

2022 Legislative Candidate Questionnaire



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Position (Representative or Senator): House of Representatives Pos. 2
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1. Do you have a personal connection or professional experience with someone with an intellectual/developmental disability (IDD), and if so, would you describe its impact on you? If not, what impact do you want to have for people with IDD and their families?

My entire career I have worked as an advocate for disability justice, standing beside people with disabilities who are my colleagues and friends. I started as the Advocacy Program Coordinator at Open Doors for Multicultural Families (ODMF) where my job was to participate in individual advocacy, facilitate leadership programs for adults and youth with disabilities and their families, create space for people with direct lived experience in legislative advocacy, and create civic engagement opportunities. I learned up close how intersectionality impacted the families I served and the challenges individuals had to overcome. After some time at ODMF I switched over to Disability Rights Washington (DRW) to focus more on diverting people with disabilities from the criminal legal system. At DRW, I started working on the Trueblood lawsuit which addresses the unconstitutional delays individuals with disabilities face when waiting for the competency system. The individuals getting stuck in this system are people with psychiatric disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and developmental disabilities. This work led me to increased legislative advocacy and soon I became and currently serve as the Public Policy and Community Mobilization Director at DRW. My body of work is broad and touches many areas of work which impact people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Through supporting and advocating alongside people with disabilities and their families I've learned about the power of direct advocacy. There are so many individuals who have helped shape my understanding and perspective. I want to share a story from early on in my career that has stuck with me and shaped the way I look at our education and criminal legal system.

While working at ODMF, I was assigned to support an individual education advocacy case. This case was about a second grade Black boy with an IEP who was not receiving the services he needed. This child was supposed to have a paraeducator with them 24/7 and the school was not able to provide it. As a result, the child would become frustrated or triggered and display undesirable, sometimes violent behaviors. The school would ask his primary caregiver, his grandparent, and ask them to pick him up from school because they couldn't handle the situation. The grandparent eventually had to stop doing this because their employer was unhappy that they kept leaving in the middle of the work day.

One day, the student became so triggered that they began tearing down bookshelves and frightened the teacher. The teacher, without a paraeducator and without resources, called for school security. This student became scared at the sight of school security and ran out of the classroom. The principal then started running after the student and the student then ran out of the building. The school then called the police to have them track down the student and the student was delivered home in the back of a police car. I will never forget how this Black student with developmental disabilities was treated at school and the systemic failures that got him there. This has driven my advocacy work in education, representation, and the criminal legal system.

As a legislator, I will be listening to the advice of disability advocates, especially those who have direct experience as family members and people with I/DD. The effectiveness of family advocates in the Legislature is well-known and established. The developmental disabilities movement benefits greatly from this advocacy. The Arc has been a pioneer in supporting direct participation by people with I/DD in the movement, particularly in legislative advocacy. In the years ahead I look forward to seeing growing participation and leadership by people with I/DD themselves in this movement.

2. What are your top three priorities and how would you ensure people with developmental disabilities and their families are included in them?

1. Open and accessible government

The remote legislative sessions increased access to many advocates, who are meeting with legislators, testifying at hearings, and participating in workgroups within their own homes. I will continue to work to improve accessibility for people with disabilities and open up the legislative process. An important step was the enactment of SB 5793, which allows underrepresented groups participating in workgroups and task forces to receive stipends for their time. I'm proud to say that I worked closely on achieving passage of this bill. I have also had a role in working to pass the Nothing About Us Without Us Act, which required all stakeholder

groups working on disability issues to have representation by people with lived experience. The bill did not pass, but if elected I am determined to rally the support needed to make it law.

A core pillar of my advocacy is my commitment to direct participation of people with disabilities. As a legislator, I will listen to constituents with disabilities, their families and advocates on policy-making that affects them.

2 & 3. Non-police Crisis Response, and Accountability in the Criminal Legal System

Reform of the criminal legal system is a high priority for me. Advocates have long sought accountability of police for excessive use of force and non-police crisis response. I will prioritize legislation that creates appropriate crisis response services and addresses the mistreatment of people with disabilities in jail and prison. I have worked to address the criminalization of disability through the implementation of the Trueblood lawsuit settlement, which addresses the unconstitutional delays people with disabilities face when awaiting competency services. Many cycle through the system experiencing behavioral health crisis, homelessness, incarceration, and institutionalization. I will advocate for a system that provides individualized, timely, comprehensive care as soon as it is needed.

3. If cuts became necessary due to a recession or economic downturn, how would you protect services that people with IDD and their families need?

Our state is particularly vulnerable to service cuts in a recession because of our regressive tax system. This was tragically evident in the wake of the 2008 downturn, when we had massive cuts in social services resulting from the sudden, severe, and sustained decreases in revenue during that recession.

This question first assumes that “cuts are necessary.” I’m interested in minimizing our state’s vulnerability to recession to try and prevent cuts. How we do this is simply, everyone must pay their fair share. Washington has the most regressive tax system in the country. We cannot keep asking our residents who make the least to pay the most. We have to address the elephant in the room and put forward progressive revenue sources, like wealth taxes. I will support the long-standing efforts of tax reform advocates working to this end.

In the event cuts are necessary, lawmakers must minimize the impact on individuals who depend on government-funded support and services. Rather than focusing on how much money will be saved by a cut, lawmakers must look at the impact of the cut on those who depend upon the service and the long term financial impact. This could happen at all levels of the process, from the time when the Governor asks the agencies to identify potential cuts, to the Legislature’s consideration of cuts in the fiscal committees, to the final budget that is enacted. At all levels, the government must identify and reject cuts that will result in hardship for individuals who are especially vulnerable to cuts in service. In addition, analysis should determine where impact of cuts are disproportionate on marginalized communities, and where this is evident find an equitable resolution. One way we can do this is by passing and expanding on legislation such HB 1264 which would require equity impact statements to also include budget changes. There must not be a repeat of what happened in 2008 and the years after, where deep cuts in services were made and their impact lingers even now. Cuts should not be made on services depended upon by people with I/DD and other disabilities, low income persons, and homeless and housing insecure.

As a legislator, I will advocate against cuts that impact people with I/DD and others who depend on basic supports funded through the state budget. I will support adjustments in the budget elsewhere to achieve the fiscally responsible end of a balanced budget.

4. Is there other information you’d like constituents with developmental disabilities and their family and friends to know?

I’m running simply because the 46th District is my home. I’m invested in the health of this community. I’ve lived here my entire life and attended elementary through high school in the district. In fact, when my parents fled Iran because of the revolution they met at my high school, Roosevelt, and put down roots in Lake City.

I currently live in Lake City and here there are few places you can go without being directly confronted by the housing and behavioral health crisis and seeing neighbors cycling through the criminal legal system. These issues have been core to my role as Public Policy Director at Disability Rights Washington where I work with the legislature to create meaningful change for our communities. Not only do I have legislative experience, I also know what’s happening on the ground. I’m part of a team that oversees 12 behavioral health diversion programs across the state. These programs are doing well enough to have received funding from the legislature to continue their work. These are programs that meet people where they are at to provide help as soon as it’s needed. We need a system that provides help the moment it’s needed, not after individuals have fallen through every hole in our systems.

I’m also running because representation matters. We need to elect individuals who have the best interest of our communities in mind because it is also in their best interest. I’m interested in bringing attention to neighborhoods that haven’t received the support they need like Lake City and the Aurora corridor. I’m also running to represent my demographic. As a first-generation young

Iranian American woman, I know exactly what it's like to not have my voice heard. If I'm elected, I would proudly serve as the youngest to ever serve the district and the first Middle Eastern woman in the Washington State Legislature.

We need a representative who has a proven track record of successfully tackling hard issues in Olympia, someone who understands how these policies work on the ground, and one who knows what it means and how it looks to lift every voice. I'm the one for the job.

Your Campaign Website

<https://www.daryaforhouse.com>