



# THE CAPITOL MORNING REPORT

A DAILY LISTING OF UPCOMING EVENTS AND OTHER NEWS FOR MEMBERS OF CALIFORNIA'S CAPITOL COMMUNITY...

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## KEEPING UP

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By: Tiffany Dobbyn, Capitol Morning Report



*Dante Allen*

“This idea of equity and an equal playing field is baked into the very fabric of me,” said **Dante Allen**, executive director of California Achieving a Better Life Experience Act Board (CalABLE). CalABLE is a savings and investment plan housed under the State Treasurer’s Office for individuals with disabilities. **Allen** was hired to help launch the program in 2018. “I think the thing that most attracted me to this position was the opportunity to be an advocate for people with disabilities,” **Allen** said. “I was born with spina bifida and for my entire life I’ve been a self-advocate just navigating the world.” And now he strives to make an important impact on the lives of others by promoting a program that allows individuals to contribute up to \$15,000 a year to an account without jeopardizing public benefits such as Social Security Income and Medicaid. “I look at CalABLE as an opportunity to reach some level of financial equity for people with disabilities,” he said. “It is that opportunity to level a playing field on a broad range of financial matters for a community too often overlooked.” A big part of the job is holding outreach events to meet people who can benefit from the program. Since shelter-in-place orders have been in effect, **Allen** says he and his office have switched to virtual events. “I’m giving two to three presentations a week via webinars and remote group meetings,” he said. “But honestly, directly interacting with potential account holders is my favorite and the most rewarding part of my job.” Even though the program is still fairly new, **Allen** says more 3,000 accounts have been opened. “And, there’s just under 20 million in assets that folks are saving and investing, many for the very first time in their lives,” he said. While he says there is excitement about reaching those milestones, there’s still much more to work to be done. “I’m also very focused on the fact that this is just a drop in the bucket; 3,000 compared to the hundreds of thousands of Californians that are living with disabilities, I know there’s a long way to go before we really make the level of impact that we can,” **Allen** said. One of his goals is to have the program reach the same level of awareness as some of its sister programs like the college savings plan, ScholarShare 529. And he’d like to see CalABLE be promoted across even more state departments and agencies. “Whether it’s the Department of Education, or Department of Transportation, or Franchise Tax Bureau, Department of Motor Vehicles, all of those places interact with people with disabilities, and they should be very aware of this program so that they can communicate that with the communities they serve,” he said. During the COVID-19 outbreak, **Allen** has been spreading the word to California’s disability community that SSI recipients who fail to spend their stimulus check money within 12 months may be penalized for saving it, but he says penalties can be avoided by depositing that money into CalABLE accounts, which exempts up to \$100,000 annually from being counted as exceeding income limits. “You can reap all the benefits of having an ABLE account and still maintain that flexibility to use the money as needed to pay for the everyday expenses of living a life with a disability,” he said. **Allen** is proud of the work his office does to help others achieve their financial goals, and he continues to focus on achieving his goal of giving those with disabilities a chance to showcase their abilities. “I’m very outspoken when it comes to accessibility, not just ‘can we get in the door,’” he said. “It is can people with disabilities have a place at the table and a voice to really share our thoughts, needs, desires because we have thoughts and ideas that can be impactful not just for us, but for everyone.” Contact: [Dante.Allen@treasurer.ca.gov](mailto:Dante.Allen@treasurer.ca.gov).