



Many Voices / One Vision



2026 Legislative Candidate Survey

*Questions for Legislative Candidates — The Arc of Washington
The Community Advocacy Coalition for Developmental Disabilities
The Children's Campaign Fund*

Name: Diana Perez

Position: House

Legislative District: 17

Email: electdianaperez@gmail.com

Website: electdianaperez.com



1. Do you have a personal connection or professional experience with someone who has an intellectual/developmental disability (IDD)? If yes, would you describe its impact on you and your candidacy? If not, what have you learned about people with intellectual or developmental disabilities and how has it impacted your candidacy?

I do not have a personal connection or professional experience with someone who has an intellectual/developmental disability. Through my years in public service and community advocacy, I have learned that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities want the same opportunities that everyone else seeks: to be treated with dignity, participate fully in their communities, build meaningful relationships, and live as independently as possible. I have also learned that too many

individuals and families continue to face barriers in housing, employment, transportation, healthcare, and community participation that limit those opportunities.

2. What policies and systems are you aware of that impact the lives of people with IDD and their families? If elected, what responsibility would you have to change those policies or systems?

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families navigate a system that too often makes them fight for every service, every support, and every dollar. I am aware of the critical role that the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) plays in Washington, and I know that waitlists for services are far too long, that family caregivers are stretched to their breaking point, and that direct support professionals are chronically underpaid and undervalued. Housing accessibility and affordability compound these challenges, as do gaps in behavioral health services, transportation barriers, and a lack of inclusive employment opportunities. If elected, I would take seriously my responsibility to fight for adequate funding for DDA services, to shorten waitlists, to raise wages for direct support workers, and to ensure that people with IDD have a genuine voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Everyone deserves dignity, opportunity, and the chance to fully participate in their community, and that includes people with IDD and their families.

3. If elected, what are your top three priorities, and how would people with IDD and their families benefit from each priority?

Affordability and Housing Stability

My number one priority is making Southwest Washington affordable for every family. For families caring for loved ones with IDD, housing stability is not just a quality of life issue, it is a safety issue. When families are not worrying about keeping a roof over their heads, they have more capacity to advocate for their loved ones, access services, and provide consistent care. I will work to expand affordable and accessible housing options and remove the barriers that make it too hard and too expensive to build the homes our community desperately needs.

Behavioral and Mental Health Investment

Many individuals with IDD have co-occurring behavioral and mental health needs that too often go unmet. Expanding access to community based behavioral health services is a priority I will carry with me to Olympia. Better funded, better coordinated mental and behavioral health care means people with IDD get the support they need closer to home, and families get the relief and resources they deserve.

Building an Economy That Works for Everyone

Every person deserves the dignity of meaningful work and economic security. I will fight for inclusive employment opportunities, strong worker protections, and a workforce development system that leaves no one behind. When the broader economy is strong and working families have good paying jobs, families caring for loved ones with IDD have greater financial stability and more choices in how they access care and support.

4. When you have questions about how to best support people with IDD and their families, what or who are your trusted resources?

When I have questions about how to best support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families, my first priority would be listening to those with lived experience. Individuals with disabilities, family members, caregivers, self-advocates, and community organizations often have the most valuable insights into what is working, what barriers remain, and where policy changes are needed. Effective policymaking starts with listening to the people most affected by the decisions being made.

I would look to trusted partners such as the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), The Arc of Washington, Disability Rights Washington, People First of Washington, Special Olympics Washington, community service providers, educators, healthcare professionals, and local advocacy organizations. I would also seek guidance from Tribal communities, workforce providers, and organizations supporting housing, employment, and independent living services. My approach would be to build relationships with these stakeholders, learn from their expertise, and ensure that people with IDD and their families have a meaningful voice in shaping policies that affect their lives.

5. The national trend -- and legal mandate --- supports transitioning individuals with IDD out of institutional settings and into community-based care, which is not only the best practice but also the most cost-effective approach. Studies consistently show that community-based services cost significantly less per person than institutional care while providing greater independence and quality of life. In Washington the cost of care in a Residential Habilitation Center (RHC) is more than double the cost of equivalent services in community settings. Although Washington has made progress, continued efforts are needed to align with best practices, civil rights, federal priorities, and fiscal responsibility. Transitioning more individuals into community-based care will allow the state to reinvest savings into services for much needed community-based services. How do you believe Washington state should approach investment in home and community based services for people with IDD in the next five years?

The evidence is clear and the legal mandate is established, community based care is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do fiscally. When community based services cost significantly less per person than institutional care while delivering better outcomes and greater independence, continuing to over-invest in institutional settings is simply not defensible. Washington has made progress, but we need to move with greater urgency and intention over the next five years. I believe Washington should commit to a deliberate, well-resourced transition strategy that expands the availability of high quality community based services, invests in and fairly compensates the direct support workforce that makes those services possible, and ensures that no individual is left without adequate support during any transition. The savings generated by moving away from institutional care should be reinvested directly into expanding community based services, shortening waitlists, and building the infrastructure families need to thrive. This is fiscal responsibility and human dignity working hand in hand, and I will be a strong advocate for that approach in Olympia.

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

I want every person with IDD and every family who loves and cares for them to know that you will have a seat at the table when I am in Olympia. Your

experiences, your challenges, and your vision for a better system will shape the work I do as your Representative. I have spent over 30 years in public service because I believe deeply that the government should work for people, especially those who have been overlooked, underserved, and made to fight too hard for too long just to access what they need. That ends with better leadership, and I am committed to being that leader for you.