

2020 Legislative Candidate Questionnaire for Developmental Disabilities

Name: Jesse Johnson

District: 30

Position: 2nd

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 been able to build a great relationship with a friend with a developmental disability in my community. She is absolutely amazing and a wonderful friend to myself and those around her.

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

Healthy and Vibrant Communities that Serve our Neighbors -- Every one of our neighbors ought to have the support they need to be successful, and that starts by listening to and acting on the needs of vulnerable and marginalized communities. In Olympia, I've sponsored multiple bills to support at-risk youth, including those who are in foster care, experiencing homelessness, or suffering from challenges with mental health or addiction. In addition to growing our efforts to provide housing stability, it's clear we need improved services to help get homeless and housing-unstable members of our community back on their feet. I also believe that healthy communities begin with a healthy environment. Through the prism of environmental justice, I'm looking forward to further developing opportunities to address climate change, reduce pollution, and create renewable energy jobs.

Education and Opportunity for Every Child - From Cradle to Career -- Both on the City Council and in my job working with Highline Public Schools, I have sought to ensure we are providing equitable access to quality education for every student - from cradle to career. I've worked to increase student exposure to career pathway and training opportunities, higher education, and trade/vocational programs, all while encouraging youth to engage in civic life and decision making. The first bill I passed in the State Legislature will lead to establishing an environmental sustainability high school curriculum focused around our local natural resources in addition to introducing our students to new opportunities in clean energy careers. I also sponsored a budget proviso to pilot our region's first ever Maritime School and Educational program, an investment to increase the maritime industry workforce including longshoreman, engineers, port workers and biologists. Our community is an ideal area to launch this program due to our excellent access to waterways.

Affordability -- The cost of living is increasing everywhere across our region, especially housing costs as more people are moving into our community. I helped lead the effort to form Federal Way's first Senior Advisory Commission, and, as our district continues to grow, I know we need to be proactive in protecting our communities by concentrating on housing and healthcare affordability for seniors and working people. I'm also dedicated to bringing down the cost of healthcare. This session, I sponsored a bill, which passed the House unanimously, to expand dental health programs for kids and expand outreach to more kids in need. The community we've built here is what makes this district special - we can't afford to lose that because of soaring costs. In the Legislature, I'll always be an advocate for affordability.

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

Until recently, Washington's economy has been booming, but too many are being left behind. When you compound that with the devastating affects the coronavirus is having on our economy, particularly vulnerable communities, are suffering. In Olympia, I will be a very vocal voice to ensure we all pay our fair share, and that includes our wealthiest households and corporations. We took important steps this session to close the Boeing tax break that has hurt our workers and kept critical revenue off of the table. That was one important step, but there are many more tax breaks and loopholes to address. I will vote to close each in the Legislature, and right side up our tax code so that we can invest in the systems, supports, and services that lift each member of our community up.

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

I am an educator and community leader with a proven record advocating for youth and marginalized people. I have led the community in organizing youth forums, youth violence prevention programs, and connecting young people to trades, apprenticeships, and postsecondary education. In addition, I have fought for resources that support youth and marginalized people. I believe that is an important needed perspective in Olympia, in order to effectively advocate for equal rights for everyone across Washington.