

# **DC Mayoral Candidates**



## **Disability Community Questionnaire Responses**

DC Advocacy Partners, the District's free advocacy and leadership training program for self-advocates and family members of people with disabilities funded by the DC Developmental Disabilities Council created the following candidates questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to all mayoral candidates polling above 10 percent. Their responses are on the pages that follow.

For more information about DC Advocacy Partners, please visit <http://dcpartners.iel.org/>

## What would you do to make Washington DC a more disability-friendly city?

**Muriel  
Bowser**



For decades laws have existed to put in place protections for people with disabilities, including the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the D.C. Human Rights Act. That said, for the past few decades governments have been playing catch up to ensure the proper resources and programs are in place to provide for people with disabilities who live, work and travel to the District of Columbia.

Throughout this campaign, I have made it a priority to talk about my vision for the future of the District of Columbia – one that is inclusive – extending our prosperity to all DC residents across all eight wards, including the approximately 72,000 residents with disabilities in our communities. As Mayor, I am committed to making sure all of our residents are able to live, travel, work, and access services and programs to preserve and improve their quality of life.

**David  
Catania**



It is estimated that over 11% of District residents live with a disability. I am proud of the strides the District has made in becoming a more disability-friendly city but more must be done. As Mayor, I will work to provide residents with disabilities with the supports they need to achieve greater independence, empowerment, and inclusion. I will focus on infrastructure, construction, and transportation issues so that we can eliminate mobility barriers. I will prioritize the development of a spectrum of affordable supportive housing that best meet the needs of individuals living with disabilities. I will also place a greater emphasis on education and employment programs so that residents with disabilities can pursue a post-secondary path of their choosing.

**Carol  
Schwartz**



People living with disabilities is a concern that is very close to my heart as my brother, Johnny, was born with an intellectual disability. He was my older brother and only sibling and I was an advocate for him during his entire life. Making DC a more disability-friendly city is an issue I would take seriously as my record reflects.

One way to DC a more disability-friendly city is to improve the quality of our streets and sidewalks, which is crucial for those who use wheelchairs and motorized devices. When I was on the DC Council and the Chair of the Department of Public Works, I instituted a perpetual fund for road, pothole, and sidewalk repair. There were substantial improvements while this fund was under my purview because it guaranteed there were resources to keep our roads and sidewalks in top shape. Sadly, this fund was eliminated when I left the Council, and we are now seeing the results. If elected, I would immediately reestablish this perpetual fund as taking care of our roads and sidewalks should be a basic function of government and is greatly needed to aid the mobility of those with disabilities.

Clearly, all government buildings must be in compliance with the Americans with Disability Act. Many years ago when I was on the Council, I worked with the disability community and the Office of Property Management to make the Wilson Building more accessible to the disabled population. We must also require that our inspectors do their best to ensure that all businesses are in compliance. I will work with varying stakeholders deeply involved in the disability community to guarantee that we are doing all we can to make DC friendly for those with disabilities.

# What will you do to ensure that students with disabilities in DC have access to a quality education and receive the supports and services they need?

**Muriel Bowser**



As Mayor, I will continue and improve upon the coordination between Office of the State Superintendent of Education, DC Public Schools, Public Charter Schools, the Department on Disability Services, Developmental Disability Administration and Rehabilitation Services Administration to ensure that all eligible youth receive the necessary support to achieve a quality of life we all want for the next generation. I plan to work with groups like DC Advocacy Partners to learn about best practices in other jurisdictions that we can make available to our students with disabilities. Read more about my education priorities below and here: <http://murielformayor.com/press/priorities-for-district/>

**David Catania**



As Chair of the Council's Committee on Education, I have made improving the quality of education and services for our students with disabilities a top priority. A year ago, I started working with our partners in the special education and disabilities communities to better understand the barriers facing our students with disabilities and their families. This collaboration led to the introduction of three landmark pieces of legislation designed to improve the District's delivery of special education system.

Unanimously approved by the Committee on Education and by the full Council on first reading, these three measures – the Special Education Student Rights Act, the Enhanced Special Education Services Act, and the Special Education Quality Improvement Act – provide students and their families with greater protections as they attempt to navigate the special education system, ensure that students with disabilities receive more services at an earlier age, and help build capacity within our special education system to ensure that all students can access the supports they need. For example, the measures:

- Ensure that parents receive copies of the complex documents to be discussed at special education meetings in advance of the meeting and a copy of their child's IEP or IFSP shortly after the plan is agreed upon;
- Allow for parents to visit their child's school and observe their child's instruction, either personally or through a representative;
- Adjust the burden of proof in special education due process hearings to reflect the information imbalance that parents face;
- Expand eligibility for early intervention services over time, to include children who have a 25% delay in one developmental area;
- Reduce delay in accessing special education services by requiring an initial evaluation to take place within 60 days of parental consent – the federal default –rather than the current requirement of 120 days; and
- Provide a mechanism for avoiding the loss of unspent special education funds, while establishing and funding collaborations between educational institutions.

As Mayor, I will ensure full implementation of the critical laws so that all students can receive the educational supports and services they need. However, these bills are just one step in the right direction. In SY2012-2013, students with disabilities had a graduation rate of only 42% - significantly lower than that of students without disabilities. Our schools must do more to ensure that our students with disabilities are given the tools they need to succeed. As Mayor, I will ensure that our educational

	<p>facilities are welcoming to all students by meeting ADA requirements. I will provide for greater investments in services that help our students with disabilities learn, such as applied behavior analysis. And I will continue efforts to improve our student transportation services so that students can dedicate more time to classroom learning.</p>
<p><b>Carol Schwartz</b></p> 	<p>We must ensure that students with disabilities are given access to education that is robust and flexible to meet their special needs. Federal law requires that students with disabilities be educated through inclusion and given opportunities to succeed alongside their peers whenever possible. We must adhere to that law and we must provide Individualized Education Plans when needed. Our schools have made improvements in serving students with special needs, but there is a long way to go. It is essential to improve our own special education programs and I believe the more we keep funds in our schools and not continually pay for private school tuitions, we will strengthen our own programs and expertise.</p>

## What will you do to improve transition services and access to higher education for youth with disabilities?

**Muriel  
Bowser**



As Mayor, I plan to raise the expectations on all our service providers, both public and nonprofit, to work towards a goal of ensuring that 60% of secondary students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) receive their high school diplomas by 2020. For many students with IEPs, a high school diploma should not mark the conclusion of their formal education. Post-secondary education should also be available and I am committed to providing those opportunities by partnering with our community college and other local universities.

**David  
Catania**



As part of legislation I recently authored, the Enhanced Special Education Services Act, I took critical steps toward helping our students with disabilities transition to adulthood and access higher education. First, I lowered the age by which schools must begin the process of establishing transition plans for our students with disabilities, which help prepare students for independent living, employment, and further education. Specifically, the legislation requires that local education agencies begin helping students develop the skills they need to transition to adulthood, and planning for that transition, when the student turns 14 rather than the current requirement of age 16. About a quarter of states start transition planning for their students when they reach the age of 14, and it is time for the District to follow suit. Starting this process earlier will help keep students engaged in school and build more robust skill sets as they transition from high school to adulthood.

The legislation also provides families with additional educational decision-making options to support children with disabilities when they turn 18, while at the same time recognizing and affirming the rights of individual with disabilities to speak for themselves. Finally, the measure requires that IEP teams work with agency partners to identify and connect students with disabilities to necessary assessments or evaluations so that they can continue receiving support as they transition to adulthood.

As Mayor, I will work with our schools and community partners to ensure full implementation of these important enhancements while also looking for additional opportunities to make postsecondary education more accessible to students with disabilities. I will work with the University of the District of Columbia and the UDC Community College to help provide our students with greater educational and career training opportunities. I will also fully fund my DC Promise Act, which provides financial grants to high school graduates to help make college more affordable

**Carol  
Schwartz**



It is essential that students and families be made aware of their rights and the postsecondary needs provided for under ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. I will work with the Office of Disability Services and the Youth in Transition Programs to ensure that more post-secondary opportunities are availability for students with disabilities and will work to ease their transitions. There are also opportunities to expose students with disabilities in high school to university programs in which they can participate.

# What will you do to help people with disabilities get prepared for entering the workforce? How will you help them get jobs and careers?

**Muriel Bowser**



DC residents with disabilities should be aware that they are an asset to the workplace, and should have information readily made available about their rights—that reasonable accommodations are available to them from the beginning of the application process to their first day on the job. As Mayor, I am committed to better utilizing the \$100 million spent on job training and job placement programs for people with disabilities. I will task agency heads, including the Departments of Employment Services and Disability Services to work with our government agencies and private sector employers to encourage customized employment tailored to an individual's strengths. Everyone in our community deserves a good job with good wages.

In regards to education, and employment opportunities for people with disabilities, as Mayor, I would prioritize the following:

- Encourage community partners and employment services agencies to work with our public schools—both traditional and charter—to begin transition planning for a path towards a career early on in their educational track. Youth without disabilities think of what they want to be when they grow up as early as kindergarten, our youth with disabilities should be positioned to do the same and their parents should be confident that the resources and planning will be there to help achieve those aspirations. As Mayor, I am committed to placing more young people with disabilities in internships through our Summer Youth Employment Program so that a path to a career can be identified and pursued.
- Continue and improve upon the coordination between Office of the State Superintendent of Education, DC Public Schools, Public Charter Schools, the Department on Disability Services, Developmental Disability Administration and Rehabilitation Services Administration to ensure that all eligible youth receive the necessary support to transition from high school to post secondary education, training or employment. As Mayor, I am committed to ensuring that young adults with disabilities and their families are aware of their rights under the ADA, Section 504 and the programs in place to assist once they graduate, whether they are pursuing education or employment after graduation.

**David Catania**



Currently, working-age residents with disabilities have a significantly higher unemployment rate as compared to individuals without disabilities. We must do more to prepare our residents with disabilities to enter and succeed in today's workforce. As Mayor, I will ensure that our students with disabilities receive the education and support services they need to successfully make the transition from high school to college or career training programs. I will support enhanced employment training programs so that individuals with disabilities know and understand their rights, are better equipped to navigate the job search process, and receive needed support so that they can stay gainfully employed. I will also ensure that students with disabilities are fully integrated into the Summer Youth Employment program and will expand job placement programs for individuals with disabilities.

**Carol Schwartz**



I was glad when Mayor Vincent Gray declared DC to be an Employment First State, affirming that employment is important for the lives of people with disabilities and that these individuals are an often untapped resource for businesses and employers. I would continue to expand the initiatives under this proclamation to promote the success stories of working people with disabilities and garner opportunities for disabled people to find employment including Customized Employment options. Project SEARCH is another innovative program which allows students with disabilities to gain experience in the workplace. I would evaluate the initiatives we are currently undertaking, expand those that are working, and partner with non-profits and government entities to embark on other programs that link people with disabilities to employers. In addition, it is important that people with disabilities understand their rights in terms of the accommodations they should receive in applying for a job and during employment.

## How will you use your entrée into the business community to see the disability community as an important part of their consumer base?

**Muriel  
Bowser**



As stated previously, DC residents with disabilities should be aware that they are an asset to the workplace, and likewise businesses should be encouraged to serve persons with disabilities. This means fully complying with all accessibility laws. But it also means encouraging businesses to go even further by making their physical operations friendlier to persons with disabilities. And it also means educating employees to serve person with disabilities and even, where appropriate, tailoring goods and services to meet the unique demands of the disability population.

**David  
Catania**



Over 70,000 District residents are living with a disability. These individuals, like all residents, have a right to enjoy all the amenities their communities have to offer, including local retail options. As Mayor, I will work with business partners across the city to ensure they have the tools they need to best serve all residents, including those with disabilities. For example, I will build on recent efforts undertaken by the Office of Human Rights (OHR) to address barriers facing residents with disabilities when eating out at restaurants. OHR worked with community partners to develop and distribute accessibility guidebooks to restaurants across the city and asked that they take a pledge to be accessibility-friendly. Efforts such as this not only help establishments meet accessibility requirements under law, but also help local businesses attract and retain new customers. And with the purchasing power of our disability community continuing to grow, it also makes financial sense.

In addition to promoting greater accessibility, I will work with business leaders to help develop workforce training and job placement programs so that residents with disabilities can have greater participation in the local economy.

**Carol  
Schwartz**



Persons with disabilities are of course an important part of the consumer base. As a person who has always been inclusive, and as an elected official who has a record of inclusiveness, I am confident that the disability community will know that I value them and recognize they are an important part of our city. I will use the Mayor's pulpit to promote the interests of our disabled residents to the business community.

## What will you do improve DC transportation options for people with disabilities, such as Metro, Metrobus, MetroAccess, and taxis?

**Muriel  
Bowser**



As the Ward 4 Councilmember and a member of the WMATA Board, I have worked to create safer and more accessible modes of transportation for all of our residents and visitors, including people with disabilities. As Mayor, I am committed to making sure our infrastructure has accessible paths of travel, including properly positioned and marked curb cuts and walk signals with audio and numeral signals in business and residential areas. Additionally, as Mayor, I will task my administration with opening lines of communication so that the disability community is made aware of the readily available transportation options designed for them, but also to understand how those options can be improved. And I will ensure that those I appoint to Metro and other regional transportation bodies understand the needs of the disability community and are as equally committed to providing first-rate transportation options.

**David  
Catania**



As Mayor, I will make a greater investment in our infrastructure to ensure that all modes of transportation – walking, driving, or mass transit – are fully accessible to people with disabilities. This includes greater investments in our sidewalks and streetscapes to ensure ADA compliance while also providing accessible pathways to paratransit services (i.e. providing “door to door” assistance when needed rather than curb pick up).

I will also ensure that the District fully participates in WMATA’s Accessibility Advisory Committee and the MetroAccess subcommittee and will partner with local, regional and private sector partners to find ways to take advantage of emerging technologies that may better support the transit needs of residents with disabilities. I will also undertake a full review of the District’s regulations and policies to determine what improvements can be made to improve transportation options for the disability community. For example, recent implementation of new regulations allowing for wheelchair accessible taxis to offer paratransit service instead of MetroAccess is an important step in providing greater choice for individuals with disabilities. As Mayor, I will look for similar efforts to help improve our mass transit options for all residents.

**Carol  
Schwartz**



While Metro and Metrobus options are accessible, both should be consistently checked to ensure they are in working condition for disabled customers. The DC Office of the Aging website offers many options to enable residents of the District of Columbia to get to their destinations. With respect to taxi service for persons with disabilities, the dc.gov website lists those options for persons with disabilities but as Mayor, I would work to create more and build effective communication of those options. The District of Columbia Taxicab Commission Disability Advisory Committee Comprehensive Report from February 20, 2014 highlighted some disturbing statistics, specifically that there are only 20 wheelchair accessible taxis out of the approximately 7,000 taxis that operate in DC. As Mayor, I would look at the recommendations made by the report to determine which can be realized in a reasonable timeline.

**As the District implements the Affordable Care Act, how will you make sure people with disabilities have access to quality healthcare, including necessary specialists?**

**Muriel  
Bowser**



Accessibility of doctors' offices, clinics, and other health care providers is essential in providing medical care to people with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities are less likely to get routine preventative medical care than people without disabilities. Accessibility is not only legally required, it is medically critical so that minor problems can be detected and treated before turning into major and life-threatening problems. As Mayor, I am committed to holding our medical community accountable, especially Medicaid and Medicare providers, for providing the necessary accommodations and specialists for people with disabilities.

**David  
Catania**



During my tenure as the Council's Chair of the Committee on Health, I made expanding access to quality, affordable healthcare a top priority. I invested millions of dollars to upgrade primary care clinics across the city and to support the turnaround of United Medical Center. I helped reduce the District's uninsured rate by more than half and brought critical healthcare professionals to underserved areas. As Mayor, I will continue this work to ensure that all District residents, including individuals with disabilities, are able to access the services they need. This includes full implementation of the District's home and community-based Medicaid programs and improved care coordination for individuals with disabilities that utilize our Medicaid and Alliance managed care program. I will also look to expand on my successful Health Professional Recruitment Act to help ensure that the District has sufficient specialty capacity to meet the needs of all residents, including those with disabilities.

**Carol  
Schwartz**



We need to evaluate on a continual basis to ensure that the plans under the District Health Exchange provide the disabled with necessary specialists in their networks. It is also crucial that people with disabilities understand all the options available to them under the Health Exchange as well as Medicaid modifications under ACA. We need full communication targeted to the disability community, like the DC Health Link Disability Community Leadership Summit, which was hosted by DC Health Link and the Office of Disability Services which briefed leaders of the community to communicate information out to their constituents. We must also make sure the DC Health Link site is updated for fuller accessibility for the disabled and is assistive technology compatible.

## What will you do to increase affordable, accessible housing proportionally across the District?

**Muriel Bowser**



Ensuring equal access and treatment for persons with disabilities has been the law for several decades. And yet, all too often people with disabilities are unable to secure affordable and accessible housing.

As Mayor, I am committed to creating accessible housing for DC residents with disabilities and removing barriers from our current stock of affordable housing units. I plan to increase oversight of accessibility standards in the private market by encouraging universal design standards (accessible to people with disabilities and seniors) in new construction of affordable units as well as in the government's regulated affordable housing stock. I will also work to improve access to housing subsidies for DC residents with disabilities. I would like to work with you and other stakeholders to determine how best practices from other states, like "Vistability" requirements could benefit DC residents with disabilities.

**David Catania**



The District is currently facing a crisis of housing affordability. Between 2000 and 2012, the number of renters who pay more than 30% of their monthly gross income for housing grew by 40%. We have more than 72,000 people on the public housing waiting list and are experiencing a spike in homelessness. And while a 2013 Housing Strategy Task Force report made recommendations on issues of affordability, most remain unimplemented.

The District needs a comprehensive approach to this crisis, one that is based on the actual need of our residents. As Mayor, I will look beyond residents' income levels and undertake a true housing needs assessment. I will review employment status, educational attainment, health conditions, and the needs of the disabled community and how the intersection of each impacts housing affordability. I will develop data-driven solutions, including concrete implementation strategies, and immediately begin implementation. I will also continue efforts to improve our inclusionary zoning program, including working with community partners to increase the production rate of very low-income units and closing loopholes that result in missed IZ opportunities. Finally, I will end the practice of failing to spend tens of millions of dollars that could be used to support affordable housing. In 2011, 2012, and 2013, the District failed to distribute millions in federal 9% Low-Income Housing Tax Credits that could have produced more than \$32 million in equity for low-income housing developments. The District also failed to allocate \$147.3 million in tax-exempt bonds in 2012 and 2013. As Mayor, I will work with advocates, developers, and investors to craft policies that will support the better utilization of these valuable funding mechanisms.

**Carol Schwartz**



Presently, there is a waiting list for housing in DC, though preference is given to persons with mobility impairments, particularly those who are the head of the household. I would work to ensure that there is more affordable housing particularly for those persons living with disabilities and below the poverty line.

The Section 811 Supportive Housing Program, administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), is designed to assist with the housing needs of very low and extremely low income adults with disabilities. I will use my skills at working with stakeholders to obtain every federal dollar available in order to help these DC residents who face special housing challenges.

The District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA), now a certified Medicaid provider, recently opened its first affordable assisted living facility, which provides 24-hour services for its low-income residents. This state-of-the-art facility is a testament to the effectiveness a holistic wrap-around approach has on addressing affordable housing while also providing vital services, such as nursing, meals, housekeeping, and educational programs, to underprivileged communities. As Mayor, I will work toward making holistic wrap-around development projects more available to our most vulnerable communities.

## How will you implement the District's Olmstead Community Integration Plan?

**Muriel  
Bowser**



The District's Olmstead Community Integration Plan is a comprehensive working plan that serves to ensure that community-based treatment is provided to people with disabilities, when appropriate. As Mayor, I am committed to implementing the plan and ensuring that we bring the community stakeholders, residents and the government together to review on-going implementation and make any needed changes quickly and efficiently to better serve the community. There are many cross-agency and cross-system integration efforts that must be realized in order to effectively meet the needs of people with disabilities. I am committed to addressing these issues, by putting in place a strong leadership team with thoughtful and transparent accountability measures which will be tracked and reviewed quarterly.

**David  
Catania**



The District's Olmstead Community Integration Plan represents the District's commitment to ensuring that individuals with disabilities are provided with maximum choice and the opportunity to receive services and support in community-based settings rather than restrictive environments.

Currently, nine separate District agencies have responsibilities under the Olmstead Plan, including the Office on Aging, DCPS, the Department of Health Care Finance, and the Department of Disability Services. As Mayor, I will ensure greater coordination across agency lines while also holding each agency accountable for implementation of their components of the Olmstead Plan. Critical to this will also be greater transparency so that the public has a full accounting of our efforts. I will also prioritize efforts to ensure the timely collection of relevant data and to reduce barriers facing individuals with disabilities, such as a lack of accessible, affordable, and integrated housing. Finally, I will promote greater public awareness of the Olmstead Plan in general and of the services and supports available to the District's disability community.

**Carol  
Schwartz**



I will continue and work to expand the 2011 "DC – One Communities for All Plan," which ensures that people released from non-community-based settings into the community have the resources and the support they need.

## How will you ensure that your administration and appointees include people with disabilities?

**Muriel  
Bowser**



As Mayor, all DC residents will play a role in my Administration – and I look forward to working with DC Advocacy partners and other organizations to ensure that people with disabilities are represented from cabinet level on down, and throughout the city’s boards and commissions.

**David  
Catania**



To best serve the needs of its residents, the District government needs to be inclusive of all people. As Mayor, I will build an administration that best represents the diversity of this city and look forward to working with community stakeholders to identify the most qualified individuals for leadership positions across the government. In addition, I will strive to make the District government a place where individuals want to seek employment and that is accommodating of all individuals.

**Carol  
Schwartz**



As stated previously, the history of my life and my career is that of inclusivity. I can assure all who live in DC that my administration will be inclusive of everyone, including people with disabilities.

## How would you like to see the disability community hold you accountable during your administration?

**Muriel  
Bowser**



While we have made progress in the District government, there is still more work to do. Mine will be an administration that serves all residents equally. And mine will be an administration that welcomes criticism if that goal can be fulfilled more fully, quickly, or with more vigor. As Mayor, I look forward to an ongoing partnership with groups like DC Advocacy Partners.

**David  
Catania**



As I have always held government officials accountable for their actions, I would want the disability community to do the same for me. Critical to this will be increased transparency in policy and budget development and open lines of communication between my administration and the disability community.

**Carol  
Schwartz**



I would like the disability community to let me know what their needs are and where possible, I will act to follow through.

# Vote November 4!



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Deadline to request: October 28

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One Judiciary Square

October 20 - November 1

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## **Election Day**

Tuesday, November 4th, 7:00 am to 8:00 pm

**For more information visit: <http://dcboee.us/>**