

2020 Legislative Candidate Questionnaire for Developmental Disabilities

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District: Washington's 43rd Legislative District

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?

It's interesting to me that this question presumes the candidate is not themselves a person with a developmental disability, which also puts people on the spot to self-disclose. I've learned that this can be dangerous – anything that is stigmatized can be weaponized. We are everywhere. I have had to learn my own ways of navigating systems and institutions, from schools to carceral systems to the system of elections. Instead of letting people convince me that I have no power to change my circumstances, I have either found mechanisms to meet my needs or created them and then shared them with others who face access barriers. I work with many people now who have different developmental disabilities than I do, including on this very campaign. I do the painstaking, rewarding work of helping all of us learn how to accommodate one another. People with disabilities deserve better than to be represented by people who think they know what we need. I am here because I know that all of us are capable of speaking for ourselves. It's just a matter of convincing everyone else that we deserve to be heard and giving us the tools and resources we need for access.

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

My foundational priority is progressive taxation. Without it, all marginalized people will continue to be exploited. Next is abolition, across all state-run institutions, from police to schools. We've seen how often development disabilities are perceived as moral problems or suspicious behaviors, leading to isolation, exclusion, and even death, especially for those who are marginalized in other ways. While we do not know whether Elijah McClain had a disability, for example, many of us saw in his 2019 murder by police a common reaction to ways of being that are associated with disabilities and therefore coded as abnormal, frightening, or wrong. Third, we have to invest in community-driven solutions that uplift multiply marginalized communities. Unfortunately, having a disability makes people far more likely to be deemed "unemployable," criminalized, dependent on self-medication, engaged in survival work, or in a situation where they cannot meet their basic financial needs. Yet too many efforts to alleviate housing instability or expand opportunity segment out developmentally disabled people. Not only is it possible to do this work intersectionally, including people with disabilities, we have to do if we're going to succeed.

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

This is a question of funding priorities. I find it extremely counterproductive to segment out people with I/DD as if these are conditions that can be addressed separately from the other conditions people face. We end up with piecemeal systems that spend a lot of money but don't do much, if anything, to improve the conditions of people's lives. Instead, folks with I/DD end up being forced to navigate opaque, inaccessible structures just to get their basic needs met. The state and community alike need to stop fighting as if each issue can be neatly defined apart from the others.

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

As a member of this community, the majority of my life I was convinced that it wasn't worth pursuing civic engagement. I felt like the systems were made to exclude me and people like me. When I was able to access education on how to navigate those systems, they were demystified. Already, I have been able to effect change on a political level. It really isn't as complicated as they want you to think. Now, it is part of my mission to make civic engagement accessible, by creating tools and sharing education so people can advocate for themselves. If you are someone with an intellectual or developmental disability, I encourage you to reach out, not just to me but to anyone who claims to want to represent you. You deserve to be heard.