

SC Gubernatorial Candidates

Disability-Related Policy Questions and Answers

Each of the 2018 South Carolina Gubernatorial Candidates were asked seven questions related to disability policy. Their responses are below.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law 28 years ago. Among many protections, the ADA requires that state agencies designate at least one employee to be responsible for coordinating ADA compliance. In a recent study, Able SC identified only three ADA Coordinators with any level of training on the public provisions of the ADA. If elected, how would you build on the work of the Americans with Disabilities Act and ensure that the rights of all South Carolinians with disabilities are protected?

McMaster

At this time, we have yet to receive a response.

Smith

In the S.C. House, I have been an advocate for people with disabilities. I personally sponsored H. 3538, which has passed into law. This “Persons With Disabilities Right to Parent Act” intends to ensure that South Carolinians with Disabilities are not discriminated against in custody disputes, adoptions, and child protection and probate proceedings. The bill prohibited termination of parental rights solely on the basis of disability, and required courts to consider reasonable accommodations that could be made to enable a PWD to be or remain a parent.

And yes, our state agencies must comply with the ADA by making sure they have at least one coordinator dedicated to compliance to make sure people with disabilities are not discriminated against.

There is much work to be done still in South Carolina to ensure that ours is a state in which everyone has a full opportunity to live an independent life. We must eliminate the barriers that prevent that. For instance, an employer can pay a worker with disabilities less than the minimum wage. That is a terrible injustice. That does not reflect the South Carolina I believe in, and we can and must change that.

As governor, I would continue to be an advocate for the rights of people with disabilities on these and other fronts.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, one in four working-age South Carolinians has a disability. If elected, how will you ensure that the disability voice is part of your administration's decision-making process, reinforce the efforts of public and private service providers, and end the stigma that prevents access to so many South Carolinians with disabilities?

McMaster

At this time, we have yet to receive a response.

Smith

My campaign is all about making sure that no one is left behind in South Carolina. One of the things that means is that Mandy and I will work to establish greater diversity in appointments and nominations throughout South Carolina, so that everyone is fairly represented in our government. That would certainly include people with disabilities.

South Carolina has seen several natural disasters over the past three years, including flooding and hurricanes. Is the state prepared to ensure that people with disabilities have inclusion in accessible and accommodating emergency shelters and have access to equally effective communications during a disaster? What gaps do you see and how will you prioritize addressing these gaps to safeguard the lives of individuals with disabilities?

McMaster

At this time, we have yet to receive a response.

Smith

The 2015 flood revealed some gaps in disaster preparedness for South Carolinians with disabilities. In some cases, therapists were not deployed to shelters, and in others there were no ASL interpreters at sites where people who are deaf resided. These are areas where we still need work. In other areas, we've done pretty well in recent years, such as the stellar contributions of SC's own Jason Hurdich in televised press conference during emergencies.

South Carolina's public schools are the repeated targets of federal enforcement actions with settled cases related to the incarceration rate of students with disabilities and misuse of Special Education dollars. What will you do to ensure that students with disabilities have access to high quality educational programming that promotes competitive employment, high school graduation, continuing education, and community integration over the current norm of marginalization and lacking post-school outcomes?

McMaster

At this time, we have yet to receive a response.

Smith

First, I am committed to increasing educational opportunity for all of South Carolina's children, wherever they live and whatever their abilities. The incarceration rate of students with disabilities is a major concern. Students with disabilities get caught in the school-to-prison pipeline at a disproportionately high rate, and that must be addressed. In terms of competitive employment: my running mate Mandy Powers Norrell and I were both sponsors of an Employment First bill, H. 4093, which (in its initial version, titled the Employment First Initiative Act) would have directed state agencies to coordinate to ensure that people with disabilities are able to obtain integrated employment at a fair wage.

There are many barriers to healthcare for South Carolinians with disabilities including inaccessible facilities and lack of affordable insurance. When healthcare is available, it is often provided in institutions including nursing homes that limit patients' freedoms and place a huge financial burden on individuals, insurers and the state. How will you address the complicated problems around healthcare on the state level?

McMaster

At this time, we have yet to receive a response.

Smith

First, I will expand Medicaid immediately upon becoming governor. Medicaid waivers allow people with disabilities to get the healthcare they need in the community (or home) so they don't have to be institutionalized. At the SC Department of Disabilities and Special Needs there is a waiting list, and it can take years to get on certain waivers. I would work to make DDSN more efficient so that people with intellectual and development disabilities get the care they need while avoiding institutionalization.

Transportation is a primary need for South Carolinians with disabilities. Transportation is required to meet medical and basic living activities and severely affects your constituents' health and quality of life. With local public transportation providers operating on shoestring budgets, troubled contracts with Medicaid transportation, and existing infrastructure that prioritizes drivers over all other commuters, how will you increase access to safe and reliable transportation for individuals with disabilities who want to get to their medical appointments, be on time for work, and access recreational and leisure activities?

McMaster

At this time, we have yet to receive a response.

Smith

I've heard that there have been problems with programs that are supposed to get Medicaid recipients to their appointments. I will look into this and address it as governor. Also, supporting telemedicine is important. It can be very hard to get, for instance, a psychiatrist to move into a rural area, and transportation remains a challenge. Telemedicine is one way we can take the care to the patient. I have sponsored legislation to increase the availability of telemedicine, and would continue to advocate for it as governor.

For the general SC population, the latest unemployment rate is 4.4%, but for people with disabilities, the employment participation rate is currently 28.1%, the fifth lowest in the country. Additionally, there is an increasing number of South Carolinians with disabilities that work under 14(c) certificates where they may earn less than the minimum wage. What steps would you take to ensure that people with disabilities have opportunities for equal, integrated, and competitive employment?

McMaster

At this time, we have yet to receive a response.

Smith

The low labor participation rate in South Carolina is the unacknowledged problem in employment in South Carolina, and this is especially true among our people with disabilities. I have sponsored the Employment First Initiative Act, and would continue to advocate for the goals that that legislation was originally designed to achieve.