



*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:** KARINA D WALLACE

**Position:** House

**Legislative District:** 9

**Email:**

karinacampaign1@gmail.com

**Website:**

Karinajustfiguringitout.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?**

Yes — deeply and from multiple directions.

I grew up watching my mother do direct advocacy work with children with disabilities. That shaped how I understood the world from a very young age.

Disability was never abstract in my household — it was people, families, and systems that either showed up for them or failed them.

I was also in special education myself through fifth grade. I am autistic and ADHD, and I didn't have the language for that as a child — I just knew I experienced the world differently and that school systems weren't always built for people like me. Getting that diagnosis as an adult reframed my entire life.

Three of my own children are neurodivergent. I have navigated IEPs, school accommodations, system gaps, and the exhaustion of advocating for your child in spaces that weren't designed with them in mind. I am not just a candidate who cares about this issue. I am a parent who is living it right now.

That experience is central to why I'm running. When you depend on systems to actually work, you stop accepting failure as inevitable. You start asking who built this, who it serves, and who it leaves out. That question drives my entire candidacy — and it's why the Disability & Chronic Illness Access Guarantee is one of my three core legislative priorities for my first term.

## **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 IDD and their families interact with a web of systems that are often underfunded, fragmented, and geographically inaccessible — especially in rural areas like Eastern Washington. That includes Medicaid waiver programs with years-long waiting lists, special education services that vary dramatically by district, housing supports that simply don't exist in many rural communities, employment programs that are underfunded and hard to access, and state agency processes that require navigating bureaucracy that isn't designed for people who need accommodations to navigate it.

I know this firsthand. I am still fighting to get my own son access to services he qualifies for. In Eastern Washington the gaps aren't theoretical — they're the reality families live every single day. Distance, limited providers, and

lack of funding mean that rights on paper don't always translate to access in practice.

If elected, I believe legislators have a direct responsibility to close those gaps. That means funding waiver programs adequately so families aren't waiting years for support, requiring state agencies to be genuinely accessible — not just technically compliant — and making sure rural communities aren't treated as an afterthought in how services are designed and delivered. My Disability & Chronic Illness Access Guarantee is built on exactly this principle: that access isn't a luxury, it's a right, and geography shouldn't determine whether you get it.

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

My top three legislative priorities are the Disability & Chronic Illness Access Guarantee, the Paycheck Protection & Corporate Accountability package, and the Lobbyist Accountability & Conflict of Interest Transparency Act. Each one directly impacts people with IDD and their families.

The Disability & Chronic Illness Access Guarantee is the most direct. It focuses on making state agencies genuinely accessible — not just technically compliant — creating real workplace protections for people who need accommodations or experience flare days, and establishing an ombudsman dedicated to fighting for disabled and chronically ill residents when systems fail them. For IDD families specifically this means having an actual advocate in government who is accountable to them.

The Paycheck Protection package matters deeply for IDD families because financial instability is one of the biggest threats to caregiving.

Unpredictable schedules, wage theft, and hidden fees hit caregiving families harder than almost anyone else. When a parent can't predict their paycheck they can't plan around their child's needs. Stable, predictable income is a disability access issue.

The Lobbyist Accountability Act matters because the systems that fail IDD families don't fail by accident. They fail because the people with the most to gain from underfunding disability services have more access to lawmakers than families do. Closing gift loopholes and strengthening disclosure

requirements means IDD advocates have a fairer shot at being heard in Olympia.

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

My most trusted resources are the people living it. When I have questions about how to best support people with IDD and their families, I start with families themselves – including my own experience navigating these systems for my son. Lived experience is the most honest data there is.

Beyond that, The Arc of Washington has been an important resource for understanding the policy landscape and what families across the state are actually facing. The Developmental Disabilities Administration within DSHS is a key system to understand for anyone legislating in this space. I also lean on disability advocates and self-advocates directly – organizations led by and accountable to people with IDD carry knowledge that no policy brief can replicate.

As a candidate and if elected, I am committed to continuing to build those relationships – not just consulting advocates before a vote, but maintaining ongoing accountability to the IDD community as a standard part of how I do my job.

#### **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?**

Washington should treat the shift to community-based care as both a civil rights obligation and a smart fiscal investment — because it is both. The evidence is clear that community-based services produce better outcomes at lower cost. Continuing to over-rely on institutional settings like Residential Habilitation Centers when the cost is more than double community care is not fiscally responsible, and more importantly it is not what people with IDD and their families actually want.

In the next five years Washington should prioritize three things. First, significantly reduce Medicaid waiver waiting lists. Families in my district are waiting years for services their loved ones legally qualify for. That is not a resource problem — it is a political priority problem. Second, invest in building out the community-based provider network in rural areas specifically. Eastern Washington does not have the same provider infrastructure as the west side of the state, and that gap means community-based care isn't actually available even when it's theoretically funded. Third, invest in supporting family caregivers directly — with respite services, training, and financial support — because families are currently absorbing enormous costs that the system should be sharing.

The savings from reducing institutional care should be reinvested directly into the community-based infrastructure that makes real independence possible. That reinvestment should be transparent, tracked, and accountable to the IDD community itself.

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

I want IDD constituents and their families to know that they are not an afterthought in my campaign — they are a central reason I am running.

I see you. I am one of you. I am a disabled person, a parent of neurodivergent children, and someone who has spent years navigating systems that were not built with people like us in mind. I know what it feels like to fight for your child in a meeting room where everyone else has more institutional power than you do. I know what it feels like to be told the system works while you're watching it fail in real time.

If I am elected I will not need to be educated about why this matters. I will show up already knowing – and already committed to doing something about it.

I also want families to know that my door will be open. Not just during campaign season. Not just when there's a vote coming up. I believe legislators should be accountable to the people most affected by the systems they oversee, and that means ongoing relationships – not one-time consultations.

You deserve a representative who treats your lives as the point. That is what I intend to be.