



# Candidate Questionnaire on Disability Issues

by Russ Carnahan

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**Please share any connections or experience (professional or personal) you have with people with disabilities and/ or the disability community in Missouri.**

While in the US Congress, I was the founder of the The Congressional MS Caucus, a bipartisan caucus comprised of dedicated members of the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate who raise awareness about MS on Capitol Hill. I lost a close family member to multiple sclerosis when she was only 44, so I am personally committed to the awareness of this issue. My wife, Judge Debra Carnahan, also served on the board of AAPD as co-chair of the National Gala.

When I conducted my numerous Rural and Urban Round Tables around the state for this campaign, I met with children with disabilities and their parents, adults with disabilities and their advocates, and they told me their own particular stories about the challenges they face.

The recurring theme from all was that our state government and our public policy makers, legislators, have to a better job of listening to what is actually happening to the citizens they are supposed to serve. The best public policy is one that is developed, not only by experts in their particular field, but learning from the very people who pay for and receive the services that come from such policies.

**Administrative: What do you see as the role of government, local, state, and federal, affecting the lives of people with disabilities and what efforts will you make to ensure state agencies serving Missourians with disabilities have the resources and man-power to carry out their functions?**

We need to continue to build on past efforts, both at a public policy level and in the private sector, by continuing to remove barriers that hurt people with disabilities who desire to live in their own home. We also need to embrace universal design in public housing and facilities.

**How will you include the voice of people with disabilities, their families and those who provide services to them in your administration?**

As Lt. Governor, I will serve on the Missouri Housing Development Commission and I will ensure that body has representation from the disability community, such as representatives from the Missouri

Disability Determination Services, ADA Centers, and those who have served on the Governor's Council on Disability.

**Health Care Access: Do you support covering people in the health insurance gap by increasing eligibility for MO HealthNet to 138% FPL? Do you think some reforms are necessary to ensure coverage, if so, what kind of reforms?**

Yes, I support expansion of Medicaid in our state.

**Currently, the Aged, Blind and Disabled category of MO HealthNet recipients are NOT included in managed care. What is your position on managed care for this population and individuals with severe mental illness and addiction disorders? What about the inclusion of long-term supports and services (like Medicaid Waiver services or Consumer Directed Services)?**

I will support these initiatives.

**Housing: The availability of affordable, accessible and safe housing is a major barrier for some individuals with disabilities to full community inclusion. What will your administration do to further housing options for persons with disabilities? And how will it do this?**

We should have policies that integrate people with the community at large; meaning living in individual homes in various neighborhoods. Universal Design has made this possible. This is a first step in making this happen and become the norm.

**Employment and Economic Equality and Independence: People with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty, and have the lowest employment rate, compared to any other minority population. Often, people with disabilities who need to access supports and services only public programs provide (personal attendant services, Medicaid waiver services, etc.) fear losing their services if they make too much money. How will you improve employment and economic outcomes for people with disabilities while allowing people to retain necessary benefits?**

We need to look at offering incentives to employers who may have never hired an employee with a disability. People with disabilities have great employment track records. We already offer incentives for employers to hire people from various underrepresented groups in our country and state, why not examine ways in which we can make it easier for businesses, especially small businesses to hire.

**In the last three years the U.S. Department of Justice has taken over 50 legal actions in 25 states including Federal lawsuits and court settlements enforcing the civil rights of persons with disabilities under the ADA which states people with disabilities have a right to live and work in integrated community settings. This past July a new federal law, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) went into effect. This law creates new standards for transitions from**

**school to integrated work in the community for persons with disabilities. School and other community agencies are charged with focusing on integrated work before exploring sheltered work options. Given these mandates, what can Missouri do to move forward to be in compliance and be leaders in this area?**

We should have a balance approach in not only integrating person with disabilities in the workforce but also continue to support programs that have provide a niche and an important need in giving people in the community the opportunity to have the chance to experience the dignity of work.

**Education: Please outline the steps your administration would take to ensure that students with disabilities in our public schools are educated in their neighborhood schools and included in classrooms with students without disabilities. These students would be provided equal access to the curriculum, and are able to obtain assistive technologies and other related educational supports that adequately prepare them to become productive members of our communities.**

I will emphasize the importance of inclusion for all school districts in Missouri and work with the Department of Secondary and Elementary Education in making this a priority. This can be made possible by not only fully funding the foundation formula but also building diverse coalitions of a common interest to effectively advocate for such an initiative both here in Missouri and in Washington DC.

**When we invest in the education of all children, including those with disabilities, we're investing in a strong economy. What steps would your administration take to ensure that students with disabilities are adequately prepared to transition to competitive employment and/or post-secondary education?**

Mainstreaming all can greatly help all students with and without disabilities learn from each other. Push for fair opportunities related to job training and job readiness programs.

**Rights: Following the events of Ferguson, Police Officer Standards Training (POST) requirements were increased. Missouri has Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) and CIT councils in a number of areas in the state whose focus is to help improve interaction between law enforcement and persons with mental illness. In addition, First Responder Disability Awareness Training (FRDAT) for each first responder discipline (law enforcement, fire/ EMS and 911 dispatchers) will be implemented in Missouri. These trainings are vital given the number of people with disabilities who are not properly identified or understood, which has led to ongoing victimization on persons with disabilities, inappropriate interactions, false arrests, unjust incarcerations or even death. What would your administration do to continue and expand this much needed education for law enforcement officers and other first responders?**

My office will make sure education and training in such areas are an integral part of law enforcement training. It will be treated as important as other issues we mandate that help officers enforce the law in a just manner that reflects the diversity of our state.

**In 2015, for individuals determined 'incapacitated/disabled', courts awarded over 2,400 full guardianships and only 63 limited guardianships. Missouri courts disproportionately award full guardianship, which strips a person with a disability of all their rights, even though there are less restrictive options available. How will you support the reform of Missouri's 30+ year old guardianship statute to better support Missourians and assist them in retaining and restoring more of their rights as they are able?**

Missouri needs have balanced approach to appreciate there are different degrees of individual choice and guardianship. We also need to make schools and parents more aware when dealing with guardianship options.

**Funding and Access to Services: A history of inconsistent and underfunded rates has led to a system that no longer covers the cost of doing business for community provider organizations. Providers are experiencing a workforce crisis hampered by low wages, a lack of health insurance, high turnover, and a shortage of staff. Demand for these workers from private industry and other human services sectors compete for these workers. In addition, nearly 65% of the 95,000 individuals with developmental disabilities are not connected with the service system and many live at home with aging parents, representing a significant future demand on the system. How will you ensure a robust service system for Missourians with developmental disabilities now and in the future?**

We need to make investments in those who provide the services and expertise that can help us fill the need of those who are currently not in the system. They need to find the right avenue for them instead of automatically putting people into institutions that (1) may not be the right service for them and (2) may be too costly.

**Many rural Centers for Independent Living have catchment areas of 4,000 square miles and 9 counties and urban Centers have extremely high population densities to serve. How would you make sure all CILs have capacity to serve people with disabilities in their catchment areas?**

We should look at developing a transportation program, like OATS, that could be developed for those who need to get to a nearby CIL.

**Hearing loss can be a significant impediment to seniors wanting to stay connected to, and remain independent in, their community. Over 600,000 Missourians, including seniors, have hearing loss and 90% of them are not Sign Language users. Instead they rely on hearing aids. This group often cannot afford hearing aids (they are not covered by MO HealthNet). What will your administration do to ensure access to hearing aids?**

I will work with the executive and legislative branches to embrace Medicaid expansion and putting these options back into Medicaid.

**Behavioral Health: What would you to do to improve the opioid epidemic facing our state?**

I will support the creation of a statewide Prescription Drug Monitoring Program that is modeled after what has already been done in the City of St. Louis, St. Louis County, and St. Charles County.

**What will be your plan to address the leading cause of disability (behavioral health) in the nation? And for those in recovery, what would you do to help access recovery supports (such as employment, housing, education, etc.) for individuals with serious mental illness and/or substance use disorders?**

First, housing is the number one priority – this is the greatest stabilizer. And as a member of the Missouri Housing Development Commission, I will advocate for this crucial recovery support. Once this is accomplished, other social and health care needs can be addressed more effectively.