**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?**

We must desegregate our schools so that students have access to a better future. That means making our after-school and summer programs free and accessible to all students. We must also get our public schools the CFE funding they are owed, fully fund the Adult Literacy Education program, end barriers and inequalities (including those with regards to foundation aid/CFE funding) that have led to such deeply segregated schools, and end the school-to-prison pipeline that disproportionately affects children of color.

We must also have an intersectional approach to quality and equitable education. As someone who is on the Autism spectrum, I understand the reality of the needs of students and the importance of giving them the resources they need to thrive. We must provide the resources for all of our students to learn in the way that they learn best. Public schools MUST be the center of our communities, and we must think about their importance beyond providing a learning environment for children. We can and must support schools as centers of our neighborhoods and places where whole families can be uplifted, and that means funding them appropriately. I am committed to fighting for every penny necessary to properly center our schools within our city and our state – $100 million should be our baseline, but we can and should aim even higher.

Supporting public education means more than paying teachers a living wage and bringing technology into the classrooms. It means more fundamental things like ensuring we combat childhood food insecurity by designating state funds to supplement free and reduced lunch programs, as well as expanding social-emotional learning (SEL) to ensure our education system is building future adults with the skills necessary to succeed. The best thing we can do for public education is to believe in its promise, and I will do that by fighting for more funding across more critical need areas when I am in the State Senate.

**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?**

I am a person who lives with a disability and a lifelong medical condition – so our campaign has a disabled candidate! That has informed how my team works as a whole, and my campaign leadership includes multiple staff with disabilities and has been deliberate to ensure that our campaign is welcoming and accessible to all.

In 2021, I was proud to be part of the coalition that passed the Disability Rights legislative package. This included a number of bills, from ensuring that deaf and hearing impaired people may request interpreters at public hearings and meetings, to creating incentives for developers to build new or retrofitted residences which are universally designed for accessibility for seniors and people with limited mobility. All of these are steps towards equalizing access to the job market by increasing access to its component parts: education access, transportation access, interview equity, and more.

I believe we have much to learn, especially because many in Albany are not interested in hearing the realities of life for disabled New Yorkers, or addressing the challenges they face in building thriving, prosperous lives. The quickest way to fix this problem is to give a greater voice to disabled New Yorkers in the legislative process, which I have done by meeting constantly with a broad umbrella of disability activism organizations to ensure any legislation I introduce actually meets the needs and addresses the concerns of those directly impacted by our state policymaking. You will always have a seat at the table when I am state senator, and together we can craft smarter, sharper legislation to truly close the ableism gap in employment and hiring.

**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?**

As I mentioned above, giving the community a meaningful and visible presence in all of our legislation has always been my main goal. This is public service, yet so often my colleagues do not consider the disabled as part of their public constituency, and see their concerns as secondary issues to be hammered out through amendments or after-the-fact quick fixes. We deserve better. We deserve to be leading this discussion because it not only impacts our daily lives, it is our daily lives.

This is very personal to me. I was diagnosed with Autism in my early 20s and it shapes how I interact with the world around me every day, and is deeply impactful in how I work as a legislator. I have some physical disabilities from a car accident a few years ago. Collect [cash for cars](https://carscashforjunkclunkersbonitaspringsfl.com/) that were damaged from accidents. I understand that we are all only temporarily able-bodied at most.  I also used to have childhood absent epilepsy which has grown to adult absent seizures. Making this campaign accessible and empowering has been one of my primary concerns, and I am proud of the broad, deep coalition of activists we’ve assembled.  Everyone should know and understand that every issue is a disability issue and that everyone even if they are lucky enough to be able bodied right now, will eventually have a disability.

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

My entire career in public service has been a fight to show that when we get past stigmas and engage actual communities, we can produce powerful public policy that helps erase feelings of otherization and exclusion, and builds a New York that truly does work for and represent all of its residents with equal dignity and respect. I have been a constant, tireless voice for the inclusion of disability advocates in all manner of public policy, even when those were not “disability issues” as defined by the narrow lens of able-bodied lawmakers. Because we understand that disabled New Yorkers are still New Yorkers, and the issues that impact all of us are, by definition, disability issues.

When activists have sought an ally to march with them in defense of disability rights, they have reached out to me even though in many cases I am not their elected representative. And they reach out because I have built trust across this state as an advocate who will bring attention and focus to important issues, and ensure they are top-line priorities for my colleagues in Albany. Let’s work together to end these painful, damaging stigmas and create a New York where our economy is open and accessible to all.

**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?**

Housing Justice: we need fully funded public housing. We need to pass Good Cause, because the best way to combat homelessness, we need to help people stay in their homes – a challenge disproportionately faced by women and single mothers who are living with disabilities.

Economic Justice: I support funding and supporting the significant expansion of state Community Development Financial Institutions that direct much needed investment towards communities of color and neighborhoods routinely overlooked or underserviced by multinational banks and lenders. We see this especially when disabled entrepreneurs attempt to apply for business financing, or when they needed help during the pandemic. In many cases, support simply was not there in the same way it was for their able-bodied friends and neighbors.

A Just COVID Recovery: The past two years have forced us to face how deeply broken our systems are, especially when it comes to providing emergency aid and medical support to those with developmental or physical disabilities. This pandemic stretched our support network to the limit — and when it became too much, the first groups to suffer were those with disabilities that made their care more costly and complicated than the state was prepared for. In order to move forward, and allow people to not just survive, but thrive, we need to make sure we expand our social service funding to guarantee an equal level of care despite physical or developmental realities.