

1. As you have read in the news, the Alaska Division of Public Assistance has had chronic understaffing leading to a significant delay in individuals receiving critical supports such as Medicaid and SNAP (“food stamps”).

How would you streamline eligibility requirements and program performance so people with disabilities can get and keep necessary services and benefits such as Medicaid, food assistance, and housing assistance?

I cosponsored the Senate version of HB 344 and then voted for the final passage to bring those provisions into the law. I supported, and continue to support, eliminating the asset test for SNAP, both so beneficiaries can save and own the things needed to lift themselves out of poverty, and also to greatly streamline the application process. In addition, we need to fully fund and staff up the DPA and any other agencies with a role to play, so that applications of all types can be processed in a timely fashion.

2. Alaskans with disabilities support a system in which each person directs their own supports, based on their strengths and abilities, toward a meaningful life in their home, their job and their community.

How will you protect and support the rights of individuals with disabilities so that they can make informed decisions about their own healthcare and personal wellbeing, ensuring autonomy and access to necessary services?

First and foremost, you have to listen to people in the community, to see what they need. My office does this on an individual level, through constituent services, but I also maintain an open-door policy for advocacy groups to discuss systemic changes needed. I have particularly close contacts with Alaska Legal Services Corporation, where I interned in law school, and know that they have a similar ethos: helping individual clients, including many folks with disabilities, fight for their rights and the benefits that they are legally entitled to.

3. Individuals placed under court-appointed guardianship are adults who rely on their guardian to ensure they are housed, and their most basic needs are met. The guardian is also responsible for ensuring protected persons receive public benefits, on which protected persons typically depend. Currently, there is a lack of qualified guardians in the State of Alaska

What are your ideas for solving the guardianship crisis?

This is a complicated issue, and we’ve seen it go very wrong with private entities like Cache Integrity. I support efforts to fund training and support for an increased number of guardians. We also need to fully fund and staff the Office of Public Advocacy, though we have seen high staff vacancies all throughout the state government, in part because we do not offer competitive benefits. I was a cosponsor

of SB88, to restore a defined benefit, which was in place decades ago, when we saw fewer headlines and shortages in this realm.

4. The Department of Justice has found reasonable cause to believe that the State of Alaska violates the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by failing to provide community-based services to children with behavioral health disabilities, relying instead on segregated, out-of-state institutional settings — specifically, psychiatric hospitals and psychiatric residential treatment facilities.

What is your vision to support in-state mental health services which support children with behavioral health disabilities and their families?

My district is home to Northstar, API, the Mental Health Trust Authority main office, MYC, Providence, ANMC, CITC, SCF, and more. In many ways, I represent the “Mental Health District.” I meet with these organizations regularly, and have attempted to get them more funding, like a state grant to help build a Crisis Care center near the ANMC campus (which was unfortunately vetoed by the governor). I am always on the lookout for ways to support more affordable, more effective care. That means getting folks out of Emergency Rooms and intensive inpatient facilities and into more community and home-based care, when possible. Certainly, reducing the number of children and adults being sent out of state for care fits into that philosophy, and I am open to your suggestions as to where our mental health care system has the most glaring or expensive gaps.

5. Children with disabilities who attend our state schools often need to have adjustments made to their schedules and/or the education services they received (accommodations) as well as modifications to the curriculum used to teach them to receive an equitable and appropriate education.

What steps will you take to improve education for students with disabilities, including ensuring proper accommodations and modifications within the classroom, increasing parental involvement in the Individualized Education Program process, and raising awareness of the rights of students under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act?

My mother was a Special Education Aide working in Rural Alaska when I was young, so I got to know a number of children with IEP’s early on in my life. I strongly support reasonable accommodations to help students with IEP’s integrate with our general student population. I believe that is a more effective approach than separate school facilities, in most cases. That being said, I of course also support programs like the one operating at Tyson Elementary School in my district, so long as they are properly funded and can maintain a relatively small size—we need to preserve personalized and safe instruction as much as possible. I also support lowering the threshold at which a preschool child can receive services under IDEA, which Alaska has set at 50% delay, the highest level in the

nation. I believe that we should lower this threshold to 25%, so that more children receive these critical early interventions.