



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: Dan Tully

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



Federal disability rights are only meaningful if they are enforced. As a legislator, I would oppose any effort to weaken or dismantle the ADA, Section 504, IDEA, or their implementing regulations, and I would use Congressional oversight, investigation, and appropriation powers to protect and fully fund the agencies responsible for enforcement, including OCR and OSERS. I support restoring staffing, investigative capacity, and technical assistance functions that have been hollowed out by recent RIFs, and ensuring these offices have clear authority and independence to carry out their missions.

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

Between now and 2028, my vision is to rebuild a federal disability rights infrastructure that is proactive, accessible, and accountable: one that responds quickly to complaints, enforces compliance consistently, and works in partnership with people who have disabilities, families, educators, and advocates. Disability rights are civil rights, and Congress must treat enforcement not as optional, but as a fundamental obligation.

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

IDEA is critical to ensuring that all students receive a free and appropriate public education. The federal government has a responsibility to meet its funding commitment, and the current 10% contribution is unacceptable. I would push to restore and increase federal funding toward the original 40% target, prioritize sustained funding in the annual budget, and support legislation that holds the federal government accountable for these obligations. Adequate funding ensures schools can hire enough teachers, therapists, and support staff, reducing burnout and improving outcomes for students with disabilities. I would work closely with educators, unions, state legislators, and advocacy groups to make sure these resources reach classrooms and support high-quality special education.

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

Access to healthcare is a fundamental right, and Medicaid is critical to the independence of people with disabilities. I will oppose any legislation, including H.R.1, that cuts Medicare, Medicaid, or home- and community-based services (HCBS). I will work to protect and expand HCBS funding, ensuring people with disabilities can remain in their communities with the support they need. I will use my office to hold federal agencies accountable, fight efforts to make these programs optional, and support policies that strengthen access, affordability, and quality of care for all Illinoisans, especially the most vulnerable.

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 expanding access to HCBS and making it a mandatory Medicaid service. To reduce waitlists, I would push for increased federal and state funding for HCBS programs, prioritize staffing and training to ensure high-quality services, and streamline eligibility and enrollment processes. I would also advocate for oversight and accountability measures to maintain service quality while expanding access. Everyone should have the right to live safely and independently in their communities, and Illinois must fully fund and support these programs to honor the *Olmstead* decision, improve outcomes, and respect the dignity of people with disabilities.



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 unhoused status significantly harms people with disabilities and serious mental illness. I will use federal tax and funding incentives to induce state legislatures to oppose municipal laws and ordinances that penalize people for lacking housing and instead support policies that expand access to affordable housing, mental health services, and supportive community programs. I will advocate for funding for housing-first initiatives, coordinated care, and wraparound services that address both health and social needs, ensuring unhoused individuals with disabilities can live safely and with dignity. Law enforcement should not be used to punish poverty or illness—our focus must be on support and expanding access to resources, not criminalization.

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

I strongly support a more equitable funding system that prioritizes accessible transit, including paratransit. Funding should be based on actual demand and need, not just ridership numbers, and should include dedicated resources for maintenance, staffing, and technology upgrades. Paratransit must be fully integrated into transit planning and treated as an essential service, not an afterthought. I would advocate for federal and state funding formulas that guarantee reliable, sustainable support for both fixed-route and ADA-compliant services, ensuring people with disabilities can travel independently and participate fully in society.

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



SSI is a vital lifeline for people with disabilities, but the current system is slow, underfunded, and traps recipients in poverty. I would support legislation to modernize SSI by increasing monthly benefits, raising outdated asset limits, and streamlining the application and appeals process to reduce wait times. I also back reforms to ensure recipients are not penalized for modest savings or work-related expenses. Strengthening SSI is essential to provide economic security, independence, and dignity for people with disabilities, rather than forcing them into poverty while waiting for support.

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 answer provided.

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

Immigrants with disabilities must have their rights fully protected, including access to appropriate medical care and accommodations. I would hold federal agencies accountable by supporting robust oversight, requiring transparent reporting on conditions and compliance, and backing legislation that enforces ADA and disability protections in detention facilities. I would work with advocacy groups, inspectors general, and Congress to ensure deficiencies are corrected promptly, and I would oppose any policies that allow neglect or discriminatory treatment. Protecting the dignity and rights of all people with disabilities, regardless of citizenship, is a moral and legal obligation.