

2020 Legislative Candidate Questionnaire for Developmental Disabilities

Name: Elaina Gonzales-Blanton

District: 23

Position: State Representative, Position 2

1. If you have a personal connection or professional experience with someone who has a developmental disability, would you describe its impact on you?

I have both. I have two children with development disabilities and I have case managed adults and children with disabilities.

For my children, being the mother of child who has been diagnosed with a developmental disability it has been eye opening, and challenging. There were no IEP's when I was a child, and both of my children had them. It was hard at first, because I felt like their disabilities were because of something I had done wrong. I later realized that their brains just work differently and different is not bad. Different is beautiful, we just had to learn new ways for them to learn.

For my case management experience, it was wonderful to see adults with developmental disabilities who have learned other ways to navigate school, and work and the resilience of the people I case managed was inspiring.

Working with the children was absolutely amazing! Children are constantly growing and learning, and they often adapt on their own. I loved seeing the children overcome.

2. What are your top three legislative priorities and how would you help people with developmental disabilities in them?

1-My first priority is to separate the Department of Early Learning from the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). I would do this because the Department of Early Learning is part of the same agency that is also Child Protective Services, and because so, when families enroll in Head Start/ ECEAP, their data is monitored and shared because the agencies are one in the same.

The Head Start ECEAP programs serve children and families with disabilities and their assessments often do not account for the disability that a child may have and therefore the data may be recorded subjectively and based on opinions rather than concrete information. I also believe that parents with disabilities may be unfairly targeted by CPS.

Separating these two agencies would help to ensure fairness for the parents and the children who use Head Start/ECEAP.

2-Another is with taxes and I would work to pass legislation to bring relief to landlords so that their property taxes are kept low and they can keep their rent affordable.

3- Transparency within our government has been lacking over the last decade or so and because so, it has become difficult for many people with and without knowledge in the field, to understand how the government works. I plan to help fix this by abolishing the practice of Title-Only/Ghost Bills. I also plan to continuously be involved with my constituents during every aspect of the legislative session, and throughout the year. By communicating regularly with my constituents on bills, where they are at in the process and how legislation works, as well as how my constituents feel on the bills, I am ensuring that their voices are heard and that I am doing my job as their elected employee. I will be available to my constituents to speak, and work WITH them.

3. With the current economic crisis, how would you protect services that people with I/DD and their families need?

I would be readily available to advocate for my constituents so that if they are being discriminated against, I can be there to help. I would also again, look at how we can keep the costs of living affordable, and taxes at a minimum. I would also support funding constitutionally protected services.

4. Is there other information you'd like constituents with developmental disabilities and their family and friends to know?

Yes, I am an adult with a developmental disability. After having failed math many times in high school, I dropped out and a few years later, earned my GED.

I went back to college, only to fail math many times. I studied, paid for tutors, was in the math skills lab at Olympic College for many hours, only to fail over and over again. I hated myself for it. I felt so down on myself for it and I thought I was stupid. But then, a friend told me to ask for accommodations. I could not get accommodations without a diagnosis and so I sought the help of a developmental psychologist. After many hours of testing, I was diagnosed with Dyscalculia. I finally had a reason for the madness of all the failed classes and brokenness that came with them. I also finally got accommodations and was able to FINALLY pass math. I passed with a 2.0, the bare minimum, but I did it! Knowing why I struggle with numbers, maps, organization and directions has changed my life because I have been able to gain access to accommodations that allow me to overcome.

With that said-I would advocate to pass legislation that would allow for colleges to use a portion of their funds to pay for developmental testing in adults who continuously fail such classes as fundamental Math, and English (100 level). Another possible solution could be that a Developmental Psychologist be contracted to administer the testing on campus. I ran out of financial aid because I failed math so many times and that in itself became an obstacle.

I would also advocate to have the failed classes of any adult with a newly diagnosed developmental disability completely expunged from their college record and for those failing grades to be replaced with the passing grade, upon passing the class after receiving accommodations. Failing math so many times killed not only my confidence, but my GPA, and like I said, my financial aid as well.