



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: Raja Krishnamoorthi

Party: Democratic

District: Senate

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

I am dedicated to protecting the legal frameworks and regulations that strengthen equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities, and I believe strongly in reversing the harms done by this Administration by reconstituting federal entities with the goal of expanding accessibility for all Americans. During my tenure in Congress, I have proudly co-sponsored legislation to strengthen disability rights including the Fair Housing for Disabled Veterans Act, which aims to improve access to low income housing for disabled veterans. I also joined many of my colleagues to support a congressional letter by Senator Warren to the Department of Labor calling for an end to federal budget cuts against offices serving individuals with disabilities. I strongly oppose any effort to defund government entities such as the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) within the Department of Education because they are essential to enforcing disability protections.

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' (RIF) implemented by the Trump administration have been done without regard to the needs of actual citizens or the workers impacted and to the detriment of those who need the services the most. We must reverse these cuts to critical administrative functions and ensure that services are expanded, not contracted.



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

I will take all necessary steps to ensure IDEA/Special Education is properly funded. In Congress, I am a cosponsor and strong supporter of the IDEA Full Funding Act, legislation that ensures budget appropriations for special education are treated as a mandatory commitment as they were always intended to be. It is our congressional obligation to uphold the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and ensure students in need of special education services are guaranteed them by federal law. Schools cannot continue to provide a “free and appropriate public education” if their staff and special education programs cannot be supported. It is imperative that the federal government fulfills their commitment to cover a percentage of state special education costs to ensure every student is provided a fair and equitable opportunity to 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

I have fought tirelessly to protect Medicaid and Medicare, and I will continue this fight with every resource at my disposal to ensure Americans do not lose access to what could be lifesaving healthcare coverage. Programs like Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) provide individuals with disabilities the resources and support they need to be independent. Without federal funding for programs like HCBS, millions of disabled Americans will be left without health coverage. During my time in Congress, protecting healthcare has been one of my top priorities which I have demonstrated through legislative action such as my co-sponsorship of the Protecting Healthcare and Lowering Costs Act, and Increasing Medication for Seniors Act of 2025, and the FAMILY Act.



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

Yes, I support Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) as a mandatory Medicaid service. We cannot reduce waitlists for people with disabilities without first strengthening support for the healthcare workers, and in-home caregivers who provide these crucial services. Strengthening the HCBS workforce will help expand home and community care services for Americans with disabilities. This is why I co-sponsored the HCBS Worker Protection Act to enhance benefits for HCBS workers and ensure they receive a living wage. HCBS allows individuals to decide where they receive care, supports their independence, and assures loved ones that their family members are cared for. This legislation is imperative for the HCBS workforce and people with disabilities who rely on them.



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

In Congress, I have led bipartisan efforts to protect and expand mental health support, by introducing legislation such as the Youth Access Act and Connecting Students with Mental Health Services Act. Additionally, I led my colleagues in a signed congressional bipartisan letter to the House Appropriations leaders, urging them to preserve funding for essential crisis hotlines, a life saving service facing drastic funding cuts under the Trump Administration. In the U.S. Senate, I will support investment in mental healthcare for Americans experiencing mental illness and homelessness, not in ordinances and laws seeking to punish people for being unable to afford housing.

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?

The U.S. economy is dependent on quick, efficient, and safe transportation systems that effectively serve all riders. These systems depend on both physical and human infrastructure to keep goods and people moving. These systems are valuable not only because of their critical place in our economy, but because they serve all people. In Congress, I helped bring a first-of-its-kind ADA Transfer Point to my district, a paratransit facility that prioritizes accessibility and to accommodate all riders.

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



I will actively support the modernization and reform of the SSI (Supplemental Security Income) program because it is a critical support to millions of Americans with disabilities. I recently joined my colleagues in a letter to Commissioner Bisignano, strongly urging the Social Security Administration to halt any measure weakening accessibility to benefits. With a diminished workforce for the SSA due to reductions and the Trump Administration's severe cuts to SSA funding, Americans seeking to obtain benefits they have rightfully earned are subject to longer delays and difficulty getting help with benefit applications. Workforce reductions at the SSA would prolong delays in accessing benefits that Americans with disabilities rely on to survive. Investing in fair wages, employee benefits and federal support for SSA workers will ensure SSI recipients are effectively assisted in a reliable manner.

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

I will consistently fight to protect SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and modernize food access programs to be more accessible to the disability community as a U.S. Senator. The Trump Administration gutted anti-hunger programs by cutting more than \$186 billion from SNAP, creating additional barriers to food accessibility for millions of Americans. I will combat these attacks and defend SNAP federal funding because no



American deserves to go without food on the table. I proudly cosponsored the School Meals Expansion Act, which expands the eligibility for free lunches, ensuring no child has to learn on an empty stomach. I understand the stakes because without programs like SNAP, my own family would not have been able to put food on the table, which is why I will continue to expand accessibility to SNAP for every American. My campaign has also released a detailed policy plan, a signature element of which is the proposal to ensure that every student in America is provided at least one free meal at school. This is a significant step toward ending child hunger and ensuring that nutritional goals are met.

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. ²

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



I strongly condemn the illegal and unconstitutional actions taken by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or any federal agency that violates the constitutional rights and dignity of people being detained. Federal agencies like ICE must be held accountable for their inhumane treatment of immigrants in custody, and I have made several visits to ICE facilities in Illinois to conduct oversight in an effort to ensure that this is being done. In Congress, I have consistently fought to protect the rights of all immigrants, including immigrants with disabilities. I co-sponsored the Stop Excessive Force in Immigration Act, which establishes clear limitations on federal immigration enforcement personnel. It is vital that immigrants with disabilities receive the accommodations and care they are entitled to under federal law, throughout the entirety of the immigration process.