



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: Juliana Stratton

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

Federal disability rights laws and regulations are essential protections for people with disabilities, ensuring they are not treated as second-class citizens and upholding disability rights as fundamental human rights. As the Trump Administration continues to undermine and target federal disability policies and programs, now more than ever we must safeguard and defend them. If elected to be Illinois' next United States Senator, I would be honored to work alongside Senator Tammy Duckworth, a steadfast and remarkable champion for disability rights. I am grateful for Senator Duckworth's endorsement of my campaign, which attests to her confidence in my commitment to serving working people and delivering real results – including defending and fighting for people with disabilities.

As a United States Senator, I would have joined Congressional Democrats' November 2025 letter calling out Department of Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer for the Trump Administration's assault on workplace protections and support for people with disabilities, proudly signing alongside Senator Duckworth and her colleagues. I refuse to be silent and complacent in the face of such disgraceful discriminatory conduct. I also would support legislation that reinforces existing laws and regulations like the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as well as oppose legislation, federal agency intervention, and funding cuts which undermine federal disability rights and enforcement.



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 Trump Administration's reductions in force this year have had disastrous impacts on our federal workforce; beyond shocking staffing shortages, they have caused severe confusion, propagated uncertainty, and destabilized our federal government. It will take immense time, effort, and intentionality to rebuild our federal administrative infrastructure. At the same time, it is an opportunity for us to reimagine and improve our existing systems and make them more equitable and accessible – for people with disabilities in particular. RIFs heavily impacted government agencies like the Office for Civil Rights, the Office for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, and the Office of Special Education Programs through staffing cuts, undermining their efficiency and ability to execute on their work. RIFs at the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs have long-term harm not only for affected employees, but for the disabled workers the OFCCP serves.

As a United States Senator, I would welcome the opportunity to support legislation that ensures our federal workforce is rebuilt in a manner that reduces biased hiring practices and increases the number of people with disabilities, creating equitable economic and workforce opportunities.

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

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is a critical law which helps make education accessible and attainable for students with disabilities. I believe education is a fundamental right and will always fight to make sure every student can access the quality education they deserve. In Illinois, we've invested in early childhood education by adding 11,000 new Pre-K seats the last two years through Smart Start Illinois, moved hundreds of school districts closer to adequacy through historic investments for K-12 students, eased the burden of student loan debt, and more. We've proven that investing in our students works. Illinois' high school graduation rate is the highest in 14 years, and our eighth graders have the second highest reading scores and fifth highest math scores in the United States. Funding special education is not only an investment in these students' future, but also an investment in our country's future. When our most vulnerable students can thrive, we all thrive.

As a United States Senator, I would work closely with Senator Tammy Duckworth to continue advocating for legislation like the Keep Our Promise to America's Children and Teachers (PACT) Act, which takes meaningful steps to properly fund IDEA and special education in public schools.

With the Trump Administration's shameful schemes to dismantle the Department of Education, consolidate IDEA programs, and use education funding as a bargaining chip – going as far as freezing more than \$200 million of Congressionally approved education funds from Illinois earlier this year – now more than ever we need a fighter in Washington who will ensure schools, especially special education programs, across



Illinois get the funding they have been promised.

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

Having served as a caretaker for my late mother, Velma, I know that having access to quality, affordable healthcare is a lifeline for so many Illinois families. In fact, that's why I first ran for office ten years ago – my State Representative was siding with Republicans to cut health services for seniors like my mom. So I ran against him and won, because I knew that my family, my community, and people across Illinois deserved better. Healthcare is central to my own story, my family's story, and my journey to elected office.



As the Trump Administration continues to mock and belittle people with disabilities and Congressional Republicans are once again ripping away healthcare from millions of Americans to give tax breaks to the ultra-wealthy, we must make coverage more accessible and affordable. That's why I support Medicare for All.

Illinois has made immense strides in protecting reproductive healthcare, expanding mental health services, eliminating medical debt, lowering the cost of prescription drugs, and more. But still, there are communities across the country right now that can't get access to the care they need – and the system needs to change.

We cannot stop working towards the goal of ensuring every single American has access to the healthcare they deserve. Meanwhile, our main opponent, Raja Krishnamoorthi, does not support Medicare for All and is one of the largest recipients of healthcare industry money in Congress. We have to act and we have to fight for guaranteed coverage by passing legislation like Medicare for All.

I am running for the United States Senate because I want to stand up for working families, advocate for people with disabilities, and fight for core issues like access to quality, affordable healthcare. I have always remained true to my values and committed to public service, and know that if my mother could see me and all that we've accomplished in the last seven years, she would be immensely proud.

I believe that the federal government should work with hospitals and local partners to facilitate quality, affordable healthcare for all Americans, especially those from Black and Brown, low-income, and rural communities and for people with disabilities who continue to face alarming healthcare disparities. People with disabilities often experience complex and costly health issues while also facing harmful healthcare discrimination. As a United States Senator, I would support protecting Medicare and Medicaid from Trump's funding cuts and restoring cuts to Medicaid, such as coverage for HCBS, made by the Trump Administration.

I welcome the opportunity to work with Senator Tammy Duckworth on initiatives to eliminate barriers to healthcare access, such as expanding parity laws to cover mental and behavioral health treatments the same way as other physical health services, restoring funding to Alzheimer's Disease and Cancer Research Centers, as well as expanding Medicare to cover long-term homecare services, vision, and hearing to



help seniors and people with disabilities live independently.

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 provide quality, compassionate, and dignified care for people with disabilities and are a more humane and cost-effective alternative to institutionalized care. *Olmstead* was a long-overdue breakthrough in rooting out discriminatory practices in our healthcare system; while it signified important progress, we must continue the fight today to ensure



people with disabilities receive the care they need at the standard they deserve.

I understand firsthand the importance of high-quality, supportive health and personal care. I served as a family caregiver, and I know that my own mother benefitted from her ability to receive care she needed in the comfort of our home. As a United States Senator, I would support legislation to increase access to HCBS and make it more affordable. In order to reduce the number of people with disabilities on waitlists for HCBS while maintaining a high quality of service, we must protect and expand investments in HCBS. This includes Medicaid funding for integrated community settings and properly paying our care workers, who are woefully underestimated and underpaid for the essential services they provide. I support making HCBS a mandatory Medicaid service; people with disabilities who rely on Medicaid would immensely benefit from the conscientious and inclusive care provided by HCBS. I would also support a tax credit for family caregivers like the Credit for Caring Act.

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

Illinois is facing a housing shortage crisis and it disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities and mental illness. Concurrently, homelessness can exacerbate existing mental illness. I understand the dire need for accessible, affordable, and integrated housing for people living with mental illness. These complex, interconnected issues are also compounded by barriers to access in both our housing and mental health systems.



As a United States Senator, I would work closely with housing, behavioral health, disability rights advocates, and other stakeholders to develop solutions for the federal government to target the root causes of these problems and support people with mental illness who are currently experiencing homelessness. This includes the need to build more affordable housing developments that allow people with disabilities to live in the communities where they want to live and work. The federal government should be a partner to local and state governments, equipping them with the resources they need to drive affordable and accessible housing development. Federal policies can be leveraged to incentivize communities to build greater quantity and quality of accessible, affordable housing developments. I would also work to mitigate the fallout of Trump's disastrous tariff policies which are driving up supply chain costs, amplifying the costs to build more housing sooner.

Illinois is facing an alarming housing shortage and affordability challenges, and we must take tangible action to confront and overcome them. I acknowledge that resolving these impediments is no simple feat, and requires intentional, good faith efforts from public and private stakeholders. Everyone deserves to have access to effective and affordable mental healthcare. Everyone deserves a roof over their head and accessible architecture they can feel at home in. The federal government can play a pivotal role in advancing affordable housing developments, and as a United States Senator, I welcome the opportunity to join the fight to end housing insecurity and expand accessible, affordable, and integrated housing across the country.

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. Accessible transit strengthens our communities' infrastructure and has a compounding impact in both making our society more inclusive and promoting our collective economic opportunity. From connecting disabled people with educational and healthcare services to unlocking more autonomy in where they choose to live and work, accessible transit and paratransit are undeniably vital tenants of a thriving community. Equitable funding systems that invest and sustain mainline and paratransit systems make public transit a more viable, reliable choice for disabled travelers. If elected to the United States Senate, I would support initiatives to expand and strengthen equitable transit funding, such as Senator Duckworth's All Stations Accessibility Act of 2021.

During my time as Lieutenant Governor, Illinois, and Chicago specifically, has worked to make our transit systems more accessible for seniors and people with disabilities. Chicago Transit Authority has made significant investments in ensuring bus stops and, most recently, Red Line trains stations are inclusive and accommodating to disabled people. But there is still more work to be done to make our transit systems 100% accessible to all travelers.

We should design our transportation's physical and financial structure with accessibility at the forefront of our minds. This includes ensuring wheelchair ramps and lifts, elevators, escalators, curb cuts, ample moving and standing space, visual and audio aids, and other features that meet the diverse range of needs of our disabled community are built into our construction and improvement projects. Making transit more equitable also means making it more affordable for vulnerable populations. That's why I support reducing transportation costs by funding universal low-cost fare cards for students, seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income



workers. Federal funding and incentives can be a powerful tool to make these advancements possible. Overall, a more equitable transit funding system centers the voices of the disability community and closely collaborates with disability rights advocates to achieve integrated and universally accessible transportation.

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

Supplemental Security Income provides essential financial support for over six million people – including millions of people with disabilities – to make basic ends meet and is a lifeline for needs not covered by Medicare or Medicaid. Unfortunately, extremely outdated benefits limit its effectiveness and stringent regulations can disqualify recipients from receiving benefits, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and financial risk.

As a United States Senator, I would support long-overdue reform that adjusts for inflation, addresses marriage parity, and rethinks income and asset limits, like the previously introduced Supplemental Security Income Restoration Act and SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act. I would also oppose measures that would slash or eliminate benefits, including the Trump Administration’s recent proposal to narrow the definition of “public assistance household” which threatens SSI benefits for hundreds of thousands of recipients. Our current system is vastly outdated, and not only do the costs of living continue to skyrocket, but people with disabilities also tend to experience higher healthcare costs. Now more than ever, we must modernize the SSI program. Additionally, given this year’s threats to the Social Security Administration, including



significant reductions in staffing, underscore the need to develop reform initiatives in coordination with SSA officials and experts to mitigate unnecessary and any overwhelming administrative strain it could cause to a reduced workforce. In addition to SSI, I am proud that Illinois has been a leader on addressing economic justice for people with disabilities, having eliminated the subminimum wage earlier this year. I would fight to bring that work to the Senate as well.

So many people with disabilities rely on SSI as a source of income to put food on the table and a roof over their heads. We must amend our current system in order to promote equal opportunity, access, and autonomy to improve financial stability 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

Millions of Americans, including nearly two million Illinoisans, rely on SNAP benefits to put food on the table. People with disabilities face higher rates of unemployment, an average lower income, and higher medical bills, exacerbating food insecurity and making SNAP benefits all the more essential. Everyone deserves a comfortable, dignified life where they can feed themselves and their families without having to worry about making rent or skipping a dose of medication to afford it. If elected to the United States Senate, I would support common sense policies that reverse the Trump Administration and Congressional Republicans' shameful cuts to SNAP benefits and measures to increase federal investment in critical food assistance programs, especially to accommodate the unique needs of people with disabilities. I also believe in expanding nutrition assistance in schools and supporting the agriculture industry by reinstating and increasing funding for a federal Farms to School Meals Program that supports partnerships between local farmers and school districts as well as creating a permanent grant program for state and tribal governments to source foods for food banks and hunger relief programs from local producers. Food access programs should also promote healthy, affordable, and accessible food options; that's why I would support reimbursements for farmers and food banks for the harvesting, packaging, and transportation of surplus crops to ensure fresh, local food reaches families in need. I would also support efforts to modernize SNAP programs by expanding the definition of disabilities and expanding online ordering and hot-meal access to close existing gaps.

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

President Trump is carrying out a dangerous agenda rooted in fear, manufacturing an unwanted crisis and targeting immigrant communities in the City of Chicago, Illinois, and across the United States. I will never abandon our immigrant communities, and I will continue using my platform to call out Trump's lies. His hateful immigration policies do not go after "the worst of the worst" like he claims, they racially profile and target our neighbors and community members, rip apart families, discourage school attendance, and weaken our economy. To move forward, we must wrap our arms around our immigrant neighbors by calling out unconstitutional and unjust federal intervention and investing in these communities that have been the most harmed.

We should treat everyone with dignity and respect, including immigrants with both visible and invisible disabilities. We need to make sure they have the protections and diverse range of accommodations they need. Federal immigration facilities and agencies are perpetuating an alarming lack of accountability and transparency in how they treat detainees, trying to hide inhumane conditions in locations like the Broadview ICE facility in Illinois. I strongly condemn the significant gaps that remain in ensuring adequate treatment and accommodations for detained individuals with disabilities. ²As a United States Senator, I would continue to call for federal immigration enforcement to fully comply with federal disability rights laws and uphold the highest accessibility standards for immigrants with disabilities. I will also work to end the Trump Administration's cruel immigration enforcement campaign and ensure that those who have broken the law are held accountable. I will never be silent in the face of blatant hate and intimidation and I will keep fighting day and night for our



immigrant communities.