



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: Kevin Morrison

Party: Democratic

District: Illinois' 8th 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



I believe disability rights are civil rights, and defending them is essential to disability justice and an inclusive democracy. I will fight to preserve and strengthen laws like the ADA, Section 504, and IDEA, and block any attempts to roll them back. Recent actions gutting enforcement offices are unacceptable. In Congress, I'll push to fully fund and staff these agencies so they can do their jobs enforcing the law. No one should have to fear that their basic rights will be undermined, and I will ensure our federal government protects those rights vigorously.

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

We must urgently rebuild the federal infrastructure that enforces disability rights after the harmful reductions in force this year. As a County Commissioner, I was proud to be instrumental in creating Cook County's Department of Mental and Behavioral Health to connect people with life-changing resources, proof of my commitment to building institutions that serve our community. In Washington, I'll apply the same approach to restore and expand disability enforcement agencies: hiring back critical staff, investing in training, and improving interagency coordination. By 2028, I envision a robust federal enforcement system with the resources and leadership needed to uphold every disability right on the books, and that ensures all individuals living with a disability have equitable access as mandated by law.

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 am committed to fully funding the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) so every child with a disability gets the education they deserve. When IDEA became law, the federal government promised to fund 40% of special education costs, but today it covers only around 10%. That leaves local schools stretched thin. This shortfall is unacceptable: it burdens our communities and shortchanges students who need tailored support. In Congress, I will fight to dramatically increase federal IDEA funding to meet or exceed that 40% goal. Proper funding will ensure schools can hire the teachers, aides, and therapists required so that all students, regardless of ability, can thrive in the classroom.

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 a human right, and I'll work tirelessly to protect Illinoisans' access to care – especially people with disabilities. I have a record of expanding mental health services at the county level, and I will bring that dedication to Congress. I will oppose any attempt, including the proposed cuts in H.R.1, to slash Medicaid or Medicare and leave disabled folks without coverage. Instead, I'll champion strengthening Medicaid, including its Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS), so that people can get care at home rather than being forced into institutions. From defending the Affordable Care Act to pushing for mental health parity, I will ensure our healthcare system remains a lifeline for people with disabilities and chronic conditions. Lastly, it is imperative that we make higher education accessible and affordable to all who wish to go into the health or mental healthcare fields in order both to fill the vacancies that already exist in care, and to prevent projected shortfalls such as Illinois' projected 6,500 physician vacancies by 2030). We should ensure that you can access higher education that does not include exorbitant debt, as well as ensure that starting off pay includes a living wage.

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

I strongly support making Home and Community-Based Services a mandatory part of Medicaid. No one should languish on years-long waitlists for services that keep them living independently. In Illinois, thousands of people with disabilities remain institutionalized even though most could live safely in the community with the right support. That violates the spirit of the Olmstead decision. I will push for major federal investment to expand HCBS waivers and end the waitlists, while ensuring high quality of care. Community living promotes autonomy, dignity, and inclusion, and it's more cost-effective than institutional care. I'll fight to guarantee HCBS funding so every person can receive care in the most integrated setting possible, as is their right.

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

Criminalizing homelessness is wrong, especially when so many unhoused individuals are people with disabilities or mental illness. I support a housing-first approach that provides people with the shelter and services they need rather than punishment. In Cook County, I backed landmark tenant protections to keep vulnerable families housed, because preventing homelessness is the first step to protecting those at risk. I know that serious mental illness often contributes to homelessness, and it's our job to break that cycle with



compassion and resources. In Congress, I will fight against laws that penalize people for being homeless and instead push for increased federal support for affordable housing, supportive housing with wraparound services, and robust mental health outreach. We must treat unhoused people with dignity and help them get back on their feet, not turn them into criminals due to their circumstances.

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

Yes, I fully support a more equitable funding system for transit that specifically invests in accessibility and paratransit. Reliable transportation is a lifeline for many people with disabilities in our community. As a County Commissioner, I have championed transit equity by supporting improvements to paratransit and inclusive infrastructure including bikeways, electric vehicle charging stations in underserved areas, and supporting the recently opened PACE Bus Paratransit Hub in Schaumburg. I understand that when mainline transit is cut, paratransit riders pay the price, and that's unacceptable. In Congress, I'll push for dedicated federal funding to strengthen ADA paratransit services and transit operations overall, so that people with disabilities can get where they need to go. An equitable transit system must include accessible buses, trains, and stations that



empower disabled people to live independently and also benefits our economy and environment.

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

It's time to bring Supplemental Security Income (SSI) into the 21st century so it truly lifts people with disabilities out of poverty. Today, SSI's rules are terribly outdated. Benefits average only about \$700 a month and a person can have no more than \$2,000 in savings, a limit set decades ago that traps people in a cycle of poverty. I will fight to raise those asset limits substantially and increase SSI benefit levels to reflect real living costs. We also need to streamline the application process (which can currently take years) and eliminate punitive rules like the marriage penalty that prevent people from building secure lives. In Congress, I'll work on bipartisan reforms to modernize SSI so it rewards, rather than punishes, people's efforts to save money or marry, and so that disabled Americans are not forced to live in destitution to keep their vital benefits.

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

No one should go hungry in America, especially not people with disabilities. SNAP is an essential lifeline, and I will fiercely protect it. I'll vote against any attempt to cut SNAP or add burdensome requirements that would kick people off their food assistance. This includes immediately reversing the SNAP cuts included in HR 1. This February, the work requirement changes alone are projected to lead to Illinois losing \$1.32 billion in economic activity, which will lead to jobs losses and business closures. Additionally, Illinois is projected to have to pay \$800 million more to keep SNAP benefits at all, which could lead to the disappearance of the program in our state, and a projected over \$5 billion loss in economic activity. This is simply unacceptable and must be reversed immediately. Beyond safeguarding funding, I'm committed to modernizing SNAP to better serve people with disabilities. This includes allowing the purchase of prepared or hot meals with SNAP benefits (since not everyone can cook or easily prepare food), reducing bureaucratic red tape in the application/recertification process, and expanding outreach to ensure those who need nutrition assistance can get it. In Congress, I'll make sure our food security programs are accessible, accommodating, and meet the real-world needs of 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. 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

Disability rights don't stop at the detention center door. We absolutely owe a duty of care and dignity to immigrants with disabilities in our custody. I am horrified by the reports of immigrants with disabilities being denied adequate treatment and accommodations in detention facilities. In Congress, I will hold federal agencies like ICE and the Border Patrol accountable through strict oversight and legislation. That means enforcing ADA and Rehabilitation Act standards in all immigration detention centers, mandating proper medical care and mental health services, and requiring transparency about conditions. I'll also support exploring alternatives to detention for individuals whose disabilities make incarceration especially harmful. Everyone, regardless of citizenship status, deserves to be treated with humanity. I will work to ensure our immigration system upholds the rights and dignity of people with disabilities at every step of the process.