

2020 Legislative Candidate Questionnaire for Developmental Disabilities

Name: Cyndy Jacobsen

District: 25

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?

My brother has high functioning autism and he was diagnosed in the early 1960's. A lot has changed since then. They originally diagnosed my brother as retarded, but now we know he is on the autism spectrum. There was some talk of institutional care for him but my parents rejected that. He grew up in special ed classes, but they did not have the treatments they do now. He was mocked and bullied by the neighborhood kids and by school kids. When I used to sub as a paraeducator in the late 90's, I would often sub in the classes for children with developmental disabilities. I did not witness the kind of bullying that my brother received. So I hope we have advanced. In my house growing up, my parents really did not emphasize any limitations my brother might have. He was autonomous to the fullest extent possible. Working was hard for him. He finally landed a job with Pinkerton (now Securitas) and has been a security guard for many years. When my parents died, my sister and I thought that he could live in a house near my family with some weekly help. He was not really able to do that safely, so now he lives with us. I also had to completely take over his finances because he was getting swindled out of his security guard paychecks. When he lived with my parents, apparently they paid all his bills, so it did not matter. Anyway, my brother is happy now. I cook for him and he has lost over 50 pounds and reduced his type II diabetes medication. His finances are much better and he may be able to retire soon. I would say that he is happy although he protested about all the changes.

My kids grew up with a family that had the privilege of including a developmentally and physically disabled young girl. This young girl is now a young woman. Here is what strikes me about their situation. When our disabled friend, Annie*, was young, she did everything her family did. We went on homeschool field trips together. We went to the beach and enjoyed 4th of July parties. Now things have changed. Her siblings have moved on with their lives and Annie is still at home. It is a bit difficult for my friend, Annie's mom. Annie cannot drive but enjoys having a part time job. Her mom is tasked with Annie's care and also with managing all the paperwork that comes with Annie's medical and social needs. Annie's mom has not renewed her nursing license as she had planned to. She is busy enough with Annie. It feels like there is a great big drop off when special needs kiddos graduate from high school. Suddenly parents are tasked with full time care of kiddos who had formerly been spending at least some time in school. And the developmentally disabled young adults are suddenly presented with the contrast between their lives and those of their peers.

(Annie is not actually her name for privacy.)

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

My legislative priorities are to try to stem the tide of new taxes coming out of Olympia, to remove institutional barriers to economic development in the 25th district (not just Seattle!), and to make sure that we address the problems associated with homelessness by providing beds for those who need addiction treatment and steering those with mental health challenges to appropriate treatment.

Those are the general brush strokes. I believe that a healthy economy solves many problems. I have enough life experience, though, to have a heart for the disabled and a specific awareness of need. I am aware and willing to learn. The next legislative session is going to be a tough one. Our State's budget increased about 40% from 2015 to 2020. It is likely that our revenues will be down less than that, depending on how quickly we wrap this up. We may be facing a roll back to earlier year's funding amounts.

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

The COVID-19 response will create extreme budgetary challenges. We may need to just hold back increases in program funding. If we roll back funding to a previous year's levels, we might be able to weather this storm without adding income taxes, capital gains taxes, carbon taxes, or you-name-the-tax. Then we can get the economy back moving and look forward to better days ahead. Then we can fund our priorities and potentially move forward with relief for beleaguered parents and individuals with developmental disabilities. Programs that I would love to support are those that give disabled people a chance to work and parents a break. Work is a meaningful part of life and parents deserve a balance, too.

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

I am accessible and available to learn. I appreciate you.

Cyndy Jacobsen

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