

2020 Candidate Questionnaire for Developmental Disabilities

Name: Debra Lekanoff

District: 40

Position: Representative, Pos. 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?

I am connected with people who work with students with developmental disabilities. The students' lives are impacted in every aspect - from being able to earn a living wage to living independently and managing their own lives without guidance or someone helping them. Some will never be able to live on their own because of the severity of their developmental disabilities. Those stories impact me deeply, and I am committed to doing everything we can to bring the voices of those professionals and families to my table to discuss policies they need that will protect their rights and resources in 2021 and beyond.

2. What are your top three priorities and how would you help people with developmental disabilities in them? (2000 characters max)

We must build our economies with jobs that reflect the values of Washington State. I fully support building educational opportunities to match our community needs and residents, which includes ensuring rural and urban students of all ages have access to high speed broadband to engage in distance learning. Every person deserves the chance to become who they want to be. That includes opportunities for training, apprenticeships, community college, and higher education, no matter the student's financial situation, social status, or level of ability. Investing in workforce development is a commitment I made in 2018, and we made some significant strides in the last two legislative sessions to make this a reality. It is even more important during this pandemic to invest in our future today so that Washington is stronger for the next seven generations.

We also need to support working families, which are the foundation of our communities and our economy. This includes addressing the housing affordability crisis in our region to ensure that every individual and family can afford a healthy and safe home in their community regardless of their income. We must address the continuing increase in property values, the overall vacancy rate, and increase the availability of affordable housing to make homeownership possible in the 40th District.

Acting on climate is another strong priority for my campaign. One important lesson we are learning from COVID-19 is that what was previously thought to be impossible now looks a lot more achievable (e.g. expanding access to healthcare, paid family and medical leave for all workers, reducing carbon emissions by turning to tele-work instead of unnecessary travel, expanding access to distance education, etc.). As I sit here in my home office with the Salish Sea as my background, I am seeing that we have a real opportunity to make meaningful changes as we open Washington back up in phases. Instead of going "back to normal," we have the chance to rethink "normal" as a state that prioritizes the health of its people and environment over profits.

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

To protect people who have developmental disabilities is to ensure they have the freedom and the power to make important decisions about their lives. Protecting the right to have a choice and autonomy to make those choices about your own future is something I fully endorse and will continue to work towards.

We also need to make sure we direct funding to programs and services that help people with disabilities, including funding for staff like paraprofessionals within our schools. I worked with members from the Hispanic community in 2020 to secure a budget proviso that would have provided 10 scholarships at Skagit Valley College for Spanish-speaking paraprofessionals. I would have then worked with OSPI to help place those workers in Mount Vernon and Mount Baker Grade school. The proviso did not pass, but we will raise it again in 2021.

With the understanding that families of those with developmental disabilities may sometimes feel overwhelmed with the task of caring for their loved ones, we also need to secure funding for community and patient advocates to help families navigate the healthcare and social service systems.

When we discuss options for increasing access to affordable housing, we must also include housing for people with developmental disabilities, who often end up with higher rents due to special accommodations they need to live comfortably. Their higher cost of living ends up putting this group at a higher risk of homelessness, which is unacceptable in normal times, but especially in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

I have a very wide wingspan and I am not afraid of a challenge. Including all communities and issues within that wingspan is a core part of who I am, especially bringing people right up to the table with me to have hard discussions that end in solutions. I value hearing from a diverse group of voices when making decisions that will impact Washingtonians' future. Those who are most affected are the best experts on what they need from us in Olympia, and I look forward to working together in the 2021 session. Together, we will move forward post-COVID to a future that works for all of Washington's people. Thank you for inviting me to share my ideas and vision with you all!