**What is your plan for ensuring that all students with disabilities, including English Language Learners, receive a quality and appropriate education to acquire critical and marketable skills?**

It starts with adequate funding, staffing, training and high expectations. The Maryland Blueprint for Education appropriately calls for a substantial increase of investment in special education and English language learners in the State and County. I will prioritize funding in my budgets for education to ensure that are meeting the goals of the Blueprint and accessing the resources that the state is providing.

I have been a strong advocate for education funding in my time at the Council. I have voted for 100% of the MCPS budget request year after year. My education policy agenda for my campaign, “Education for All,” says very clearly, “Ensure that kids with learning disabilities are always a priority in discussions about education.”

I will listen to people with disabilities, as well as their families and service providers. I will also hire an education policy expert who will work with MCPS, the Board of Education and the Council to advance the key goals for education that I am passionate about. You can find out more about my agenda at <https://hansriemer.com/education>

Additionally, one of my priorities is to hire violence-prevention staff in our school system who can augment what I hope will be a reduced role for police officers. While I know that many families feel safer with police in the schools, many advocates in the disability community have also advocated that reducing police presence while increasing the use of positive behavioral supports and mental health resources promotes better outcomes for kids.

I will also continue to invest in early childhood education. Several years ago I led the Council to increase investments in early childhood education by millions of dollars every year, by making Head Start a full day program and expanding child care subsidies for families. Early intervention is critical for families to identify infants and toddlers with developmental delays and it provides vital support and resources to the family in the home so that parents can understand and address delays before they surface years later as academic struggles. Families need to know their rights and to be true partners in the goals and services for their children. I will continue working until we have universal, affordable and accessible early care and education.

**If elected, what will you do to advance opportunities for people with disabilities who want to work and earn an income, just like anyone else? How will you support employers, large and small, to recruit and hire workers with disabilities? How will you promote evidence-based policies and best practices leading to meaningful careers as well as disability entrepreneurship opportunities?**

When I was first elected to the County Council, substantially with Councilmember Andrew’s leadership we initiated a marvelous program in the County that provides hiring preferences and internship programs (Project Search) for people with disabilities. That program has been a success and I would welcome discussing how the County could provide tax incentives or grants to employers to replicate the program, both as an in-person job training program as well as versions for virtual work in knowledge industries and services. The County should be leading the private sector to step up and provide more job opportunities that pay a living wage to our residents with disabilities.

Ongoing opportunities for remote work – which can be win-win-win for employers, employees and the environment alike – should continue to be an option in our area. At the same time, transportation is critical. If our residents with disabilities cannot get to their job, then they cannot hold a job, regardless of incentives we might provide to the employer. That is one reason I proposed and the Council agreed to make RideOn permanently free at all hours for people with disabilities.

I have also been a leading champion for building up wheelchair accessible on-demand transportation through taxi fleets. For some people with disabilities, the growth of services like Uber and Lyft has been very welcome because taxi service was previously inadequate. For those who use wheelchairs, however, there is a real problem with access to wheelchair accessible vehicles. That is why I pushed hard to get funding in place to help taxi drivers buy wheelchair accessible fleets and I also worked with WMATA to establish the “AbilityRides” program, providing a better alternative to Metro Access. The executive branch, however, has been too slow to implement this vision. If I win, I will move faster to [make this a reality](https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/denvers-paratransit-service-expansion-includes-groceries-on-demand-rides?utm_source=Next%2BCity%2BNewsletter&utm_campaign=988004a82f-DailyNL_2022_03_11&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_fcee5bf7a0-988004a82f-44201453).

I have fought consistently and steady to increase pedestrian access through more investment in sidewalk construction, a higher priority for pedestrian access in new development. I created the Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Access program that provides millions of dollars in the County’s capital budget for access infrastructure, adding safe crossings in areas of critical need and building out our downtowns and transit areas to be safer and more walkable.

I have also been the County’s leading champion for sidewalk snow removal. Beginning with my legislation requiring the County to clear sidewalks in certain urban locations and to develop a sidewalk snow removal plan, continuing through raising fines on property owners who do not comply with our law, I know that something as simple as snow on the sidewalk is the difference for many in being able to have a public life.

Montgomery County has a program to include people with disabilities in its own workforce. That program should be expanded. At the same time, contractors to the county should be held to the same disability inclusion standards as Federal contractors in <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ofccp/section-503>.

People with disabilities are approximately twice as likely to start their own business as adults without disabilities. We must expand disability owned businesses and look out for them in County acquisitions. This includes ensuring that all our websites are screen reader accessible and that county videos and online events have captions for people who are deaf and/or hard of hearing.

**Whether or not you have a formal platform, what specific plans do you have to incorporate the voices of people with disabilities into your decision-making processes, if elected? What steps, if any, have you taken to make your campaign accessible for people with disabilities and to ensure that our voices are heard?**

In my work as a Councilmember, I have always prioritized disability rights issues and I have met regularly with our disabilities commission. As Executive I will continue with that approach.

The pivot to virtual or online community engagement has been a breakthrough for many in the disability rights community. I will ensure that we do not go back to the old ways that prioritized almost exclusively in-person engagement in County civic and government affairs. To be truly accessible, on-line engagement opportunities must continue to be plentiful and valued by decision makers. At the same time, I’ll continue my work to expand technology access, for example broadband and 5G, while ensuring that our online engagement is also accessible.

I commit to ensuring that high priority policies are reviewed for their impact on people with disabilities, such as housing, transportation, and facilities. I will partner with the Commission to identify those priority areas for impact review.

When I saw that Respectability had a candidate questionnaire for the Governor’s race, I wanted to fill it out for my County Executive campaign because it is an important way to explain my commitment to the community. I hope other candidates follow suit.

My campaign website is working to be fully accessible, as are our events. We are recruiting staff and volunteers to join our team.

**If elected, what will be your plan to fight stigmas, highlight the disability community, and promote higher expectations for success?**

I know firsthand the impact of stigma. When I broke my hip in 2015, it took me some time to accept that I had a broken hip rather than a broken leg. I experienced and was afraid of the stigma from breaking my hip, since that is not often an injury that a young person experiences and people often found it amusing. During that time I was suffering from a poor recovery. When I finally accepted the nature of my injury, I was able to properly research it and then connect with a surgeon who better understood why I was experiencing a poor recovery and help me get my life back on track. Altogether, I spent nearly three years in recovery, on and off a cane or crutches and with limited mobility and chronic pain.

Seeing the world from the perspective of a person with a disability had a profound impact on my life. I know what it is like to enter the crosswalk on a busy street and not know if you can get to the other side before the light changes and cars start moving. I bring my passion for that person’s well being to my legislative and policy work on pedestrian safety, to choose but one example. It is why there has been no Councilmember who has done more to create development rules, laws and funding for accessible pedestrian and transportation infrastructure.

I will work with our disability rights community to lift up your voices, celebrate our progress, and keep moving forward with progressive change.

I am also aware that many residents are experiencing a disabling condition as a result of COVID-19. Long COVID has forced many people out of the workforce. They need access to health care and community support, and possibly new job training if they need to find alternative employment. We will need to engage with our residents on these challenges and provide resources for their recovery.

**What additional policies and priorities, other than those already discussed above, do you plan to focus on to improve the lives of people with disabilities? If you have yet to develop them, what is your plan to learn about disability issues?**

With the pandemic mental and behavioral health have expanded significantly as serious challenges everywhere. We will work to de-stigmatize proactive training and services to help people with these challenges. This could include better access to mental health services by phone, online and in person.

Every year in our Council budget, I have fought for higher payments for DD providers. I’ll continue to prioritize those vital services so that our group homes and service providers can hire a skilled and caring workforce for our families and residents.

Housing is a critical issue for people with disabilities. Montgomery County is unfortunately a “housing shortage” community. We don’t produce enough housing each year to meet the demand and the growing gap creates harmful consequences. Housing shortages create more homelessness and they squeeze vulnerable populations out of housing opportunities. People with disabilities pay a steep price as they lose access to housing that is more convenient to employment centers and better jobs, quality of life amenities and cultural opportunities, and transit centers that connect to the broader region and all that it provides.

The underlying solution is to adjust housing policies so that the market can begin to close the gap, while enacting funding and incentives to ensure that there is adequate new housing created for residents with special needs. This is an area of policy that local government has great influence, and we need an executive who is pro-housing!

That has been my cause. As Chair of the Council’s housing committee, I have led the charge for more funding for affordable housing; our Housing Initiative Fund resources are made available to nonprofits like Housing Unlimited that then provide housing to people with disabilities. I have led the charge to create more MPDUs (new development set-aside units for our affordable housing programs) which are then provided to nonprofits that make them available to special needs clients. I proposed and the Council adopted accessory dwelling unit legislation, which allows homeowners to build basement apartments or backyard cottages.

I have proposed and plan to deliver on creating significant new funding for affordable housing, particularly targeting corridors like the Purple Line, and building “social housing” that provides a sustainable mixed income model for affordability.

The County Executive has fought me relentlessly on expanding housing opportunities. He has pushed against or voted against master plans that allow more housing to be built in order to address our shortage, he has underfunded our affordable housing fund, he even advocated against accessory dwelling units.

Additionally, I would like to work with the disability community to devise new recreational programs for kids and adults. I know that we can do more to help families meet their needs for quality experiences and community building through programming in arts, sports, and culture.