



# DELAWARE VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES COALITION



The Centers for Disease Control estimates that 24% of Delawareans of voting age have a disability. The Delaware Voters with Disabilities Coalition wants to ensure that these voters – one in four – are informed on the issues and prepared to elect candidates that best serve their interests. Our mission is to educate Delawareans with disabilities about the power of their vote and how to best use it.

Today, we are reaching out with a few questions to give you the opportunity to address the concerns of our community. The Delaware Voters with Disabilities Coalition will post your responses online. Receiving your responses by October 28, 2022 will offer voters time to consider your responses prior to voting.

## Laura Sturgeon for Senate District 4 Survey Response

- **A key slogan of the disability community is “nothing about us without us.” How will you engage the disability community, if elected, in the policy decisions that affect our lives?**

I would reach out to groups like the Governor's Advisory Council on Exceptional Citizens as well as constituents who have a loved one with disabilities as they have been among my best teachers. I have a constituent who relies on Private Duty Nurses for her daughter, a constituent whose son relies on home care personal attendants, and others who use the services of Easter Seals. They have invited me into their homes to help me understand the needs of their children and that opened my eyes to a world I previously knew nothing about.

I would also engage groups like the Ability Network of Delaware, and all the groups in the logos at the top of this form that make up the Delaware Voters with Disabilities Coalition.

- **What legislation have you/will you sponsor regarding accessibility problems?**

Please bring me suggestions/requests for legislation as I would be very happy to sponsor it and build support for it and shepherd it through the process.

- **Additional services are needed in Delaware for the disabled community – adult supports as well as support for parents of special needs children/young adults. How will you bring additional services that offer the disabled population consumer choice, and control of their care?**

From my experience as a member of the Joint Finance Committee these past four years, it seems to me we need to stabilize the workforce by making sure the State is paying good wages or reimbursement rates to the people who work with the disability community. Once the workforce is stable, families will have more options. When the workforce is unstable, families often end up having to settle for anyone they can get and that someone might not be a good fit. They might even do harm. But when we increase wages, there will be a larger worker pool that will allow families to have choices, make changes when someone isn't working out, and feel secure that their loved ones are getting good care.

- **People with disabilities have a higher rate of employment in Delaware than the national average. However, that rate remains far below the average employment rate for people without disabilities. What will you do to help improve employment rates for people with disabilities and address discrimination in employment?**

I would work to ensure the Department of Labor Division of Vocational rehabilitation is well staffed and serving the needs of the disability community. Like many government entities, they are understaffed and underfunded. I would block any discriminatory hiring practices like permitting employers to pay lower wages to workers with disabilities. I would work to ensure employers and potential employers are abiding by the laws protecting job seekers and employees with disabilities, including providing reasonable accommodations.

- **What does full inclusion for people living with disabilities look like to you? What steps do you plan to take to ensure access to full inclusion for your constituents?**

Full inclusion means the ability to live at home, go out into the community for shopping, entertainment, and socializing, and the ability to ride public transportation. It also means the ability to go to public school and participate fully in classes with their non-disabled peers. I don't believe in sequestering individuals in institutions or exclusive communities built just for people with disabilities, and I don't believe in sequestering students with disabilities in separate classrooms. People with disabilities should be fully integrated into the community with their non-disabled counterparts. We can do this by providing accommodations that give access to people of all abilities.

- **Funding for home- and community-based services is currently heavily weighted toward long-term care facilities as opposed to home- and community-based services. How will you work to (at a minimum) provide equity in access to these services and address work force and wage issues for individuals living in the community, particularly those living in their own homes?**

A top priority for me in my four years on the Joint Finance Committee has been fully funding the McNesby Act, which we finally did this past year, increasing Medicaid Reimbursement Rates for Private Duty Nurses and Home care personal care attendants, which we are still

working on. I have advocated to the other members of Joint Finance, the Chairs, and my leadership in the Senate. We did get an increase for PDNs in 2022, but we are still woefully behind where we need to be for Home care personal attendants. I am proud of what we were able to do for DSPs in the IDD space, but we need to keep pushing for all the other workers who make life manageable for families caring for a disabled person in the home.

- **How will you address other systemic challenges to adequate in-home supports and services, such as long waiting lists, placement into group home being limited to crisis-only situations, and staff shortages that lead to uncovered hours?**

No Response

- **How does your campaign prioritize accessibility within your digital and in-person engagement? If elected, how will you ensure that your communications, from websites to press conferences and more, will be accessible to people with disabilities?**
- My campaign is mostly just me with part-time help from friends who pitch in when available. I would welcome the opportunity to have an accessibility expert look over my website to tell me how I can make it more accessible, and I would work with the designer to make the needed upgrades if they have the knowledge to do so. When I make in-person appearances at events, I use a microphone to help people hear. I try to have someone record my events for sharing on media platforms for those who cannot attend because of mobility issues. I give out my personal phone number and email to anyone who prefers to communicate by voice, text, or email, respectively. I am sure I could do more and welcome feedback on how to do better.
- **On Friday, October 7, 2022 the Delaware Supreme Court struck down a law that would have allowed for same day registration and mail-in voting for all registered voters. The Court ruled that an amendment to the State Constitution was required, which would require a 2/3 vote in both chambers. Same day registration and mail-in voting provides greater opportunities for participation of people with disabilities in the electoral process. If the legislature chooses to pursue a constitutional amendment to allow citizens of Delaware to vote by mail and/or have same-day registration, would you support these measures? If not, please explain your reason.**

Yes, I was a co-prime sponsor of the original constitutional amendment that failed in its second leg as well as of the Vote by Mail bill that was struck down.

- **Is there anything else that you would like to share with the Delaware voters?**

I taught public school for 25 years but only in the last half of those years did our schools adopt a full inclusion model for students with learning disabilities. I found having students with IEPs in my classroom to be enriching for all students and for me. Outside of public education, I had little experience with the disability community prior to my election in 2018, but my constituents reached out, brought me into their homes, and taught me so much. Just like I found having students of all abilities in class together to be an overwhelmingly positive experience, I believe people of all abilities participating in society together is the best model for all. I will work for a world that accommodates persons with disabilities so they can be fully

integrated into their communities, and I will continue working to ensure the workers who serve disabled folks and their families are well compensated for the critical services they provide.