



## **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:** Robert Peters

**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**

I will oppose any attempt to weaken the ADA, Section 504, IDEA, Olmstead enforcement, or any other core civil rights protections for disabled people. I'll push to strengthen enforcement, increase funding for the agencies that safeguard our rights, and make sure that disabled people have a seat at the table when it comes to policymaking.

### **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 need to reverse reductions in force and invest in a pro-labor federal workforce with staffing and expertise to enforce civil rights and administer benefits. We must restore and expand positions at key agencies like HHS, DOJ, and the Department of Education, while ensuring disabled people are hired, retained, and promoted throughout the federal government.

## **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

Congress promised to cover special education and never kept that promise. I'd fight to finally fully fund IDEA and make that commitment the law. That means automatic, mandatory funding increases, not subjecting special education to yearly political fights that leave students, families, and schools scrambling.

### **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

This fight is personal to me because I was born hard of hearing and needed expensive surgeries and therapies to be able to speak and hear. In Springfield, I took on predatory health insurers and expanded mental health coverage, providing people some relief from crushing health care costs. In Congress, I'll push us further, fighting to roll back Trump's cuts to Medicaid and Obamacare while passing laws like Medicare for All that make quality health care a universal guarantee. For people with disabilities, I'll work to protect long-term services and supports, mental health care, reproductive care, and ensure providers are accessible.



### **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 making HCBS a mandatory Medicaid service so no one is forced into an institution simply because that's what's funded. I'd fight for federal investments to eliminate HCBS waitlists, raise wages and standards for home care workers, and enforce strong quality and oversight.

### **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**

We need a housing-first approach that creates permanent, affordable housing with voluntary, high-quality mental health and substance use services. I'd fight to expand supportive housing, mobile crisis teams, and community-based mental health care so people are met with care and housing first.

### **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 support shifting federal transportation funding toward fully accessible public transit and making paratransit reliable, affordable, and dignified. That means dedicated federal dollars for accessibility upgrades, same-day paratransit service, equitable pay for transit workers, and tying transportation funding to robust accessibility standards in every region, urban and rural.

### **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**

We need to raise SSI benefits above the poverty line, end the asset limits and marriage penalties, and update outdated income rules that punish people for working a little or getting help from family. I'd support legislation that automatically indexes benefits to inflation, so disabled people are never forced into permanent poverty to qualify for help.

#### **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 oppose any cuts or punitive work requirements for SNAP and instead fight to expand eligibility and benefit levels so no one with a disability goes hungry. At the same time, I'll push to make food programs accessible—supporting delivery options, online purchasing, culturally appropriate foods, and making sure application and recertification processes are simple, accessible, and non-stigmatizing.



## **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**

I'd push for strict enforcement of disability rights in all immigration facilities, including ending the detention of people whose disabilities cannot be safely accommodated. I'd also demand independent oversight, transparent reporting, and loss of contracts for agencies and contractors that violate the rights of any immigrants, including people with disabilities.