September 26, 2016

Dear Candidate for Statewide Office in Missouri,

The coalition of organizations below respectfully requests that you thoughtfully consider the attached questions and provide responses by October 10, 2016.

Addressing issues important to the disability community is critical because we represent a significant constituency. A recent national study estimated that there would be 35.4 million people with disabilities eligible to vote in the November 2016 elections, representing close to one-sixth of the total electorate. Using their estimate, Missouri alone has the potential to turn-out more than 1 million voters with disabilities. Additionally, the rate of voter registration for individuals with disabilities since 2008 has surpassed those without disabilities by 2.3%. Add to that their families, friends, co-workers, people paid to provide services and supports to them, and the reach of the disability community eclipses that of any other constituency or minority group.

We vote on disability issues because individuals with disabilities, their families and those who provide services to them are fundamentally invested in the decisions made by elected officials.

Imagine a family with a young child with significant disabilities, including medical and behavioral needs. Medical bills pile up. Accessible vans are expensive. Mom considers quitting her job because yet another day care has said they don’t have the expertise to support her child.

Imagine a man, injured in a car accident at the age of 16. Once a star athlete, he is now quadriplegic. His dream is to be an engineer. He went to school, got good grades and was supported by Vocational Rehabilitation. When he gets offered his first job, he finds out he would no longer qualify for attendant services that help get him out of bed and ready for work in the morning.

These are just two examples of Missouri citizens and their families who look to elected officials to stand up for them.

When you return your answers, we will share them with our wide network. The members, constituents, customers and employees of our 14 organizations, as well as those of our colleagues’ organizations, will hear directly from you.

These issues are numerous and complex. We want to help. If you would like to be connected to someone at one of the coalition organizations to talk through an issue, ask a question or get more information, please call or email me. I will connect you to the right person. Our goal is to make sure you have what you need to share your opinion with us.

To ensure you have an opportunity to speak directly to our community, please remit your answers (which should be entered in the attached fillable PDF) to Cathy Brown at cbrown@paraquad.org no later than 12:00 p.m. on Monday October 10th.

On behalf of the 14 partner organizations and all the people we represent, thank you very much.

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Candidate Questionnaire on Disability Issues

Please share any connections or experience (professional or personal) you have with people with disabilities and/or the disability community in Missouri.

Serving and the understanding the specific needs of the diverse disabled community has been a lifelong mission. My faith informs my commitment to equality and dignity. Our family has several members who live with thrive with debilitating mental health issues from anxiety to schizophrenia. As a 25 year healthcare professional I am fully aware of the challenges that affect the communities and the families involved. As a policy maker, legislator, I have developed close friendships with constituents who have taught me much about the needs of the people with disabilities.

Administrative:
What do you see as the role of government, local, state, and federal, affecting the lives of people with disabilities and what efforts will you make to ensure state agencies serving Missourians with disabilities have the resources and man-power to carry out their functions?

People with disabilities interact with the government more than any other group in our nation. Obviously, there are federal, state and local programs that are funded to assist people with disabilities to live and work in our communities and be fully functioning and valued members of our society. I've always supported these vital programs and will continue to do so as state Treasurer. We also need to fully fund the agencies like the MO Human Rights Commission that are in charge of protecting the civil rights of our citizens with disabilities.

How will you include the voice of people with disabilities, their families and those who provide services to them in your administration?

Over my career in public service, especially when I was Regional Director of HHS, I've worked directly with many people with disabilities, their families and the organizations that serve them. I will maintain and enhance those relationships as your next Treasurer.
Health Care Access:
Do you support covering people in the health insurance gap by increasing eligibility for MO HealthNet to 138% FPL? Do you think some reforms are necessary to ensure coverage, if so, what kind of reforms?

I wholeheartedly support covering people in the MO HealthNet to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level. Currently, we expect people to survive on 85% of federal poverty level which keeps people trapped in severe poverty simply because they need the type of health care coverage that only Medicaid provides. Medicaid is the only health insurance program that covers daily attendant care services. In terms of reforms, we need to also make it easier for people who need this health insurance coverage to be able to work, save money and be married to a spouse who can also go to work without losing coverage.

Currently, the Aged, Blind and Disabled category of MO HealthNet recipients are NOT included in managed care. What is your position on managed care for this population and individuals with severe mental illness and addiction disorders? What about the inclusion of long-term supports and services (like Medicaid Waiver services or Consumer Directed Services)?

As a former healthcare professional my advocacy on this issue through the State Treasurer’s office will be useful. I will work with the Disability community and their providers to ensure needs are met in a fiscally responsible manner for all.

Housing:
The availability of affordable, accessible and safe housing is a major barrier for some individuals with disabilities to full community inclusion. What will your administration do to further housing options for persons with disabilities? And how will it do this?

The State Treasurer serves on the Missouri Housing Development Council and in that capacity I will strongly support the development of more affordable, accessible housing as well as the new rule requiring all developments to utilize universal design principles. I will advocate for onsite child care and social services.
Employment and Economic Equality and Independence:
People with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty, and have the lowest employment rate, compared to any other minority population. Often, people with disabilities who need to access supports and services only public programs provide (personal attendant services, Medicaid waiver services, etc.) fear losing their services if they make too much money. How will you improve employment and economic outcomes for people with disabilities while allowing people to retain necessary benefits?

Because of our failure to expand Medicaid, we are keeping people trapped in poverty. First, we need to bring back the billions of Missouri tax dollars we’ve already paid into Washington DC to create 24,000 good paying health care jobs and keep our rural hospitals open. Second, we need to allow people to make more than 85% of the FPL to be able to work and do more with the Ticket to Work program to give people with disabilities the opportunity to go to work and provide for themselves and their family without losing their health care.

In the last three years the U.S. Department of Justice has taken over 50 legal actions in 25 states including Federal lawsuits and court settlements enforcing the civil rights of persons with disabilities under the ADA which states people with disabilities have a right to live and work in integrated community settings. This past July a new federal law, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) went into effect. This law creates new standards for transitions from school to integrated work in the community for persons with disabilities. School and other community agencies are charged with focusing on integrated work before exploring sheltered work options. Given these mandates, what can Missouri do to move forward to be in compliance and be leaders in this area?

First, we need to close the front door to sheltered workshops and work to help transition workers into integrated competitive employment. I support the administration’s proposal to eliminate the sub minimum wages that in the state of Missouri legally allow employers to pay people with disabilities on average less than $2 an hour. Other states have led the way and it’s time we catch up.

Education:
Please outline the steps your administration would take to ensure that students with disabilities in our public schools are educated in their neighborhood schools and included in classrooms with students without disabilities. These students would be provided equal access to the curriculum, and are able to obtain assistive technologies and other related educational supports that adequately prepare them to become productive members of our communities.

Similar to the last question, we still have vestiges of the past with segregated schools for children with disabilities. Segregation is never equal and we need to close the State Schools for the Severely Handicapped and mainstream those children into their own neighborhood schools with appropriate staffing and support. All children can learn and we need to give every child the opportunity to learn in the same integrated environment.
When we invest in the education of all children, including those with disabilities, we're investing in a strong economy. What steps would your administration take to ensure that students with disabilities are adequately prepared to transition to competitive employment and/or post-secondary education?

Students with disabilities have more rights in our K-12 system than they do in our post-secondary systems. We need to work with our trade schools, our community colleges and our four year institutions to educate them and assist them in understanding the needs of these young adults with disabilities and help to successfully transition into the next chapter of their lives.

**Rights:**
Following the events of Ferguson, Police Officer Standards Training (POST) requirements were increased. Missouri has Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) and CIT councils in a number of areas in the state whose focus is to help improve interaction between law enforcement and persons with mental illness. In addition, First Responder Disability Awareness Training (FRDAT) for each first responder discipline (law enforcement, fire/EMS and 911 dispatchers) will be implemented in Missouri. These trainings are vital given the number of people with disabilities who are not properly identified or understood, which has led to ongoing victimization on persons with disabilities, inappropriate interactions, false arrests, unjust incarcerations or even death. What would your administration do to continue and expand this much needed education for law enforcement officers and other first responders?

More than half of the people killed in officer involved incidents are people with disabilities and often the interactions wouldn’t turn violent if the officers had proper training in dealing with people with mental illness, autism, deafness or other conditions. I support the new efforts to provide more disability awareness training of POST officers. I also know that people with disabilities are more likely to be victims of crime than other populations and we need law enforcement and other agencies to be partners in trying to prevent these heinous crimes.

In 2015, for individuals determined ‘incapacitated/disabled’, courts awarded over 2,400 full guardianships and only 63 limited guardianships. Missouri courts disproportionately award full guardianship, which strips a person with a disability of all their rights, even though there are less restrictive options available. How will you support the reform of Missouri’s 30+ year old guardianship statute to better support Missourians and assist them in retaining and restoring more of their rights as they are able?

Our guardianship laws, like other items in this questionnaire are relics of the past and we need to rethink the rights of all citizens with disabilities to be in more control of their own destinies. This includes making sure that their voting rights aren’t stripped away through a variety of tactics, including inappropriate guardians or photo ID laws. We also need to educate our Public Administrators about the rights of people with disabilities and the Olmstead decision that people have the right to live in their own communities and not be unnecessarily institutionalized.
Funding and Access to Services:
A history of inconsistent and underfunded rates has led to a system that no longer covers the cost of doing business for community provider organizations. Providers are experiencing a workforce crisis hampered by low wages, a lack of health insurance, high turnover, and a shortage of staff. Demand for these workers from private industry and other human services sectors compete for these workers. In addition, nearly 65% of the 95,000 individuals with developmental disabilities are not connected with the service system and many live at home with aging parents, representing a significant future demand on the system. How will you ensure a robust service system for Missourians with developmental disabilities now and in the future?

Too often we have asked our state employees and contractors to do too much for too less. Our state employees are the lowest paid in the nation, resulting in high turnover, burnout and low morale. That extends to the contractors who are providing direct services to our citizens with disabilities. As the former regional director of HHS, I saw firsthand the negative impact and consequences of underfunding these vital services and will support efforts to provide the necessary budgets to appropriately compensate these valuable workers.

Many rural Centers for Independent Living have catchment areas of 4,000 square miles and 9 counties and urban Centers have extremely high population densities to serve. How would you make sure all CILs have capacity to serve people with disabilities in their catchment areas?

Our CIL's have been vital in providing a wide array of valuable services that are cross-disability for the last generation. However, they've seen very little in terms of increases even though their service numbers are up dramatically. I'll support increasing the general revenue they need to reach out to the unserved and underserved population in our state.

Hearing loss can be a significant impediment to seniors wanting to stay connected to, and remain independent in, their community. Over 600,000 Missourians, including seniors, have hearing loss and 90% of them are not Sign Language users. Instead they rely on hearing aids. This group often cannot afford hearing aids (they are not covered by MO HealthNet). What will your administration do to ensure access to hearing aids?

As State Treasurer I will advocate for healthcare choices that help people that function to their highest capacity.
Behavioral Health:
What would you do to improve the opioid epidemic facing our state?

Missouri is the only state that does not have a prescription drug monitoring database, which allows addicts to doctor and pharmacy shop which results in more prescription opioids on our streets. Then when people can't get those they turn to heroin. We need to provide law enforcement and our first responders with opioid reversing drugs and training so they can save lives immediately when they arrive on the scene. We also need to provide more drug treatment programs and treat this like an illness and public health threat as opposed to asking the criminal justice and prison systems to solve the problem.

What will be your plan to address the leading cause of disability (behavioral health) in the nation? And for those in recovery, what would you do to help access recovery supports (such as employment, housing, education, etc) for individuals with serious mental illness and/or substance use disorders?

Once again, we've used our court and prison systems to try and solve a public health crisis. We need to invest in treatment, counseling and community supports to assist people with behavioral and addiction issues to heal within their communities instead of incarcerating them.