

The Arc of New Jersey Legislative Questionnaire  
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Question 1 –

As the Chair of the Assembly Human Services Committee, my passion and mission in the Legislature are to expand the opportunities and services available for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. While we continue to fight for more dollars for programs, medical services, transportation, and critical housing options, I have also worked on legislation to make it easier for families to navigate the system of services this is currently available. For example, A2717/S2065 was signed into law, which allows for a streamlined application process for individuals served by the Department of Children and Families and are aging into the Department of Human Services.

In addition, I held frequent hearings on I/DD issues, focusing on the needs of the families in our state. Two critical topics were abuse and neglect of individuals in the I/DD community and the proposed, then revised, Statewide Transition Plan. In the coming session, I look forward to moving legislation to improve the protections against abuse of I/DD individuals and I will continue to closely monitor the status of the Statewide Transition Plan. While I applaud the Division of Developmental Disabilities' efforts to heighten the standards of inclusion, I remain committed to making sure special needs individuals have choices in where they live, who they live with, and how they spend their days. I have not and will not support a one-size-fits-all approach to I/DD housing, employment, or day programs.

I also look forward to introducing and passing legislation to create an Ombudsman for Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities and their Families. Family advocates are so important for individuals with special needs, but the families also need an advocate within government to help them navigate the various service systems and address gaps in assistance. In my work to help families I have seen a great need for this in New Jersey, and I hope to create such a position in the coming legislative session. I will also work with families and service providers to examine the expected implementation of a fee for service system to ensure that clients are served in a person-centered way and that providers are able to continue providing comprehensive quality services.

Question 2 –

I have long been concerned with the growing, not shrinking, waiting list for residential services for individuals with I/DD. While the FY 2016 budget included an additional \$3 million to reduce the residential waiting list in the Division of Developmental Disabilities and \$2.5 million for the Family Support Services program in the Department of Children and Families, this is not nearly

enough. I will certainly continue to advocate for more funding and resources dedicated to special needs housing. But New Jersey must also allow more options for housing so that every individual can be served now, in a setting most comfortable and desirable for that individual and his or her family. No one should have to wait for an emergency situation to come off the waiting list.

A key to increasing housing is to allow as many options and choices as possible, so long as they are safe, appropriate, and meeting the needs and wants of the individuals and their families, which is why I am closely monitoring the status of the revised Statewide Transition Plan. Individuals should not be restricted to a supervised apartment or a 2-4 person group home when there are other available models. I am committed to working with the Division of Developmental Disabilities, advocates, families, and providers to make sure that the concept of “person-centered” planning is used to create more opportunities for individuals, not to erect barriers and place restrictions on their choices. To that end, I am also sponsoring A2658/S301, the Innovative Services for Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act, to allow funding for new and creative housing models.