



## **Access Living Federal Candidates Questionnaire – Disability Policy Issues**

Disability voters are an important voting block. In Chicago, there are over 300,000 people with disabilities, with countless friends and families who also consider themselves disability voters. Furthermore, about one in six voters, or 16.4% of the voting electorate nationwide is a person with a disability, [according to the American Association of People with Disabilities](#).

Candidates nationwide have learned that people with disabilities have a historical interest in policymaking that impacts our lives. The following **10 questions** aim to address major policy areas of concern of disabled voters in the Chicagoland area.

**Candidate Name:** Jason Friedman

**Party:** Democratic

**District:** Illinois' 7th District

### **Disability and Civil Rights:**

#### **Context for Question**

Over the last fifty years, people with disabilities and our allies have worked tirelessly to create and enforce a critical set of disability rights laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and much more. In the past several months, both administrative and legal action have made it clear that federal disability rights and enforcement are at tremendous risk. This is evidenced by the recent dismantling of federal entities tasked with enforcing disability laws, notably the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) within the Department of Education.



### Question

***What would you do to ensure that current federal disability rights laws and regulations are protected, not dismantled?***

### Answer

As Congressman, I will oppose any and all efforts to weaken disability rights laws and regulations. I will also fight to restore the programs that have been decimated by the Trump administration. My vision is to not only enforce disability rights, but to proactively work with community advocates like Access Living to strengthen protections to improve access to education, housing, employment, and health care.

### Question

***Between now and 2028, what is your vision for rebuilding the federal administrative infrastructure that has been gutted in this year's reductions in force (RIFs)?***

### Answer

The reductions in force have significantly undermined the enforcement of disability rights and support for the disability community. I will work to fully rebuild the impacted agencies by increasing their funding, restoring their legal capacity, and ensuring that people with disabilities are involved in the process. Further, I will use my congressional authority to support stronger checks on executive authority so that no administration can unilaterally harm entire communities.

### **Education:**

#### **Context for Question**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that governs special education in the United States. This is the law that ensures that ALL students have the right to a “free and appropriate public education.” When the IDEA was passed, the federal government committed to covering 40% of state special education costs. As it currently stands, IDEA is only covering 10% of costs. This shortfall leaves local communities on the



hook to make ends meet. teachers and therapists stretched thin, and worse outcomes for students.

### **Question**

***What steps would you take to ensure IDEA/Special Education is properly funded going forward?***

### **Answer**

Supporting the education of the disability community is not optional, and it is the federal government's responsibility. I back a plan to bring federal funding for special education to 40% of total cost as quickly as possible. I will also fight for stronger training programs and more grants to help teachers, therapists, and other professionals who work with students with disabilities succeed.

### **Health Care:**

### **Context for Question**

When we surveyed disabled Chicagoans about their federal policy concerns, access to healthcare was the number one issue for an overwhelming number of respondents.

Medicaid is integral to the independence of people with disabilities because of home and community-based services (HCBS). H.R.1 will implement drastic cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, leaving many disabled folks without access to health coverage. HCBS is particularly at risk of cuts should their federal funding be lost, because HCBS is not mandatory. Without Medicaid HCBS, many people with disabilities will be forced to leave their communities and live in institutions.

### **Question**

***What will you do to protect Illinoisans' access to health care, especially people with disabilities?***

### **Answer**

Healthcare is essential to independence, and independence is essential to health. I strongly oppose cuts to HCBS, Medicaid, or Medicare. In Congress, I will fight to expand eligibility, increase coverage, and strengthen access. Every resident of Illinois' 7th



Congressional District, and the country, deserves mental health care, personal assistance, and long-term support at home.

### **Context for Question**

In Illinois, thousands of people with disabilities remain institutionalized in state-operated developmental centers or nursing facilities, even though most could live safely and independently with proper support. Illinois operates several HCBS waiver, such as the *Persons with Disabilities Waiver*, to help individuals receive care at home rather than in institutions. Expanding access to these programs is vital because community living promotes autonomy, dignity, and inclusion. It is also more cost-effective than institutional care and aligns with the *Olmstead v. L.C.* decision, which affirms the right to live in the most integrated setting possible.

### **Question**

***What is your plan to reduce the number of people with disabilities on waitlists for home and community-based services (HCBS) while ensuring services are high quality? Do you support making HCBS a mandatory Medicaid service?***

### **Answer**

In Congress, I would push to increase funding for the HCBS program to reduce waitlist times and pay care workers more. I also support making HCBS mandatory for all states, because nobody deserves to lose health care or their independence because they were born in a state without HCBS. My goal is to push Illinois and the country toward community-based care for the disabled population so that everybody can live with dignity, autonomy, and grace.

### **Context for Question**

We have seen a rash of laws across Illinois and the country that criminalize homelessness. Homelessness is an issue that disproportionately impacts people with disabilities. People with serious mental illness are more likely to end up homeless and not having a house leads to all kinds of health problems. Some ordinances even go as far as penalizing people sleeping in their own cars.



### Question

***What will you do to protect people living with mental illness who are also unhoused?***

### Answer

I strongly oppose the criminalization of homelessness because it is cruel, unproductive, and disproportionately harms those with disabilities, often worsening the conditions of those experiencing mental illness and perpetuating the cycle of homelessness. Our federal government must support housing and treatment for people living outside or in their cars. I will support housing-first policies that encourage self-sustaining financial mobility and pathways to long-term security. I will also help expand crisis response programs so that people experiencing mental health crises receive care from a professional instead of the police. Punitive reactions to homelessness or mental health crises never work, so I will always lead with empathy and compassion, looking to provide safety and dignity for the unhoused.

### **Transportation:**

#### **Context for Question**

Systemic underfunding of transit systems, particularly on the operations side, has left the Chicagoland transit system in funding peril. Many disabled people cannot drive and rely on both mainline transit and paratransit systems to be independent and participate in society. Because the availability of paratransit is tied to the availability of mainline transit, fixed route funding cuts directly impact ADA paratransit service as well. Unfortunately, despite the high need for paratransit, it remains insufficiently funded and frequently overlooked, rather than considered a vital part of the transit system overall.

### Question

***Would you support a more equitable funding system that better funds accessible transit, including paratransit specifically? And, if so, what do you think that system should look like?***

### Answer

Accessible transportation is critical for participation in everyday life, and I strongly support federal funding for local transit systems that assist the disability community. As the CTA,



Metra, and Pace face financial hardships, I will fight to supplement their infrastructure development through federal appropriation. Increasing accessibility to comply with ADA and dedicating resources to paratransit services will be a top priority. Every transit system should strive for reliability and affordability, and as Congressman I will help Chicago's public transportation achieve those goals.

### **Economic Justice:**

#### **Context for Question**

Supplemental Security Income, also known as SSI, serves as a critical safety net to provide some level of income for many people with disabilities. However, the process to obtain benefits can stretch over two years. Recipients of SSI only receive an average of \$700 / month, and outdated asset limits of \$2,000 per person and \$3,000 per couple trap people with disabilities in a vicious cycle of poverty.

#### **Question**

***What concrete steps would you take to modernize and reform the SSI program so that it benefits and uplifts people with disabilities?***

#### **Answer**

While SSI is meant to be an almost universal safety net, far too many people, particularly people with disabilities, fall through the cracks. I support raising SSI benefits to reflect today's economy and permanently indexing them to inflation. We must modernize the application and appeal process to make it quicker, more accessible, and more transparent.

I will also strongly support and co-sponsor the Supplemental Security Income Savings Penalty Elimination Act. The outdated limits penalize saving, work, and marriage, reinforcing poverty rather than alleviating it. With the rising costs of emergencies, apartment deposits, and mortgage downpayments, we need to make sure that lower-



income households are able to build well-earned savings. Beneficiaries need to be able to plan for the future and for their children.

### **Context for Question**

SNAP is a critical lifeline for millions of Americans and is especially important for people with disabilities. However, H.R. 1 will force millions of Americans off critical SNAP benefits, as well as create excessive bureaucratic red tape for people with disabilities. Regardless, the SNAP program in many ways does not account for the unique needs of people with disabilities, particularly with the program's restriction on purchasing ready-made / hot meals.

### **Question**

***What concrete steps would you take to protect SNAP benefits AND modernize food access programs to be more accessible to the disability community?***

### **Answer**

In Congress, I will fight to expand SNAP to meet the needs of the disability community, including allowing the purchase of prepared meals and including extra resources for those who have a more expensive diet. Provisions in H.R. 1 that enforce a work requirement are misguided and harmful. Instead of ensuring that people earn welfare, they slow down bureaucracy and make critical programs less accessible. Food security is a right, and SNAP and the federal government must meet people where they are.

### **Immigration:**

### **Context for Question**

While federal disability rights laws apply to people with disabilities regardless of citizenship status, there are significant unaddressed enforcement gaps in protecting immigrants with disabilities. According to an [April 2024 Congressional Research Service report](#) on medical care in immigrant detention facilities, significant gaps remain in ensuring adequate treatment and accommodations for detained individuals with disabilities. <sup>2</sup>



### Question

***How would you work to hold federal agencies accountable for protecting the rights and dignity of immigrants with disabilities in detention and during the immigration process?***

### Answer

The Trump administration has used the immigration system as a tool to spread fear and division, and the disability community has been especially harmed as Republicans ignore the legislation that guarantees disability rights. As Congressman, I will work to hold ICE, CBP, and DHS accountable by using Congress's oversight powers: hearings, subpoenas, investigations, budget reviews, and unannounced visits. We must expand alternatives to detention for individuals with disabilities, and build a system that preserves dignity and strengthens our country instead of weakening it.