect and talk about what is important in our lives and what we can do together to improve quality for all people! It is also an opportunity to become familiar with different services available from agencies in Rhode Island and learn what these agencies can do to support and meet the needs of individuals.”



Deanne read the September 2025 Minutes



3. Presentation: Talks About Self-Defense and Being Safe on the Internet

Presented by: Mike Matraccia and Christina Battista

Mike Matraccia let the RI Cross Disability Coalition Members know that he has been a Providence Police officer of 35 years. He was diagnosed with Multiple Scoliosis (MS) in 1998 and now uses a wheelchair. He continues to be part of the Providence Police in an ADA role.

What is Self-Defense?

Key Elements:

Reasonable amount of danger

Immediate threat

Proportionate force

Types of Self-Defense

Physical: Being aware of your surroundings

Verbal: Say no as loud as you can

Mental/Emotional: Remaining calm in a stressful situation

Mike Matraccia talked to the group in more detail about physical and personal safety. He told the group to be aware of their surroundings and to trust their instincts (gut feelings). To consider taking a self-defense class tailored to people with disabilities to learn techniques to protect themselves.

Walk/roll with confidence

1. Avoid distractions (being on the phone)
2. Travel with a buddy when possible
3. Stay in well-lit areas when/if possible
4. Let others know where you are going (if appropriate)

Physical/Personal Safety

- Use pepper spray
- Personal alarms
- Flashlights
- Identify exits and safe zones in unfamiliar settings
- Technology (emergency alert App on smart phone/device)



- Mobility Aides (if applicable; use to your advantage)

Verbal Self-Defense

- Use Assertive language
- Be loud
- Setting clear boundaries
- De-escalating situations (be calm)

Internet Safety

Main Dangers Online

1. Scams and Phishing
2. Cyberbullying and harassment
3. Sharing too much personal information
4. Dangerous and inappropriate websites
5. People pretending to be someone they are not

Examples of Potential Dangers

- Someone sends a message asking for your bank info
- A pop-up says “You’ve won a free phone” (but it’s FAKE)
- A “friend” online asks for private picture



Protecting Your Information

- Don't share passwords, addresses, or bank account information
- Use strong passwords (mix of capital and lower-case letters, symbols, and numbers)
- Turn on two factor authentication if possible

Think Before You Click

- Be cautious with links and downloads
- Ask someone you trust if you are unsure

Be Careful Who You Talk To

- Don't trust strangers online, even if they seem friendly
- Never meet someone in real life that you met online without a trusted adult or friend



See you in March 2026!



5. Motion to Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at about 3 pm.

NEXT MEETING

Date: MONDAY, March 2, 2026

Location: Warwick Public Library

Time: 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm



Minutes submitted by Tanja Blicher-Ucran