**Question 1: What policies and actions do you support to reduce the stigmas of people with disabilities (PwDs) that are barriers to employment, independence and equality?**

**Answer:**In short, I will pursue a multifaceted awareness campaign that attacks stigmas from all angles. Our focus needs to be on the *many abilities*of PwDs, not disabilities. It is important to remember that making efforts to employ PwDs benefits PwDs themselves, taxpayers, and businesses. A shift in mindset starts with awareness. We need to create an expectation by employers that employees with disabilities can succeed in the workplace and that hiring PwDs makes business sense.

We need to seek out media opportunities to highlight businesses who have benefited from the PwDs in their teams. As other employers have found, hiring PwDs is good for business because they are loyal, on time, and motivated, and they create a better workplace morale. When businesses see other businesses benefitting from their PwD workforce, it will encourage further employment. As such, the state won’t *need*to require businesses to hire PwDs. The profit will speak for itself.

However, the government **should be**a model employer by hiring PwDs, and we can work with the Chamber of Commerce to help Hawai‘i businesses learn about the benefits of being an inclusive employer.

But awareness among businesses and the government isn’t enough. People with disabilities should have the expectation themselves for a lifetime of meaningful employment, including entrepreneurship. Parents should believe in their children and encourage them to work if they are capable. PwDs shouldn’t feel discouraged from entering the workforce, and like employers, they should focus on their abilities, not disabilities. It’s good for taxpayers too because PwDs who work won’t be on public benefit.

As employers from companies such as UPS, Walgreens, and Tim Horton’s have shown, it’s not about charity, it’s about the bottom line. Because hiring PwDs has proven profitable, I think Hawai‘i’s biggest opportunity for increased employment among people with disabilities is a strategy based around awareness on all sides. If elected, I would be open to doing regular media releases with RespectAbility or similar organizations to spread awareness both about the business side of hiring people with disabilities and my policies to assist PwDs in their job search. I will also track progress on my website and on social media.

**Question 2: What is your record on improving the lives of people with disabilities, specifically in enabling people with disabilities to have jobs, careers or start their own businesses?**

**Answer:**I have voted for many bills that would improve the lives of people with disabilities.

Bills improving employment opportunities and financial positions of PwDs:

* HB1627 HD1 SD2 & HB1721: Include persons with disabilities under the minimum wage requirements to stop the wage discrimination
  + [Repeals the exemption of persons with disabilities from minimum wage requirements.]
* HB1670 & HB1795 & HB2678: Provide taxpayers who hire an individual with a disability a nonrefundable tax credit to incentivize hiring PwDs.
  + [Provides to a taxpayer who hires an individual with a disability a nonrefundable tax credit for the 6-month period after the individual is initially hired by the taxpayer.]
* HB2232 HD1: Excludes the weight of car attachments designed to assist a person with a disability from the county and state motor vehicle weight tax to protect against an unfair tax burden.
  + [Excludes the weight of lifts and ramps, motors to operate them, and vehicle chassis reinforcements added to assist a person with a disability, from the determination of net weight of noncommercial motor vehicles for purposes of levying the state and county motor vehicle weight tax. Defines non-commercial motor vehicle.]
* HB874 HD1: Requires use of an unspecified percentage of funds in the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Special Fund to provide housing for residents who qualify for Social Security disability benefits and are diagnosed with a life-long serious mental illness.

I have also voted for many bills related to medical coverage. Here are some of the bills:

* HB109: Provides insurance coverage for air travel and lodging for blind or disabled individuals living on neighbor islands requiring medical care on the island of Oahu and their attendants.
  + [Applies to health insurance policies, contracts, and plans issued or renewed after July 1, 2018.]
* HB211 HD1: Appropriates funds for 2 FTE positions in the Disability Compensation Division of DLIR.
* HB612 HD1: Appropriates funds for the Aging and Disability Resource Center.
* HB1116 HD1: Prohibits retaliation against people who assert a disabled person’s rights under section 368-1.5, Hawai‘i Revised Statutes, in state and state-funded services.
* HB955: Creates penalty for health care providers who fail to provide auxiliary aids or services to patients with a communication disability.
* HB2371: Create the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Medicaid Waiver Administrative Claiming Special Fund into which federal moneys may be deposited from Department of Health participation in the waiver program.
* HB1112 HD1: Permits filing of an appeal of a decision related to temporary disability insurance at any DLIR office. Authorizes service of notice of hearing of an appeal through various media. Provides for conduct of a hearing at various locations statewide. Specifies procedure in the event a party fails to appear at the hearing.

**Question 3: Do you have specific strategies for youth employment for people with disabilities? For example, what are your thoughts on apprenticeships for youth with disabilities?**

**Answer:**As mentioned above, the awareness strategy would serve multiple purposes. They would both highlight the business case for hiring PwDs and create an expectation among our youth with disabilities and their parents that they have the capability for lifetime employment. We should prepare them with an expectation to work, not an expectation to be on public benefit.

Delaware Governor Jack Markell told a story of a young man with disabilities who, before he worked, spent most of his day at home watching TV. Working gave him a place to go every day where he could be part of a team and see the products of his labor. He was happy about these changes because they made him more productive, social, and ultimately more independent.

One way to achieve the goal for higher employment rates among youth with disabilities is to partner existing organizations, whether advocacy groups or employment organizations, with schools to better help our students succeed in transitioning into the workforce. We need to encourage school career services offices to have programs focused on students with disabilities. Programs already exist through organizations like Project SEARCH and Easterseals, but schools need to maximize these resources. Rehabilitation Hospital of the Pacific was the first organization in Hawai‘i to participate in Project SEARCH. The hospital helped 6 students develop their professional skills through an internship. Easterseals already has a few offices in Hawaii. We just need to more actively pursue these kinds of programs to improve their presence in Hawai‘i.

Moreover, I support expanded vocational programs in high schools and community college in Hawai‘i, and there’s no reason that PwDs should be restricted from taking advantage of these opportunities. Apprenticeships would be part of this, because they can allow high school students to earn college credits and industry credentials. At the very least, they will gain practical experience, making them more competitive in the job market. Preparing youth with disabilities for careers that use their full potential, how to overcome hurdles in the interviewing process and workforce while in high school and providing employers with a pipeline of skilled PwD workers would be central to this goal.

**Question 4: The jobs of the future will largely require post-secondary education. However, on average only 65% of students with disabilities complete high school and only 7% complete college. What policies do you support to enable students with disabilities, including those from historically marginalized communities and backgrounds, to receive the diagnosis, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), or 504 plan and accommodations/services they need to succeed in school and be prepared for competitive employment?**

**Answer:**It starts with adequate federal funds.

Something our current administration has failed to do is to adequately seek out federal funds for SPED students. The U.S. government reimbursed Hawai‘i $259,946 for school-based Medicaid health services in 2016, the latest date for which data is available. With 21,000 SPED students, that’s $12.38 per student per year. That’s absolutely unacceptable, not just morally, but mathematically. How can we expect to succeed without the required funds?

Hawai‘i is significantly behind other states with similar student populations. Rhode Island, Montana, Maine and New Hampshire, four states with similar student populations to Hawai‘i’s, received $26 million to $38 million in reimbursements. At the very best, the administration was only able to get one tenth of what other comparable states got for school-based Medicaid health services.

And if that’s not bad enough, we have a shortage of SPED teachers. As of the 2017-2018 school year, there were 311 SPED SATEP vacancies. This means that 1 in 6 SPED teachers have not completed a state-sanctioned teacher training program.

My solution is to fight for federal funds and making efficient use of whatever we get. I believe that this is a major oversight of the current administration, and it is an opportunity to help our marginalized communities that I will not pass up. This is a matter of millions of dollars. Getting increased funding will help with diagnoses, student IEPs, and other accommodations. Increased funding could go toward growing connections with programs like Project SEARCH and Easterseals. Schools are not getting the funding they need, so kids are not getting the services they need. I plan to change that.

**Question 5: Today there are more than 750,000 people with disabilities behind bars in our nation. Most of them are functionally illiterate and 95% of them will eventually be released. What are your views to ensure that incarcerated PwDs gain the skills and mental health support that will enable them to be successful when they leave incarceration?**

**Answer:**We need early intervention, adequate accommodations, and individual re-entry processes tailored to individual situations. In general, my problem-solving mindset is community-based and individual focused. This issue is no exception.

Because many who don’t graduate high school end up incarcerated, the whole process begins early in a child’s life. Many disabilities are not visible, and will be discovered as kids grow up, especially during school. Early intervention involves properly training teachers to be sensitive to students who might have a disability. Early diagnoses mean that accommodations will come earlier so that students with disabilities have a higher chance of graduating high school, improving their work prospects and lowering the odds they’ll become incarcerated. Alternative sentencing is another viable preventative option as well.

However, the question asked for what to do once people with disabilities become incarcerated. Part of the solution is adequate accommodations. Adequate  accommodations require knowing which prisoners have disabilities, so accurate prisoner data is crucial. For example, inmates with Executive Function Disorder (EFD) struggle following multi-step instructions. Guards give inmates lots of directions, and if the guard does not know that a particular prisoner has EFD, he or she might believe the prisoner’s inaction due to confusion is defiance. Another example is that prisoners who are deaf need to be able to have accommodated communication with their attorneys. There have been cases where deaf prisoners have been released, but they didn’t know about it for months or even years after being released because they weren’t able to contact their attorney.

Another problem with accommodations in prison is solitary confinement. Many prisons use solitary confinement as a means of protecting incarcerated PwDs, but it can make certain issues worse, and can even create new trauma. Accommodations should be tailored for the specific needs of people with disabilities, not take a broad-brush approach. Going back to EFD, this could involve visual instructions that lay out steps one by one instead of just yelling a list of directions all at once. Adequate accommodations reduce the risk of exacerbating issues through inappropriate accommodations.

As for professional development for inmates with disabilities, we need to look to create win-win solutions for both the general public and private entities. My solution involves public-private partnerships who will help inmates re-enter the workforce. Some programs exist at prisons like HCC where inmates create a variety of products and gain transferable skills by the time they leave. Whichever programs we decide will best serve our incarcerated people with disabilities, they need to be ones that have a mindset focused on each individual’s needs, not on a one-size-fits all approach.

However, these programs require funding. Our judiciary is grossly underfunded. It currently receives less than 1% of the state budget. The state still is in need of crucial positions including court interpreters that would help properly accommodate PwDs.

**Question 6: People with disabilities are twice as likely to be victims of crime as those without disabilities. This includes the fact that both children and adults with disabilities are more likely to be victims of rape or sexual assault. They are also far more likely to suffer from police violence, partially because manifestations of disability can be misunderstood. How would you address these issues?**

**Answer:**I voted for bills that address these problems and as governor, I will continue to push for the needed change. I voted for HB 2279, which requires care homes to be licensed, which benefits vulnerable residents who are often victims of crime by staff or other residents. I voted for HB 1349, which requires police commissions to ensure that all full-time police officers receive crisis intervention training related to interaction with persons with mental disabilities. The bill also would require police commissions to establish policies for officer interaction with persons with mental disabilities and homeless persons.

This issue is a matter of life or death, as more than a third of people killed by police officers have disabilities. It often happens because of improper training. One tragic example of inadequate training was the Freddie Gray case in Baltimore. Freddie had Executive Function Disorder, and when the police told him to put his hands on his head, turn around, and get on the ground, he got confused and reached for his hips. The police thought he was reaching for a weapon and shot him.

Another bill I voted for was HB 1788, which allows ID cards to indicate a person’s disability, to allow the person access to certain eligible public services and help identify the disability to public safety personnel in case of an emergency. This bill would help for those disabilities that aren’t visible or easily recognizable.

My voting record, including voting for HB1856 below, shows that the safety of people with disabilities in their interactions with police is a priority of mine. Under my administration, proper police training is a must.

* HB1856: Provides for the right to a certified sign language interpreter at any stage of a criminal proceeding, including the taking of a person into custody prior to being charged with any offense. Provides that administrative fines be deposited into the DCAB special fund and criminal fines be deposited into the court interpreting services revolving fund.

**Question 10: Are your office, website and events accessible to people with disabilities? If yes, please describe.**

**Answer:**Both the campaign office and the capitol office are accessible with people with disabilities. There is adequate room for people with a wheelchair, scooter, or walker. The bathrooms in both offices are accessible. All facilities are well lit, so they are appropriate for people with visual impairments. My website, [www.votetupola.com](http://www.votetupola.com/), works with screen readers both on mobile and desktop. Videos on the website and on YouTube have captions. My events welcome supporters of all abilities.