



# Candidate Survey - Central PA



## Transportation:

**Accessible, affordable transportation for people with disabilities is limited in our state, particularly options for evenings, weekends, holidays, and for those in rural areas. This impedes access to employment, education, healthcare, and other community life. What would you do to make transportation more accessible and affordable for those with disabilities?**

### John Flood:

I do believe that in my community we do need to increase the availability of public transportation services. We have Rabbit Transit which does support this but the consistency and long wait times are a problem. We need to improve the availability of these services.

### Marie Librizzi:

Being in Centre County we have the ability to meet with leaders in organizations that currently exist. There is no reason why transportation would not be available to people with disabilities in this County. I would meet with the appropriate parties for immediate action to get disabled citizens services they need.

### Nick Jacobson:

I fully support expanding transportation services for all residents of rural PA, especially in the 85th district. On the short term, that means making bussing better quality and more widespread. On the long term, I want to expand PA's rail network across the more rural parts of the state. I have family members with disabilities (although they do not impair mobility) and will always fight for equal rights for all people.

### Cameron Schroy:

The state needs to make this a priority. Providing additional resources to improve transportation for people with disabilities will be supported by myself in the next state budget.

### Alex Taylor:

Work with local governments, bus companies, and other transportation companies like Uber/Lyft to create more frequent and affordable accessible options for people to get to work, or to healthcare appointments.

### John Inglis:

I believe it is government's responsibility to provide more reliable transportation to people with disabilities. I would endorse and vote for more funding towards these initiatives. I believe it is unconstitutional for these services not to be available without alternatives.

### Mark Temons:

My wife and I have both fought professionally to make our commonwealth more accessible. A former builder, I designed and managed hundreds of home improvement projects making homes wheelchair accessible. Now our family's business, a workforce development firm founded by my wife in 2017, has worked with PA's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the state agency largely responsible for creating accessible transportation solutions. My wife has spent 20 years training state workers in PA, so we know first hand that our state stopped investing in departments that provide accessible solutions for people with disabilities. Those decisions were made by our previous General Assembly, and we need to reverse those decisions, invest in our public service agencies, create good-paying jobs, build the workforce in those agencies, and increase their capacity to help more Pennsylvanians. Additionally, we need to continue to invest more in public transportation, concentrating on making it as inclusive as possible.



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# Candidate Survey - Central PA



## Education:

**Governor Shapiro's 2024-2025 budget includes a \$100m increase in special education funding. What do you think can be done to improve special education in Pennsylvania's public schools?**

### John Flood:

Special Education funding has been inadequate for years. This forces local school district to have support students with disabilities on the cheap. We need both state and federal legislators to adequately fund these necessary services. I will fight to do this at the state level as well as work with federal officials to do the same.

### Marie Librizzi:

Special Education has so many different facets and I believe needs to address the definition of people who may be identified as Special Ed. I would like to see a better opportunity for people to get the specified training and care they need depending on their needs, The term "Special Education" puts all citizens in a single group and we need to do a much better job of caring for each individual person. I also believe training and housing for independent persons should be much more available.

### Nick Jacobson:

Defending special education is at the core of my defense of public schools. Many alternatives to public education have no requirement to accept individuals with disabilities, leaving special education increasingly poorly funded in public schools. I will always defend public education and advocate for both special resources for those with special needs and for the greatest possible integration with the rest of the student body.

### Cameron Schroy:

This is a good start on the Governor's part. But additional resources need to be added to recruit and train high quality special education teachers and paraprofessionals. As a civics teacher and a PSEA endorsed candidate, I know what Pennsylvania students of varying abilities need to succeed. I will champion additional resources for all students, and particularly make sure we are living up to our promise for students with disabilities.

### Alex Taylor:

We need more special education teachers and we need better support for teachers with students with special needs in their classes so that we can increase quality of education for students with special needs.

### John Inglis:

As an educator, I have seen first-hand the needs of students with disabilities in our schools. We need more funding for special education teachers so we can keep class sizes down, IEP caseloads low, and expand inclusion classroom availability.

### Mark Temons:

In PA, Special Education is generally funded by a line-item in the yearly budget, the Special Education Fund, the second-largest public education line item in the budget, behind the Basic Education Fund. This year, the Basic Education Fund is about \$8 billion state-wide, and and Special Education Fund allocates about \$1.5 billion, both of which represent an increase in public education spending reflecting Democrats success in flipping the State House of Representatives in 2022, but also a compromise in fully and fairly funding education due to Republican control of the State Senate. This year, our race in the 31st can be the race that flips the State Senate for Democrats and creates further funding particularly in the districts that have been left behind financially for decades. I believe that teachers and administrations have been putting intentional effort into making schools more accessible and inclusive, and I believe those efforts are just and should be continued, creating cultures that empower all of our students.



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# Candidate Survey - Central PA



## Housing:

**There is a shortage of affordable accessible housing in Pennsylvania with waitlists for some counties being between two and six years. How would you propose to address the availability of affordable, accessible housing?**

### **John Flood:**

I believe that we will have to work with HUD to help us build more affordable housing. I think that we can probably work on providing some tax incentives to do this at the state level

### **Marie Librizzi:**

One possibility is to use older shipping containers and redesign them for living space. In this day of Tiny Homes, I have seen in person, how useful these units can be for hardly a fraction of the cost of a new home. I have also discussed this idea and many other ideas with developers I have known for many years and they agree with my assessments and are willing to make it work.

### **Nick Jacobson:**

We need regulatory reform and funding to fill in the gaps. We must make it easier to build affordable and accessible housing in Pennsylvania.

### **Cameron Schroy:**

The Commonwealth should invest more in constructing and planning more affordable housing, This will ease the waitlists and provide more housing opportunities for people.

### **Alex Taylor:**

Work with the existing system and attempt to streamline it, as well as work with local municipalities to see what if any existing structures may be repurposed to create accessible and affordable housing. We can make it affordable by incentivizing landlords to provide accessible and affordable options for tenants with disabilities.

### **John Inglis:**

There needs to be government interventions to make housing more affordable across the board, and especially for marginalized groups. First time buyer incentives, rent controlled properties, and more support through SSI should be things we invest more in.

### **Mark Temons:**

This is an area that I am very familiar with as a former carpenter, construction designer, and licensed Home Improvement Contractor in PA who lives in the fastest-growing county in the State (Cumberland, right across the river from the capitol in Harrisburg). We need to make sure that we are including affordable town homes and apartments for rent along with single-family homes in our county and state-wide construction plans. And as a designer who specialized in Universal Design, I know that being intentional and making spaces accessible and inclusive from the start can provide better opportunities for all of us, and it saves the cost of remodeling for accessibility down the road. That being said, in an area with a lot of existing, old housing stock, we need to invest in programs like Whole Home Repairs and the types of projects I used to build to keep homes modern, safe, accessible, and comfortable.



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# Candidate Survey - Central PA



## Home and Community Based services (HCBS):

**Many people with disabilities rely on personal care attendant services for their basic living needs so they may live in their own homes and communities. Low wages and a lack of training for this position deter a qualified workforce. Why do you think this situation continues despite the growing demand by Pennsylvanians who require these services?**

### **John Flood:**

We need to increase the state minimum wage to at least \$20 a hour and adjust that annually based upon the Social Security Index

### **Marie Librizzi:**

The money is available from the state. I believe making it a priority to educate employers that residents with disabilities make incredible employees once they are trained. This is not a difficult talk to talk to local businesses and business groups to give them the tools they need to contact HCBS. Many owners of businesses do not know or do not have the time to research these organizations. This would be the perfect time with employers have such a difficult time finding qualified help.

### **Nick Jacobson:**

Right now we have a market that does not allocate value appropriately. We place high premiums on low-consequence jobs and low premiums on the essential workers that make a difference in people's lives (teachers, nurses, home help, firefighters, etc.). I support incentives to pursue healthcare and community services as a career in Pennsylvania for current and future students.

### **Cameron Schroy:**

As the question states, low wages, lack of training and poor benefits have a depressing impact on this workforce. The Commonwealth should set high wages and good benefits with adequate funding to ensure people want to enter into and stay in these fields. I will work in the next budget to provide the funding necessary to do this.

### **Alex Taylor:**

We need to work with insurance companies to increase the reimbursement rate for HCBS as this is a reason many personal care companies cannot provide higher wages or afford to provide quality training. If we incentivize an increase in reimbursement rates we could perhaps achieve this, but I believe working directly with the companies to achieve it will provide longer lasting results.

### **John Inglis:**

Required certifications and trainings should argue for a higher pay rate for these positions. More funding needs to be available for this. Without credentials, funding, and proper training, the jobs are overlooked and not valued.

### **Mark Temons:**

I know for a fact that the reason this situation continues is decisions made by our Pennsylvania General Assembly. As a builder and then a designer, I worked with a nonprofit organization, United Disabilities Services in Lancaster, PA, and with the PA Office of Long Term Living to build over 600 home improvement projects that kept 1000 Pennsylvanians living in their homes and saved taxpayers over \$100 million. These investments in homes to make them accessible were part of the Home and Community Based Services program that was largely handed to insurance companies starting in late 2019, following decisions to privatize made by our House and Senate. The Office of Long Term Living, like Vocational Rehabilitation, reorganized or downsized substantially, and now homeowners get no help more often than not. I saw it every day. Clients lost not just our construction services but home nursing hours, physical therapists, and caretakers. The General Assembly needs to reinvest in these agencies and in our communities.



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# Candidate Survey - Central PA



## Employment:

**The unemployment rate of people with disabilities is two to three times that of individuals without disabilities. If elected, what would you do to increase the employment rate of people disabilities?**

### John Flood:

I believe that we must do a better job of creating and incentivizing the hiring of people with disabilities as well as increasing the funding for job training. However, any jobs created must pay a living wage for the hires.

### Marie Lib Rizzi:

I believe making it a priority to educate employers that residents with disabilities make incredible employees once they are trained. This is not a difficult talk to talk to local businesses and business groups to give them the tools they need to contact HCBS. Many owners of businesses do not know or do not have the time to research these organizations. This would be the perfect time with employers have such a difficult time finding qualified help.

### Nick Jacobson:

Having witnessed firsthand the challenges of working with a disability in my own family, I will always fight for the rights of people with disabilities to participate in the workforce. That doesn't mean giving people an easier time (quite the opposite) but rather eliminating barriers to work, creating more flexible work environments, and guarding against discrimination and mistreatment of individuals with disabilities.

### Cameron Schroy:

Every person with a disability who wants a job should be able to get a job. First and foremost, we must work with the next Attorney General to create a hate crimes and employment discrimination task force to address the unemployment disparities that exist. Second, the Commonwealth should create tax incentives for employers who hire people with disabilities. Third, public hiring should reflect the broader demographics of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and people with disabilities should be treated fairly in state employment practices.

### Alex Taylor:

We create an incentive program to have employers hire more employees with disabilities, we can also survey the disabled community to assist them in finding work that they'd be able to do and get to easily, as well as match them with employers that are willing to work with them to make sure they are successful in their positions.

### John Inglis:

I would explore a task force within the PA Dept of Labor to explore expanding tax credits for companies that hire people with disabilities. I would also have them look for innovative ways to incorporate new training and job availability in growing fields or fields that have growing needs.

### Mark Temons:

This starts with reliable transportation as talked about above, and that involves investing in public transportation as well as in the agencies that deal with accessibility, equity, and inclusion. We also need to create more good-paying union jobs, and having that diversity in employment options will allow folks to work either from home or from an office with accommodations, but in a culture that values workers and their contributions, because in that type of culture, we all thrive, and in collaborative environments where workers have long-term careers instead of gigs, teams are able to better fill in for each other's strengths and weaknesses, and those are truly inclusive environments. This is something our workforce development firm teaches business and organizations, and inclusion for our firm is also personal, as my wife has a disability resulting from a traumatic brain injury. She's the best training facilitator in the state, but we understand that everyone needs accommodations sometimes, and mutual respect and reliable work forces are the best way to make this happen seamlessly and effectively.



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# Candidate Survey - Western PA



## Transportation:

**Accessible, affordable transportation for people with disabilities is limited in our state, particularly options for evenings, weekends, holidays, and for those in rural areas. This impedes access to employment, education, healthcare, and other community life. What would you do to make transportation more accessible and affordable for those with disabilities?**

### Jay Costa:

We need to increase funding by the state to support local transit systems. Even in communities with a system, the hours are often unworkable for folks who rely on this mode of transportation.

### Margie Zelenak:

Transportation is an issue especially in Westmoreland County. It is an easy solution but there needs to be a solution. The state plan on aging, Aging Our Way, PA focuses on transportation issues for seniors which will also benefit those with a disability. To make transportation more accessible, there needs to be funding to provide more drivers that will allow for longer hours of operation. There also needs to be a known network of volunteers that are willing to assist with transportation. The affordability would need to be addressed in the state budget to appropriate funding to improve the availability of reliable transportation. This issue will only increase as more seniors forgo driving and need access to reliable bus, taxi or ride share services.

### Michael Walker:

I would propose a public transportation grant for expanding public transportation for individuals with disabilities for evenings, weekends, and holidays.

### Tina Burns:

Invest in more transportation options. Funding for options could come from several sources currently not contributing their fair share to our state. Such as large corporations that legally skirt PA taxes by using the Delaware loop hole to hide. Legislation could close that loop hole and bring in many millions a year back into PA. Another funding source would be to charge fossil fuel an extraction tax.

### Hadley Haas:

I would work with other elected leaders, to prioritize funds for accessible transportation especially in rural areas. Additionally, requiring vehicles to install ramps and making audio and visual communications, such as signs and announcements, available. I support Pennsylvania's current program to allow people with disabilities to pay half the fare for transportation services.

### Joe Lenzi:

Uber type paratransit

### Arvind Venkat:

I would advocate for expanding funding for paratransit services, particularly during evenings, weekends, and holidays. We need to ensure local transit authorities have adequate training programs for drivers to accommodate individuals with disabilities.



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# Candidate Survey - Western PA



## Education:

**Governor Shapiro's 2024-2025 budget includes a \$100m increase in special education funding. What do you think can be done to improve special education in Pennsylvania's public schools?**

### Jay Costa:

We need to make sure that the dollars continue to flow directly to special education, but also that we have the proper formula in place that gets schools the dollars that they need on a consistent basis so they can not only fund programs but also keep up with the facility, infrastructural and technological needs that these programs have.

### Margie Zelenak:

To improve special education in public schools, we need to have a trained workforce to increase the staffing to provide assistance for students. I have a cousin with a grandson that is autistic in elementary school. His aide left for a higher paying position with a private group. The wages need to be increased to retain the staff. My hope is this \$100m will assist with the workforce. It takes a compassionate caring person to work with special needs students. An option, is a loan forgiveness program for college students that work in this field.

### Michael Walker:

Increase pay for Paraprofessionals and other aides to help give more comprehensive learn experience to all students.

### Tina Burns:

While this is a great increase, it only just begins to start adding back to education that was ripped away from it during the 2012 governor. More resources can be and should be given to not just special education, but education overall. The state needs to chip in their fair share and the funds need to be distributed equitably to include the lower SES areas which are hurting for resources more than higher SES areas because the local taxes can not provide enough for a supported and solid system. Money for such an important thing like education and taking care of our children and one another who need additional special services needs to be a priority.

### Hadley Haas:

As the parent of two sons with hearing loss who attended public schools, this is an issue that is very close to my heart. I believe it is necessary to assess staffing levels and compensation for the teachers and support personnel who work with students with special needs. These individuals are often overburdened and underpaid which leads to turnover. Consistency and relationships are critical to the success of students with special needs. I believe more can be done to provide incentives for teachers to enter this field and to retain them once they have started their careers. This includes financial incentives but also training and support programs.

### Joe Lenzi:

Hire more special ed teachers. Decrease student to teacher ratio

### Arvind Venkat:

It's crucial to ensure that these funds are used effectively for the benefit of disabled Pennsylvanians. I would advocate for hiring more special education teachers and support staff, as well as providing professional development focused on inclusive education practices. Additionally, we need to increase resources for assistive technology and individualized learning plans, ensuring that all students receive tailored support that meets their unique needs.



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# Candidate Survey - Western PA



## Housing:

**There is a shortage of affordable accessible housing in Pennsylvania with waitlists for some counties being between two and six years. How would you propose to address the availability of affordable, accessible housing?**

### Jay Costa:

I hate to sound like a broken record, but this is another area where the state has not consistently invested. I've been proud to support funding and public private partnerships that incentivize the development of affordable housing, mixed use housing, and further - the maintenance of existing homes. The Whole Home Repairs program was very helpful in keeping folks in their homes and keeping those homes safe, dry, and warm. It's easier and more efficient for the state to keep folks in homes than to have to build new ones, but both strategies are part of the solution.

### Margie Zelenak:

The Commonwealth is experiencing the closing of many colleges. They can be an option to remodel some of these dormitories for affordable and accessible housing. Unfortunately, many of the homes in my district can be over 100 years old and it is impossible to redo fit them to serve a population with mobility needs. There must be a focus on building new housing that can assist the disabled and senior population. The cost of construction has increased. The option to provide a tax incentive to builders for affordable, accessible housing may induce construction.

### Michael Walker:

Create a grant for Landlords that work with HUD in renovating properties for renting to individuals with disabilities. As well as creating grants for programs like Common Roots that would focus on helping individuals with disabilities find first time homes to buy. Also would propose a budget increase for emergency shelters to be compliant with ADA standards.

### Tina Burns:

We need to open up some of the legislation that bogs down localities ability to open up housing opportunities. For example every county has abandoned homes and building that could easily be turned into housing. Housing were programs for working for ownership or even rent can and should be established, but in order to begin the red tape needs to be lessened. For example in my home town, there is a closed church that was purchased with intent to turn it into apartments, but zoning would not allow it to be used for that purpose, so instead it sits empty and is becoming vandalized. and will soon be beyond repair.

### Hadley Haas:

I am supportive of legislation, such as House Bill 1976, which would allow for housing in commercial zoned areas. Additionally, House Bill 2045 which would allow for duplex, triplex and fourplex housing to be available in areas that are zoned for single family housing. This is still an issue I am learning about but know how critical it is that every person has access to housing.

### Joe Lenzi:

Convert unused commercial space to housing.

### Arvind Venkat:

I would support policies that incentivize the development of accessible units within new housing projects. This could include incentives for developers who meet accessibility standards. I would also push for increased funding for organizations that renovate existing housing stock to make it more accessible and affordable.



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# Candidate Survey - Western PA



## Home and Community Based services (HCBS):

**Many people with disabilities rely on personal care attendant services for their basic living needs so they may live in their own homes and communities. Low wages and a lack of training for this position deter a qualified workforce. Why do you think this situation continues despite the growing demand by Pennsylvanians who require these services?**

### Jay Costa:

My sense is that until the state mandates a higher minimum wage, corporations will continue to pay people as little as possible so that they can continue to profit. We need a higher minimum wage, protections for workers in these fields who want to join a union, and incentivized training programs so that caring, quality people can get into this field in the first place.

### Margie Zelenak:

Covid affected the workforce more than we realized. There was a workforce crisis prior to Covid but it has grown. Many workers were approaching retirement and left the healthcare field to avoid getting sick. Because of the workforce crisis in all industries, it is an employee's market. They have multiple opportunities to choose for a job. Unfortunately, the wage is what moves someone to leave the healthcare field and go work at a less demanding job. We need to embrace immigration and remove barriers to employment by reviewing regulatory requirements that may prevent them from working as a personal care attendant.

### Michael Walker:

I would support a 10% increase in wages of Personnel Assistance under OLTL (Office of Long-Term Living). And support for a wage increase tier system based on performance, experience and reliability starting at a livable wage.

### Tina Burns:

It continues because politicians that hold the majority will not allow solutions for the people of Pennsylvania because their priorities are with the large corporations and industries in PA that continue to fill their pockets and contribute to their campaign funds. Voters need to voter for those who want to actually serve the people they are supposed to represent instead of voting for those who want to serve corporations and their own self interests.

### Hadley Haas:

Due to a lack of competitive salaries due to insufficient reimbursement rates, it is hard to retain personal care attendants.. Additionally, a lack of accessible transportation can make it hard for them to access their clients and give them the care they need. I believe this system needs to be examined and overhauled in order to provide people with disabilities an acceptable level of care.

### Joe Lenzi:

Because private industry doesn't value paying people or trainers

### Arvind Venkat:

The low wages and lack of training in the personal care attendant field are significant barriers to attracting a qualified workforce. I would advocate for raising wages to make these positions more competitive and appealing. Additionally, we should establish comprehensive training programs that equip personal care attendants with the skills they need to provide high-quality care. By elevating this profession, we can meet the growing demand for services and improve the quality of life for those who rely on them.



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# Candidate Survey - Western PA



## Employment:

**The unemployment rate of people with disabilities is two to three times that of individuals without disabilities. If elected, what would you do to increase the employment rate of people disabilities?**

### Jay Costa:

This is an area I'd like to learn more about but I believe a tax credit program for businesses that employ people with disabilities would be a valuable incentive that I would support.

### Margie Zelenak:

I would propose legislation that provides a tax break incentive to companies that hire a person with a disability. There also needs to be education for the public on the amazing skills a person with a disability can bring to a workplace.

### Michael Walker:

Have a requirement for 14(c) (subminimum wages) to give the individuals a choice to enter a training program to help them obtain a minimum wage job using the 14(c) certification as only a job training program. As well as Legislating for stronger protections for individuals with disabilities. As well as expanding medical assistance for workers with disabilities and increasing the income and assets limits for enrolled employees

### Tina Burns:

There are many great templates for availing employment for people with disabilities. Once in particular that comes to mind is GoodWill, and other examples as well. We as a state and locality need to invest in businesses that will give back and add to our communities. Setting up grants and funding for businesses that will hire and work with disabled individuals can be done and should be done. But again, in order for things like this to be possible, we need to start voting for those who will put people first over corporations and industries. Until politicians get the hint by voters the politicians will continue to discount the people.

### Hadley Haas:

Increasing and investing training and education for people with disabilities so that they are qualified for employment positions is one solution I would like to explore if elected. I am supportive of the work Representative Dan Miller has done, including his legislation, H.B. 1834, that will work to create more opportunities for people with disabilities to join the workforce.

### Joe Lenzi:

Tax Incentives to businesses

### Arvind Venkat:

I would push for initiatives that promote inclusivity in hiring practices. This could include providing incentives for businesses that implement disability-friendly policies and actively recruit from this talent pool. I would also advocate for job training programs specifically tailored for individuals with disabilities, along with partnerships between schools and local businesses to create pathways to employment. I also believe in the power of small businesses. Supporting entrepreneurship among individuals with disabilities can also empower them to create their own opportunities.



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# Candidate Survey - Eastern PA



## Transportation:

**Accessible, affordable transportation for people with disabilities is limited in our state, particularly options for evenings, weekends, holidays, and for those in rural areas. This impedes access to employment, education, healthcare, and other community life. What would you do to make transportation more accessible and affordable for those with disabilities?**

**Brian Munroe:**

Investments into our public transportation services are needed, not only to increase service to all communities but to ensure the existing infrastructure meets ADA standards and doesn't leave any Pennsylvania's out. More direct services for those with Disabilities are also needed to cater to specific needs. I believe that one of the better ways to address this is through local government with programs designed to address communities varied needs. However that requires the State government granting those local areas the necessary funds to carry out those services, which I fully support.

**Judy Schwank:**

I have and will continue to support funding for mass transportation and paratransit that is more efficient and timely in the PA state budget.

**Melissa Shusterman:**

As a SE legislator, I have worked with my disability community to improve their commutes. I have personally taken a ride on their their vans and have advocated for more expansive busing routes, accessible train stations, ADA sidewalks, covered bus stations and consistency in public transportation. busing. I am currently dealing with a constituent who is employed at a wonderful company and he relies on public transportation ( buses )to get to work/errands/play each day. After deep diving into this particular case, we discovered that many of the inconsistency of the daily bus ride came down to a shortage of bus drivers. Many times a short commute becomes a longer one because the bus route needs to adjust due to the lack of additional drivers. So what does this mean for our disability community? It means that the state needs to help/ nurture / incentivize future bus drivers and train conductors to enter the field and stay in Pennsylvania. This is something that I am exploring from a legislative angle.

**Elizabeth Moro:**

I believe in the importance of public transportation and finding ways to expand it--especially for our Pennsylvanians with disabilities. I am deeply committed to supporting and improving our transportation systems to increase access, safety, and ease of boarding. Utilizing systems like Uber and Lyft may provide links in this--allowing more autonomy and flexibility with scheduling. As a representative, I am dedicated to seeking ways that we can collaboratively find solutions and be an advocate for our Pennsylvanians with disabilities.

**Michelle Rupp:**

All of these issues are of primary concern for myself and my family. I am the mother of a 19-year-old daughter with neurodivergent diagnoses (Autism, ADHD, Agenesis of the Corpus Callosum). We have utilized available services such as TransNet which is often unreliable and occasionally not safe. Ride services such as Uber may not accept wheelchairs or service dogs. I'd like to see more community-based support and collaborations between public and private sectors to provide these needed supports. We could refocus current services to employ retirees and veterans to help provide transportation in exchange for vouchers to use on supplemental Medicare premiums. We could encourage businesses to develop carpooling services among employees to help provide transportation for differently abled coworkers. Finally, we could encourage development of community volunteers to provide driver training programs for people with different abilities.

**Anna Payne:**

We need to work with our local partners in our community so we can better understand the needs. When talking about investing in public transit we also need to make sure we are making it easier to use and more inclusive

**Rayne Reitnauer:**

I like the suggestion by SAIL to provide low cost loans to make ride share vehicles more accessible, especially in areas underserved by traditional public transit options. The free transit program currently provided for people 65 and older should be expanded to include people of all ages with disabilities.

**Joe Hogan:**

I was proud to stand with Governor Shapiro when he visited my district to advocate for more funding for public transportation in Pennsylvania. I am optimistic that the General Assembly and the Governor will be able to find a way that properly funds our public transit systems throughout Pennsylvania. These funds should also be used to promote and implement solutions to help Pennsylvanians with disabilities so that they can live the lives they want and deserve to live. This means extended hours for targeted transit programs and routes that meet the needs of the population served by the system

**Michael Zvalaren:**

I think one of the biggest issues with our Commonwealth is the lack of public transportation, which would do everything from clean our air to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels to put money back in our pockets. The same goes for those with disabilities, especially in rural areas like Schuylkill County, where such people often have no other option than to utilize public transportation that is sorely lacking. I believe PA needs to take a hard look at funding improvements in our public transportation infrastructure, and that they need to be extra cognizant of the challenges facing the disabled community when searching for answers that can benefit us all. Fully funding improvements in our public transportation, from high-speed rails to city buses and subways to rural shuttles, is imperative for our future

**Jared Bitting:**

I live in a three generation household with a mother-in-law in a wheelchair, so I understand firsthand the struggles faced by people with disabilities in finding accessible transportation. I support providing low cost loans to Uber, Lyft, taxis, and other ride share programs to buy or modify vehicles that are more accessible for those with disabilities. I also support providing expanding free transit programs to include individuals with disabilities and working to ensure more bus stops are accessible and safe. I believe encouraging competition by creating more spaces available only to accessible vehicles will create more competition and improve service.

**Joe Webster:**

The simple answer is "fund it." Pennsylvania provides "healthcare," support for persons with disabilities, veterans care... by relegating responsibility to volunteers to do all the work, or by setting reimbursement rates so far below market costs there really is no continuity of care. We have too many gaps in the system and the services we can provide to our disabled community, our family members, our friends, and our neighbors. It could be so much more comprehensive. With regard to transportation specifically, the 2024-25 budget provided some funding for public transit that will help. We need to increase that funding each budget year. We need to seamlessly integrate our transportation infrastructure instead of ad hoc adjustments and "filler" tactics. And we need PennDOT and local zoning ordinances to include bumped-out bus stops, wheelchair accessible vehicles, etc. So much to do!

**Tarah Probst:**

It is something that I have been working on with MCTA since last year. We are trying to expand and go up to Southern Pike County. It is so important we get this done, our area lacks transportation options.

**Tim Brennan:**

Access to affordable, reliable, and, critically, accessible public transportation is a serious issue across the US; I've worked to make it easier for all Pennsylvanians to access the quality, ADA-compliant public transit they need. One serious challenge for our local disability community is SEPTA's requirement to travel to Center City Philadelphia to receive the free public transit passes to which they're entitled, which can pose a significant hurdle for community members with limited mobility. To resolve this issue, I'm working with SEPTA on an ongoing basis to bring a mobile certification unit to the Bucks County IU, which would eliminate this unnecessary and onerous requirement. In future sessions, I hope to be able to advance more bills to expand funding for reliable, accessible public transit across the Delaware Valley; in the interim, if SEPTA still lacks the resources to make its operations fully ADA-compliant in a timely manner, I remain open to more immediate legislative solutions, potentially including incorporating ride-sharing options into a person's wavier-based transportation service plans.



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# Candidate Survey - Eastern PA



## Education:

**Governor Shapiro's 2024-2025 budget includes a \$100m increase in special education funding. What do you think can be done to improve special education in Pennsylvania's public schools?**

**Brian Munroe:**

We can improve special education in our public school system by ensuring new education funding is going to address specific needs in the classroom particularly address class sizes and support structures not only for students, such as counselors, but as well for teachers. Further investments into our special education systems are required and should be based off of direct feedback from teachers and parents with students in special education programs in order to design a funding stream that reflects the students needs.

**Judy Schwank:**

More advocacy with school districts to implement research proven methods to better integrate and serve students with disabilities

**Melissa Shusterman:**

I think many schools suffer from a lack of resources around special education. The money allocated for special education funding in this years budget should be used in a way to feed special education career pipeline. Several ideas include: helping special educators, case workers and career counselors for special education pay for their students loans in return for their commitment to working here in PA, paying our educators more and offering older students more options outside of traditional education (private/public partnerships with businesses- like internships).

**Elizabeth Moro:**

We need to ensure that our schools are funded equally and adequately to provide every child with the resources and environment needed for successful learning. Today, students are facing more challenges and require greater access to counselors and well-equipped teachers to support their needs. It's crucial to implement integrative best practices that increase awareness and teach children to be advocates for one another. I believe that the leadership in Harrisburg should prioritize respect for all students and focus on strengthening education, rather than getting caught up in "culture war" issues. We need to work with our schools to ensure that we are creating opportunities for everyone. Personally, I have a niece with Down syndrome, and I've seen the challenges she and her parents face in ensuring she receives a quality education and accessibility. My focus will be to explore opportunities to improve special education at all levels.

**Michelle Rupp:**

Primarily I think the funding designated for special education services should be used to improve special education rather than being diverted to other programs. We need more transparency in education budgets so that we can see where state funding is spent. We need to develop and refine programs of inclusive education and focus on universal design for learning. This approach will help every student access education in ways that match their learning styles and abilities. Additionally, we must set high expectations for our neurodivergent students. Education needs to focus primarily on abilities and presume competence, rather than highlighting deficits. Additionally, we need to provide transition services to students throughout the course of their education rather than waiting until they enter post-12 education programs and suddenly expect them to develop these skills in 4 years. We need highly skilled professionals to teach our neurodiverse students, and we need to free them from unproductive bureaucratic controls that prevent creation of truly individualized educational programs.

**Anna Payne:**

Special education students are children first they need to have access to resources that address their specific learning needs. Those resources include personnel support staff that are highly trained, and addressing the specific learning emotional or physical needs of students.

**Rayne Reitnauer:**

Additional funding is still needed. While addressing students' academic needs, we must also address their social and mental needs. My daughter has had an IEP since the third grade. Setting her up in the traditional learning environment with accommodations as much as possible has been much better for her than regularly pulling her from class.

**Joe Hogan:**

I supported both budgets that delivered historic funding for our schools in Pennsylvania. I have also supported initiatives to improve the number of, and quality of teachers in Pennsylvania. The way we improve special education is by making it easier for qualified individuals to become teachers in our schools. Students need these services and not every family is in a position to move to a school district that meets their needs.

**Michael Zvalaren:**

PA's school funding system is woefully inadequate, and its special education system is indicative of that. As a father of three neurodivergent children, I am extremely sympathetic to this issue. I think that \$100mm is a drop in the bucket compared to the investment that needs to be made in special education for our public schools. In my school system, children are sent elsewhere, with a six-figure bill attached, because the personnel necessary to support them do not exist in our district. EVERY student deserves a quality education, and thus EVERY district needs to be given the tools, support, and funding to ensure they can put in place the people and programs to help our youth grow into happy, healthy, and productive citizens.

**Jared Bitting:**

As a public school teacher, the mental health of my students is a top concern and the mental health crisis I have seen with students coming through my middle school is one of the reasons I got into this race. I support promoting anti-bullying programs school-wide and providing extracurricular activities that are accessible to all. I am a technology and engineering teacher and work every day to find activities that all of my students can engage in and enjoy. I support increasing the number of counselors in our schools to ensure students can properly discuss their mental health concerns, and believe those counselors should receive continuing education on disability issues. I believe that school should be preparing our students to be successful after they graduate and that having counselors to ensure students are prepared for the transition from school should be incentivized.

**Joe Webster:**

I believe we need a holistic approach to disabled persons and public education. It might start with mental healthcare; we should have mental health specialists in every school building. And then it broadens into specific capabilities designed for persons who need specific support. The "push-pull" of our current school systems, where a support aid has to hurry into a classroom or where a student is pulled out for special services, results because we have underfunded schools overall. When we fix the funding issues - coming now, coming soon! - we can enable programs that we know can work.

**Tarah Probst:**

We need more than 100 million. I have fought for public education dollars since I was the Mayor of Stroudsburg Borough. We just invested 1 billion dollars in public education, because for nearly 20 years, the GOP did not fund them properly. We need more teachers, more guidance counselors, more special education teachers for our districts to make sure our kids have all that they need, and special education is a vital part of our school districts. I am on the house education committee as well.

**Tim Brennan:**

In order to improve special education in Pennsylvania's public schools, we must provide all districts with adequate State supports and resources to ensure all children can avail themselves of an equal opportunity to succeed. This commitment, however, is not enough; beyond improving special education in our K-12 school system, we must also place a stronger emphasis on creating a trajectory for our students so that they can succeed after their school entitlement ends and their adult, eligibility-based services begin. We must dedicate ourselves to planning for our children's futures, and to the ability of all children to achieve their dreams, regardless of disability status; this support must begin by expanding special education resources provided to Head Start and other preschool programs, in order to begin this trajectory-oriented service provision model as early as possible.



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# Candidate Survey- Eastern PA



## Housing:

**There is a shortage of affordable accessible housing in Pennsylvania with waitlists for some counties being between two and six years. How would you propose to address the availability of affordable, accessible housing?**

**Brian Munroe:**

We have a housing shortage throughout Bucks County and most new homes or apartments aren't built with people with disabilities in mind. I agree that not only is more housing needed, but that housing incentives can be created. Beyond this federal assistance for first time home buyers should include direct assistance to those that have disabilities in order to offset any additional needs or requirements they may have in order to get them into a new American home.

**Judy Schwank:**

This is one of the biggest problems that we face as a state. While there is more funding allocated for housing in this year's budget, programs like the Whole Homes Repair project was not funded. We must continue to invest in housing and make needed changes in the State Planning Code to create more housing opportunities.

**Melissa Shusterman:**

Many areas, including mine do not have land left to develop other than possibly above a train station. Lack of housing has driven our helpers (care workers, teachers, childcare workers, special education case workers etc) out of our county. I have often said that new development should have a specific number of affordable units. If we were able to do this county wide we would see a change in the housing numbers for those who need housing. This could be legislated or adopted by the county government.

**Elizabeth Moro:**

As a real estate broker, I have seen the challenges to affordable housing and take fair housing and accessibility seriously. In our area, venture capitalists and investors are buying affordable housing and turning them into expensive rentals. We also face obstacles in creating affordable housing due to local permitting issues. Developers often prioritize building larger, unaffordable homes to maximize profits. We need a comprehensive plan to improve housing accessibility and affordability, which I will work on when elected. Ensuring housing is available for all Pennsylvanians is crucial for our well-being, and requires collaboration across all levels of government.

**Michelle Rupp:**

The statutes regarding accessible housing are confusing. There is a limit to 4 people with waiver funding in a duplex home. I read this as a way to prevent overcrowding of facilities and situations that were encountered in places like Pennhurst or other institutions. I believe the vagueness of the statute could be used by owners of these residences to discriminate against people with disabilities. I think we need some clarification on the specific language and guidance for owners of rental properties. I also think that we need improved support programs for individuals living in independent settings. Many people with disabilities may need supports that are not available, underfunded, or have poorly trained support personnel. We also need better training programs for families and students with learning differences related to independent living skills. This training should begin when children are young to give them ample opportunities to develop much needed skills for independence. With respect to affordability, I think we need to look at waiver funding programs and opportunities to earn a living wage. As I discuss below, people with disabilities need to have opportunities to earn a living wage without fear of losing access to necessary services.

**Anna Payne:**

We need to partner with developers and encourage them to build more attainable/affordable housing. We should be offering them rebates or grant money to do so, but we also need to work with local government to make sure they are on board. It should be a partnership.

**Rayne Reitnauer:**

Provide grants to be used for down payments and for construction modifications to make homes more accessible.  
Provide tax deductions or tax credits for landlords who renovate housing to make it more accessible.

**Joe Hogan:**

Pennsylvania needs to provide incentives to build more housing throughout the Commonwealth. By increasing our supply, it will lower costs for everyone. In my corner of Bucks County, there is little room for additional development let alone a political appetite for affordable housing. The legislature can provide additional funds to increase the amount of each housing voucher to make the program more attractive to landlords which will cut down on that waitlist.

**Michael Zvalaren:**

First, we need to increase the housing stock in Pennsylvania. Second, we need to ensure that government programs are available to address blight in our communities, and that a condition of accessing those public funds is that affordable housing be made accessible as a result of those improvements. Third, we need to mandate that each community develop inclusionary zoning statutes that create more affordable housing among new construction. Fourth, we need to promote the building of special needs housing for the elderly, a fast-growing population living on a fixed income that will soon find itself unable to live on its own. Finally, we need to recognize that 13% of Pennsylvanians live with disabilities, and over 26% of our veterans do, too, so some sort of preference program needs to be built into these initiatives to ensure that such people are given priority.

**Jared Bitting:**

As I have been talking to residents in my district, I have seen that affordable housing is one of the top issues in my area, and that is all the more challenging to those that need accessible housing. I believe the creation of ABLE accounts has helped to allow people with disabilities to save for a down payment on a house while still maintaining the benefits they need. I support creating grants to support first time home buyers with disabilities to pay down mortgages. I believe we should incentivize landlords to provide accessible housing options and renovate inaccessible homes to increase the supply of affordable accessible housing. We need to ensure that homeless shelters are fully accessible., and create an emergency fund to help prevent people with disabilities from becoming homeless in the first place.

**Joe Webster:**

I believe the problem of affordable accessible housing impacts many communities in Pennsylvania. It clearly impacts persons with disabilities. But it also impacts the general population of low income individuals. It impacts our seniors. And the policy inputs for both are similar. We need political commitment to fund programs. We need collaboration between public agencies, private lenders, developers, and policymakers. That's one comprehensive way to truly address the inadequacies in the housing stock. We need to make eligibility criteria meaningful and we need to make sure income and asset limits are raised so people don't face a financial disincentive for saving, for taking the next step in income potential.

**Tarah Probst:**

I am currently on the housing committee and we are going over options, but we have been fighting for this as well.

**Tim Brennan:**

Access to livable housing is a human right. It's become cliché to point out we face a broad housing affordability crisis in this country; however, given the unacceptably high percentage of our built spaces that remain out of compliance with the ADA, people with disabilities face disproportionate burdens in securing the affordable, accessible housing they need. When subsidized housing vouchers become available, there should be a plan to set aside a given quantity for people with disabilities, to ensure that they have access for the same opportunities. If re-elected, I will continue to support measures that would address the broader affordable housing crisis, including giving serious consideration to the findings and recommendations of Governor Shapiro's Housing Action Plan, and I'll continue to advocate for the needs of the disability community in those solutions, to ensure that whatever policies we pass are accessible to all Pennsylvanians. More immediately, I will also continue to advocate for supportive accessible housing throughout my district.



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# Candidate Survey - Eastern PA



## Home and Community Based services (HCBS):

**Many people with disabilities rely on personal care attendant services for their basic living needs so they may live in their own homes and communities. Low wages and a lack of training for this position deter a qualified workforce.**

**Why do you think this situation continues despite the growing demand by Pennsylvanians who require these services?**

### **Brian Munroe:**

We need to attract more people into this service oriented workforce, this is similar to issues of keeping law enforcement, nurses and other aides, and even teachers within the workforce. It starts with making sure the barrier to education is lowered and can be done locally and within our state. Then ensuring that funding is secured to keep that workforce active. This can also be done through ensuring that family members who may want to be care givers are afforded the right to a living wage while being a care giver. As a whole a systematic structure of support can be implemented to ease these pressures but conversations must continue to happen and input from families experiencing these issues are needed. Another aspect that plays into this strain on the workforce is the low wage, your reporting is that direct care workers only make \$13 an hour, which is simply not sustainable, yet PA still has only a \$7.25 minimum wage which is lower than West Virginia. In this case its clear to see how legislation on one issue can impact another, again care workers deserve livable wages just like everyone else

### **Judy Schwank:**

This situation continues and we are not able to adequately serve the people who need services because we have not allocated enough funding for better worker wages. We have made progress in this year's budget but more must be done.

### **Melissa Shusterman:**

There are many factors driving our care workers to other industries and other states. Here are several: low pay, no reimbursement for schooling, no reimbursement for commuting, a lack of exposure to these fields by middle school and high schoolers a lack of recruitment to this field, a culture where people do not know the incredible work our care workers do each day, barriers to entry for those who have been in the prison system. A lack of benefits within this industry (paid leave, childcare, paid medical leave etc). Wall street type firms purchasing 'care' companies. Low insurance reimbursements / reimbursements tied to Federal reimbursements

### **Elizabeth Moro:**

As an owner of a service industry business, I have experienced first-hand the challenges with finding enough employees since the pandemic--even with increasing pay. Finding good workers is a challenge across the board. With that said, we need to provide incentives and encourage qualified individuals to enter the field of personal care attendant services. This will continue to be a larger priority as demand increases and again by planning collaboratively with healthcare professionals, individuals with disabilities, and state leadership, we need to work together to holistically design and fund systems that will be there to support this demand. Increasing the pay to a livable wage, streamlining the application process, focusing on in-home care, and improving institutional care--these are all areas of improvement. Speaking to healthcare professionals, we need to ensure safe workspaces and adequate funding is available to make sure we are providing the best care for all and encouraging workers to fill the jobs available.

### **Michelle Rupp:**

I think the situation is perpetuated by the government programs that fund these services. We need to create collaborations between public and private organizations to help increase efficiency, training, and better wages. We need to require insurance plans to help offset the cost of care for people with disabilities. We could create programs where students in healthcare or education programs could live with and provide home/community support while attending school. This would provide disabled community members with needed support and would remove housing costs for students and reduce the costs of education. Additionally, this would provide students in healthcare and education with much needed insight and experience into the issues faced by those they will serve in their chosen professions.

### **Anna Payne:**

If we aren't paying people a living wage, it will not incentivize them to apply for the job. If we have the demand but we don't have the work force we have to start to address the issues that prevent them from applying.

### **Rayne Reitnauer:**

When warehouses pay significantly more per hour than most home care positions, this significantly limits the potential labor pool for these jobs. Providing training and certifications, benefits, and a true living wage will increase the number of care positions filled.

### **Joe Hogan:**

This situation continues because the wages that are paid to support staff is well below the cost of living in most regions and doesn't make up for the challenges of the position. I have been a vocal advocate for increasing the wages for direct support staff in a variety of human services positions and will continue to advocate for these funds. I have heard from many parents and caregivers about this issue and intend to keep working to address the wages as well as make it easier for qualified and passionate individuals to enter and stay in this field.

### **Michael Zvalaren:**

Low wages and lack of training are funding issues, pure and simple. The PA Department of Human Services made available funds to support HCBS workers in 2022, which was a welcome sight, but it wasn't enough. Between the elderly and those with disabilities, the number of people who need HCBS will only continue to swell, and more state and federal funding needs to be made available. One study by the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission laid plain many of the issues HCBS workers face: "In 2020, the median home health and personal care aide hourly wage was \$12.98. Fifteen percent of direct care workers have annual earnings below the federal poverty level (FPL), and 44 percent live in households with incomes under 200 percent FPL. About two in five (42 percent) direct care workers use public assistance programs, including 26 percent who are enrolled in Medicaid" (<https://www.macpac.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/MACPAC-brief-on-HCBS-workforce.pdf>). Raising the minimum wage to \$15 would begin to address the salary problem, but even that is too low for most to live on. Better wages, better training (especially training that could be used in other careers), better hours, and better advancement opportunities are all things that could begin to address the issue of high turnover and lack of interest in this field. No one who works forty hours a week should earn less than a living wage.

### **Jared Bitting:**

The lack of home and community based services is a supply issue. Direct care workers have a critically important job, helping people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to stay in their homes (rather than a nursing home) by assisting with bathing, eating, exercising, and many other critical tasks, and yet they make a median salary of just \$11 per hour. COVID-19 made this situation even worse. Direct care workers need to be paid a living wage with high quality benefits and bonuses for tenure and receive training for their roles. This will increase the number of people willing to take and retain these critically important jobs. This also makes good financial sense since it is much less expensive for people to live in their homes with the assistance of direct care workers than it is to put them in a nursing care facility.

### **Joe Webster:**

Eroded community support for what should be community-based services for disabled persons. And a whole lot of other things. Empowering political changes that are straightforward and "sensible" like ensuring voting rights and ending gerrymandering of political districts. It also means changing parliamentary rules in the legislature itself. It means creating ethical standards for legislators (like campaign funding limits and gift bans) to reduce the power of money in both elections and legislative efforts. And it could require more drastic scenarios like having open primaries or a national vote for president. I'm saying, "I believe good government starts with taking care of our most vulnerable populations. So we seriously need to enable good government."

**Tarah Probst:** Again, the house democrats have tried passing these type of bills, wage bills, safe staffing, etc... We will not give up.

### **Tim Brennan:**

There is a national Direct Support Professional Crisis; wages for care professions in general, and DSPs in particular, are simply too low to attract the qualified talent we need in these important roles, especially in high cost-of-living areas like Bucks County. I recently rallied with Direct Support Professionals in their quest for higher wages, and I've signed several letters supporting them in this important fight; if re-elected, I will continue to advocate to help these professionals gain respect and compensation commensurate to their critically important role in society. Throughout my first term, I've been a champion of career and technical education programs and funding for public universities and community colleges; to increase the value placed on DSP roles, and create a pipeline to help address the labor shortage in this field, I would be interested in supporting legislation that helped produce career trajectories supporting roles as Direct Support Professionals, Self-Directed Employees, and Supports Brokers.



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# Candidate Survey - Eastern PA



## Employment:

**The unemployment rate of people with disabilities is two to three times that of individuals without disabilities. If elected, what would you do to increase the employment rate of people disabilities?**

**Brian Munroe:**

We should expand government assistance with respect to the employment of people with disabilities, beyond this we should eliminate subminimum wages. Those who wish to work should not be punished or have their benefits threatened.

**Judy Schwank:**

We need to redirect our workforce policies to be more inclusive of ALL populations. I also think that the mission and work of the OVR must be updated.

**Melissa Shusterman:**

I have been in office for almost 6 years and I ran to make sure all places are accessible. This even goes to our local Arboretum and parks. It is critical that those with disabilities can easily access our local gardens, parks and recreation spaces for employment or for pleasure. I am Co-Chair of the Intellectual Disabilities Caucus and work legislatively and partnership with businesses to improve the employment rate. My office has helped businesses update and refine their workspace for the specific needs of this community and this has allowed internships/co-ops and employment to be achieved. I have also been in support of the businesses that strictly employ our disabilities community. I have toured and supported their expansion

**Elizabeth Moro:**

This needs to be a multi-faceted approach which involves all the elements discussed in the previous questions--increase in transportation, strengthening education, improving healthcare, and working to remove the stigmas/discrimination in our workplaces. As a legislator, I will advocate for integrative approaches to all of these and to protect the rights of disabled individuals and support meaningful employment. There are also more opportunities to work remotely, and this may be another way to achieve meaningful employment. I am someone who takes things head on and works to achieve results. Learning more about the issues facing our fellow citizens with disabilities will be ongoing, but something I am committed to.

**Michelle Rupp:**

First, we need to remove the employment penalty that could be faced by individuals with disabilities. If you earn too much money, then you lose access to services you couldn't purchase on your own. We need to reform the criteria for access to services and give people with disabilities access to needed services while allowing them to earn a living wage. Next, we need to educate employers about the untapped potential in workers with disabilities. Too many employers assume that someone with a disability is difficult to employ when they are typically loyal and productive employees given the correct support. Early job skills training and long-term skilled job coaches with structured fading support would help people with disabilities enter the workforce with confidence. I think we also need an attitude change about disability. We need more people in the disability community to become active self-advocates; talking about their experiences and what skills they bring to the table.

**Anna Payne:**

I believe we need to work with our business partners, and help them understand the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities. We should also work with our local governments in our community to help them better understand the importance of hiring people with disabilities as well.

**Rayne Reitnauer:**

At my own business, we have worked with LVCIL (Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living). They team potential employees with a job coach to learn more about the skills and potential skills these participants can offer their future employers. We have also worked with the local school and other social programs that provide job training. With the help of a coach, these participants have gained experience on a job site. We have hired from these at least three times. Our employee of the year for 2023 was first introduced to us through one of these program. I would like to expand the companies that participate in these programs, offering grants to cover job coaches.

**Joe Hogan:**

I am a prime cosponsor, along with Rep. Benham of H.B. 2221, the Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities Modernization Act. This legislation would expand the eligibility so that people with disabilities can work in fulfilling careers that meet their potential while still qualifying and receiving the care they need to thrive in their lives. Further, I also introduced the Disability Pride Awareness Month last year and cosponsored the 2024 version of the resolution. Which in part, seeks to raise awareness about employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

**Michael Zvalaren:**

Disabled people are skilled, intelligent, and worthy of the same positions as those without disabilities. If elected, I would pursue grants that could be made available to disabled people for adaptations, equipment, transportation, support, or other things they made need to overcome the hurdles present in finding competitive employment, as well as funds available for employers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees they might hire. I would also work to create educational campaigns that would explain to employers that they CANNOT discriminate against disabled people, that there IS support available for both the employer and the employee, and that they NNED to play their part in removing the stigma around disability by hiring the disabled and showing their employees and patrons that we're all the same. Everyone deserves the dignity of earning a good living.

**Jared Bitting:**

I support expanding Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities so that they are able to continue to receive Medicaid benefits while also working. I also support increasing the income and asset limits for enrollees so that they are able to work while also receiving benefits. I fully believe that diversity in the workplace fosters better decision making and would encourage employers to hire disabled workers into leadership roles, which will hopefully lead to a more inclusive workplace environment. I believe subminimum wage jobs should be eliminated and support the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act to ensure workers earn at least minimum wage.

**Joe Webster:**

We need to raise income and asset limits so we don't discourage employment, eliminate the subminimum wage (here and in regard to overall tipped wages) and, perhaps more importantly, we need to continue all efforts to reduce and eliminate the stigma related to hiring, working with, and engaging with disabled members of our community. Again, this is a "mainstream" issue. All should be welcome. All should be respected, included, and valued for their contribution to our own welfare and well-being.

**Tarah Probst:** The House of Representatives passed \$15 an hour... it died in the Senate.

**Tim Brennan:**

I would work to provide incentives for employers who hire people with disabilities. Additionally, I support equal pay for equal work so that people with disabilities are compensated appropriately for the work they do. Additional supports for job coaching and on-the-job training need to be easier to obtain so that all people can have the same employment opportunities. Pennsylvania is recognized nationally as an Employment First state, but this initiative needs to be more broadly communicated across the Commonwealth, in order to promote broader awareness of the valuable contributions people with disabilities can make as employees in a variety of professional settings.



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