



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: Reed Showalter

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



I will work to ensure language exists in FY 2027 appropriation bills reversing all funding and staffing cuts for agencies that help those with disabilities and their families. I will also seek to be surrounded by voices in the disability community familiar with the protections that are people's rights by law, and work tirelessly to ensure their interests are represented in Congress.

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

More than just reversing the dismantling of critical infrastructure seen under Trump, it is crucial that we prevent repeat offenses. In addition to reversing the staffing cuts, I will also seek to codify into law minimum staffing requirements for civil rights-focused and other agencies which touch the lives of those in the disabled community and beyond.

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 commit to cosponsoring the IDEA Full Funding Act in the House with Representatives Bynum and Huffman, gradually lifting federal contributions to promised levels and then fighting to keep them there.

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 will cosponsor the HCBS Access Act to ensure Illinoisans can continue to have the option to receive quality and dignified care in the setting of their choice, preventing future administrations from ending waivers providing Medicaid money for the care people rely on. Moreover, I will work to alleviate the struggle low-income Americans face with the costs associated with disabilities by working towards a federal living wage, encouraging the manufacture of critical drugs (including insulin and inhalers) at cost in the U.S., and establishing a universal health care system.

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 fully support making home and community based services a mandatory Medicaid service. I am also committed to raising the benchmark Federal Medicaid Assistance Percentage (FMAP), which will give states a greater ability to build out independent living centers themselves or to support organizations that perform this work.

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 path away from institutionalization and towards independent living must mean that those living with severe mental illnesses can be protected from self-harm and harm to others be prevented from occurring as well. To achieve this, it is crucial that funds for public safety can be spent on qualified professionals working on crisis care teams, instead of militarized responses in which situations are often made worse, not better. The path to maintaining or accessing secure housing can be supported by increasing funding for mental health service centers and both community and independent housing.

I also aim to support the transition away from institutionalization and towards more independent and communal living through a federal homebuilding program and encouraging cities to permit denser housing typologies, which will lower the cost of housing and increase supply, supporting access. Additionally, I support an expansion of ADA tax credits to homeowners and residential property owners, encouraging the retrofitting of older homes to be ADA compliant.

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, it is imperative that paratransit be treated as an instrumental part of transit systems. In line with this, I support establishing federal funding guidelines providing that a



consistent ratio of funding goes to paratransit services. I also support reporting requirements to make sure that paratransit systems do not experience delays or infrequent service.

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

Providing resources to disabled Americans should not mean keeping them trapped in cycles of poverty. I support raising the asset limit to \$20,000-\$30,000 to avoid penalizing the need for emergency expenses, and I support indexing this limit to inflation. I also support raising payments above the poverty line and ending the marriage penalty. I will support the SSI Restoration Act in achieving these aims.

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 would seek to expand food access through funding community-run, at-cost grocery stores, in which SNAP payments would be accepted without stigma. I hope to expand, rather than contract SNAP, by reversing cuts imposed by the Republican reconciliation bill and allowing payments to go towards the transportation of food in line to make benefits more accessible to those with reduced mobility and transportation access. Furthermore, I support higher payments for individuals whose disability involves food allergies and results in a need for more expensive groceries, such as those with celiac disease.

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 support ending the practice of solitary confinement for all, including those with disabilities. I also support laws requiring independent observers be allowed into immigration detention facilities, ensuring that reasonable accommodations are offered and ADA and Section 504 requirements are being followed.