



Paraquad
5240 Oakland Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63110
By Email

To the leaders of Paraquad:

Missouri is at its strongest when it is inclusive and accessible to everyone, and right now, there is more we can be doing to support Missourians with disabilities. Improving our healthcare system, schools, and policing, while enforcing existing nondiscrimination laws, will create a more comprehensive infrastructure to aid this community.

A primary objective in my campaign is to finally bring Medicaid expansion to Missouri. With every year that passes, our healthcare system's resources are stretched thinner and thinner. Hospitals and health centers are less equipped to deal with their patients and fewer Missourians receive the individualized attention they require. The lack of state and federal resources committed to health facilities has yielded high turnover rates among nurses. Many of the positions remain vacant. This shortage leaves existing nurses stretched thin, doing more with less -- potentially threatening the quality of care all patients receive. And when quality in care drops, it disproportionately affects those with disabilities.

Perhaps most importantly, Medicaid expansion will bring coverage to 300,000 Missourians who currently have no insurance. Among this group are 91,000 people suffering from a mental illness or drug addiction. These are the people who need our attention, but are falling through the cracks. The spread of opioid use is closely tied to how effectively we manage mental illness in this state. Instituting a prescription drug monitoring program and getting coverage to those with mental illnesses or an existing addiction will go a long way towards combatting the epidemic.

Fully funding our schools is also vital in supporting Missourians with disabilities. Just like in the healthcare sector, schools have been forced to make deep cuts to programming. And just like healthcare workers, dwindling resources burden our educators. Students with disabilities often require more individualized attention to succeed in the classroom, but with student-teacher ratios on the rise, it becomes harder to make sure they get the support they deserve. Education is our best tool to help Missourians with disabilities successfully transition into the workforce or on to higher education. When 18 school districts in this can only afford to

go to school four days a week, our budgetary priorities are clearly out of balance. As Governor, I will work to bring schools the resources they need to effectively educate all of our students.

As the state's chief law enforcement official, I have seen first hand how improved training for police can help more effectively serve and protect citizens with disabilities. The law enforcement community has made strides in educating officers about how to deescalate situations when encountering Missourians with mental illnesses. I applaud these efforts and would like to see them continue. By cutting health and education services, we ultimately force police to perform more and more functions within society. The very least we can do is give them the tools and support they need.

My career in public service has always been about fighting for fairness and equality for all Missourians. I am particularly proud of the advocacy work I did on behalf of the Second Injury Fund. Every Missourian who wants to work, should be able to. Keeping the Second Injury Fund solvent preserves a level of protection for workers who aggravate a previous disability while on the job. Supporting this fund, along with strictly enforcing our nondiscrimination laws, is how we can begin to work on bringing down the unemployment rate for people living with disabilities, which is higher than many other minority communities.

Helping our citizens with disabilities requires a multifaceted strategy and comprehensive effort. Each individual faces a unique set of challenges. There is no silver bullet for everyone. The better we enable our schools and hospitals to provide individualized attention and care, the more effective they will be. Proactively tackling mental illness and addiction reduces the burdens we place on law enforcement and ensure we do not treat the innocent like criminals. And providing support for people with disabilities in the workforce will allow all Missourians to live with the dignity they deserve.

Every Missourian must feel free to pursue their ambitions. No disability should stand in their way. As Governor, I look forward to approaching these issue with the seriousness they demand.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Koster", with a stylized flourish at the end.

CHRIS KOSTER