



## **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:** Neil Khot

**Party:** Democratic

**District:** Illinois' 2nd 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 a Congressman, my chief priority would be to serve our country by holding the administration accountable. For too long, Congress has forgone many of its oversight responsibilities. I will work with my fellow Democrats, along with any willing Republicans, to ensure that disability laws are followed to the letter and that no American has their civil rights diminished on account of disability.

### 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

Arbitrary RIFs have significantly hurt the federal workforce and the efficacy of the government and in many cases in violation of the law. Moving forward, we need stronger legal protections in place for federal employees to ensure that the federal government continues to deliver on its mandates.

### **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

Since the initial passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1975, federally funded special education programs have greatly increased the quality of life and educational outcomes for children with disabilities. To restore funding, the first step must be to provide greater financial incentives for educators and teaching assistants to ensure that they receive adequate pay and professional development.

## **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

On a federal level, any future budget must see a restoration in funding levels for both programs. Along with that, I would support the State of Illinois exercising greater oversight



over Medicaid programs, such as encouraging greater use of Z codes to ensure standardized healthcare coverage.

### **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**

Home and community-based services should be mandated as a part of Medicare through a phased rollout to reduce the risk of a drop in quality. States that increase HCBS should receive targeted funds. To ensure quality, we need large investments in the direct care workforce; this could be done by requiring that a minimum proportion of 80% of HCBS payments go to the care providers.

### **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

The root cause of homelessness is a lack of affordable housing. I support streamlining the process of home construction, including zoning reform. To assist those with mental illnesses

specifically, I support a rapid expansion of Public Supporting Housing units and greater funding for crisis systems such as 988 and community crisis support teams.

## **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

While the immediate shortfall has been addressed in Chicago, we need to increase funding for public transit throughout America. With paratransit being especially important in suburban and rural areas, I support greater federal funding for bus systems that offer mainline and paratransit service, such as Pace, to ensure that public transportation can be implemented rapidly on largely existing infrastructure.



### **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**

SSI is a vital program, but its rules have not kept pace with today's realities. I support raising and indexing the outdated asset limits so people with disabilities can save without losing benefits. I would modernize the approval process by improving staffing and expanding fasttrack determinations to reduce multi-year wait times. I also back updating SSI benefit levels to reflect the true cost of living. These reforms will strengthen economic security, independence, and dignity for people with disabilities.

#### **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**

SNAP is essential for millions of Americans, including people with disabilities, and I oppose efforts like H.R. 1 that would cut benefits or create unnecessary barriers. I support protecting SNAP eligibility and ensuring states cannot impose work requirements that punish people with disabilities. I would also modernize SNAP by allowing the purchase of prepared or hot meals, recognizing that many disabled individuals cannot safely cook at home. Additionally, I back expanding online grocery access, delivery options, and increasing funding for medically tailored meals. These steps ensure food security, autonomy, and dignity for the disability community.

**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. ☷

**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**

All detainees must be afforded basic human dignity, especially access to healthcare. Representatives from the House and Senate Homeland Security Committees must be allowed immediate access to immigration facilities when practicable. Furthermore, I



support expanding the DHS Office of Inspector General to ensure greater oversight over detention facilities.