

2020 Legislative Candidate Questionnaire for Developmental Disabilities

Name: Jenn Goulet

District: 9

Position: State Senate

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

Honestly, I'm a bit uncomfortable that you've asked about how the experience impacted *me*. So I will talk about how it impacted *us*. My oldest, now 20 years old, is autistic. When they (they use they/them pronouns) were a child, it had a much more significant impact on both our lives. I spent many days seeking mental health care, educational services, and other special services to help them be able to navigate and cope in a world that wasn't easy for an autistic kid. They would often become overwhelmed and try to escape it, running away from daycare, school, or home. I would worry terribly. Once I had to get police involved to help search for them. At one point, I had to contemplate a group home setting when I no longer felt confident I could keep my kid safe from themselves or keep my other child safe from their older sibling. I worried they'd never be able to safely live on their own or hold a job. I was a single parent and it was overwhelming and heartbreaking. I had too few resources to help. My kid was overmedicated and I didn't know who they were without the awful medications, but the psychiatrist wouldn't agree to help me wean them off in spite of my pleading. He argued my kid was one of the most profoundly autistic kids he'd ever treated and needed to remain medicated. I just wanted to know who my kid really was without being dulled by all those medications with terrible side effects that weren't even helping! (They even got suspended from school once for violent behavior against a teacher, which was a side effect of a new medication.) But there was a severe shortage of mental health professionals in the Tri-Cities who would see minors and the only other one wasn't seeing new patients. We had been lucky to even get into the one we were seeing! I knew it wasn't safe to take them off without guidance, so I didn't know what to do. I was suffering from my own mental health issues in large part because I felt so alone and helpless through these years. I just wanted what was best for them, but it felt like life circumstances were conspiring against us. Finally, bullied mercilessly in school, struggling academically after being integrated into the regular classroom, and horribly depressed, at the age of 14, they decided to move across the country to live with their father, to get a fresh start. That didn't work out very well in the end, and they eventually moved back home with me when they were 17 (finally off medications!). They are on SSI, but just started attending Columbia Basin College. They are a talented artist and writer. They are still trying to navigate and cope in a world that isn't easy, but they've come a long, long way from the kid that tried to run from everything when they got overwhelmed. Now they are a fighter, like their mom. We've both overcome so much adversity, and I am proud of who they are becoming. Their path forward is not going to be without its challenges, but in spite of everything we've been through, I have something now that I didn't have when they were little: I have hope.

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

1. COVID disaster recovery will be a top priority in the next legislative session and I aim to ensure no one gets left behind. I'm angry that at the federal level too much in aid has gone to big businesses, while small businesses and individuals have been largely left out in the cold. While I won't be able to do anything about that at the federal level, I will work at the state level to ensure that any aid is inclusive of the "little guys." The small businesses and nonprofits, the essential workers, the

unemployed and underemployed, the disabled, etc. That will naturally include people with I/DD, who may be on disability, laid off, working essential jobs, or relying on help from nonprofit organizations like ARC, etc.

2. Ensuring everyone in our Eastern Washington communities has access to quality, affordable mental health resources in a timely manner is probably the thing I'm most personally passionate about, because the lack of timely and quality care has impacted *everyone* in my family so deeply, myself included, and I've seen how much it impacts so many others, leading to unemployment, needlessly placing people in the path of law enforcement, and driving up the rates of suicide. And when I say mental health care, I see that intersecting with diagnosing and helping people with I/DD, too.

3. Fully funding K-12 education, focusing on finally funding special education services, is one of my top priorities, too. Special education has never been adequately funded, and I want to work to close the gap. Of course, having had a kid who received special education services for the majority of their years in school, in which teachers and paras who came and went quickly did the best they could with the little resources they had, this is an issue that is close to my heart.

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

All I can say is that because of my personal background, it's important to me in a way that would lead me to fight for funding services as best I can. It's going to be very tough with so much competition for funds and a depleted tax base in the wake of a disaster the size of COVID. But I'd do what I can, and that's all I can say.

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

I will focus on the viewpoints, needs, and priorities of individuals *with* developmental disabilities first and foremost. I will listen to those who can and should speak for themselves.