

2020 Legislative Candidate Questionnaire for Developmental Disabilities

Name: Jamila Taylor

District: 30

Position: 1

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 twin brother, William was born with learning disabilities. I wrote a Facebook note about him in 2012. This was before he suffered a stroke related to his diabetes. I am now a caregiver for him and my mother. The three of us reside in the same household.

My Special Twin

After reading the eloquent open letter to Ann Coulter by John Franklin Stephens (<http://specialolympicsblog.wordpress.com/2012/10/23/an-open-letter-to-ann-coulter/>) about her remark using the "retard" word in reference to President Obama, I thought I'd share my thoughts on my twin brother, William. As some of you may know, my brother has learning disabilities. That open letter and my brother both embody the heart of the matter -- true character.

If you see us together, we still enjoy the brother-sister banter and yet, he is a very significant reason of why I am so driven. My parents aptly chose to enroll him in schools that could best address his academic development. Out of the 12 years of public education, we only attended 3 years of school together. While I was in advanced classes, my twin was in special education. In our early years, the doctors and specialists didn't believe he would graduate from high school; He did that. They said he would never step foot on a college campus as a student; He did that. They said he would never get his driver's license or drive a car; He did that -- and I dare say he has a spotless driving record. They never imagined he'd appear in the local newspaper. And yet, He did that.

William is a paradox of expertise. If the family needed someone to set up the new electronics, we call on William. On many occasions, you could hear my mom or dad affectionately yelling, "William! Come set up the VCR so that I can record my show." His video gaming expertise has always been top-notch. I hated losing to him ALL of the time. He could finish a newly-released game in the first week. What's interesting is how he immersed himself into the gamer world in such a diligent way. He'd subscribe to the gamer magazines, read them thoroughly and then explore the video game in a whole new way with the new tricks he learned. After all, he is from a research-focused, academic family. Why would he be any different?

As an adult, William struggles to find employment although he's probably one of the most reliable and consistent people around. He's always on time, rarely misses work, and willing to learn. William puts forth a meticulous effort in his tasks.

William is a keen observer of the world around him. He learned early on to carefully, quickly, discern someone's character. He is my protector in so many ways. At 6'4" he is the absolute tallest in our family and he towers over all of us. He stands out and sees what we don't. He chooses his words with much effort. When he speaks, I listen. Sometimes I pretend not too. Come on, I'm still his sister. It's easy for me to feel comfort and protection just being in his presence. I look forward to the day when he gets to be the loving uncle to my future children. William is known by many, friended by few, loved by us.

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

In addition to addressing the COVID-19 Economic Recovery, my top priorities include:

Health Care: I share my home with my mother and twin brother, both of whom live with chronic illness. Too many seniors and low income residents are having to choose between life saving medication or having somewhere to sleep at night. I am fortunate that I am able to help provide for my family, but too many others lack a safety net — only perpetuating cycles of homelessness and other trauma. We have to do better as a State to care for all people. It's not only compassionate, but makes fiscal sense.

Crime and Violence Prevention: Throughout my career I've addressed challenges within the public safety continuum — from preventing youth violence to advocating for the safety of domestic violence survivors and seniors at risk of exploitation. Individuals with developmental disabilities are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and need continued social supports that allow independence, yet some protection from harm. I'm excited to continue tackling these and other critical issues in the legislature.

Homelessness and Affordable Housing: In addition to my prior work as a nonprofit director, I am a small business owner and manage a complex household budget. I understand the pressures facing local families, and the need to maximize resources and deliver services efficiently. In Olympia I will fight to ensure every family -- regardless of employment status and income -- can keep a roof over their head and access critical services. I have learned from residents on fixed incomes are particularly vulnerable to displacement when landlords come under new ownership. Resources for people with developmental disabilities need to be preserved and we need to find effective solutions that support our members of the community who are often "not seen."

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

While Washington is providing employment for many high-skill, high-wage workers, its residents continue to suffer from public health crises, safety concerns, and housing insecurity. These are my major priorities in office and I will work to ensure our economy is recovering while ensuring it is not at the cost of low-income residents and families. As we recover we must not let anyone fall behind. This includes pushing forward legislation to close wealth gaps, support workers, invigorate education, secure long-term healthcare for all residents, and prevent violence statewide.

I would want to ensure that any plan proposed considers the needs of marginalized members of the community and does not perpetuate our upside-down tax code where those with the least pay the most.

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

I am the caregiver for my mother and sibling, both of whom live with chronic illness. While my lived experience may show me one side of the healthcare system, my role as a state representative would be to examine things beyond my own experience. I have empathy for families and individuals who have difficulty navigating the healthcare system and being able to access affordable options. I will support well-vetted and strategic efforts to contain costs for patients, including increased transparency for pharma, insurers, hospitals, specialty doctors. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the ongoing health disparities affecting residents in my district. Taking on a role as a state representative would give me the opportunity to advocate

for my constituents and community against bad actors and to advocate to change systemic policies with bad effects.

Campaign website: <http://www.electjamilataylor.com>