**QUESTION 1: Do you have designated advisors and clear processes for making decisions on disability issues? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. I consider these issues a priority and have primarily designated two staffers in my policy office, my Legislative Director and Legislative Assistant for health care, to work on disability issues, consulting with a wide range of leaders and policy experts in the disability community, including persons with disabilities. I also meet regularly myself with constituents with disabilities and leaders of local, state, and national groups committed to advancing the rights of persons with disabilities. I also have a dedicated team of caseworkers who provide assistance to individuals and families who may be having a difficult time working with their school or a public agency to obtain the services they need.

**QUESTION 2: Is your campaign accessible and inclusive to people with disabilities? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. I am proud to have the support of many within the disability and mental health community in Maryland, and have worked to organize these groups as part of my campaign into a Disability Community Supporters for Van Hollen effort.

I also greatly appreciate the supporters with disabilities who take time to volunteer for my campaign and make every effort to provide necessary accommodations and engaging tasks that match and build on each volunteer’s skills and talents.

My campaign is also working to improve the accessibility of our website, and includes a [section to share my positions on disability issues](http://vanhollen.org/issue/the-struggle-for-equal-rights-and-equal-justice/). We also work to caption videos on our Facebook page to expand access for the deaf and hard of hearing.

**QUESTION 3: Do you have a proven record on improving or a plan to improve the lives of people with disabilities? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. I have been working throughout my career to advance rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities. In the Maryland General Assembly, I worked on the Budget and Taxation Committee to pass tax credits to incentivize employers to hire workers with disabilities and adequately fund state programs. In the House of Representatives, I serve as a co-chair of the bipartisan Congressional Down Syndrome Caucus. I have pushed for greater funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, including in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and am the author of the IDEA Full Funding Act to provide a glidepath to mandatory full funding of IDEA Part B Grants to states. I was proud to work on a bipartisan basis as the chief Democratic sponsor, alongside the disability community, in a multi-year effort to pass the ABLE Act to allow families of persons with disabilities to save to give their loved one a secure future. I am committed to continuing this work, as described in the answers below.

**QUESTION 4: Do you have a plan/commitment to reduce the stigmas about people with disabilities that are barriers to employment, independence and equality? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. Through many years of working with persons with disabilities, including on my staff and in my internship program, I have direct experience with their extraordinary capabilities. When our nation underestimates or devalues the contributions of this community, we do ourselves a disservice. Therefore, we must always strive to break down barriers, confront stigma, and increase independence and self-determination. We must communicate with employers to share best practices and debunk stereotypes to help them understand ways to integrate their workplaces and take advantage of the talents of those in the disability community. Programs like Project SEARCH and Broad Futures in my Congressional district are making important strides in this critical work.

**QUESTION 5: Do you have a proven record on enabling, or a plan to enable, people with disabilities to have jobs, careers and to start their own businesses? Do you have specific strategies for youth employment for people with disabilities and/or sector strategies such as jobs and careers in STEM, hospitality, healthcare and elder care? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. I am committed to ensuring that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to pursue their employment dreams, whether that is through supported employment or by starting a business of their own. I supported the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, which made some strides towards encouraging integrated employment, but we must do more. I’ve worked with the Autism Self-Advocacy Network, the Arc, and the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities to introduce the Transitions to Independence Act in the House of Representatives, which will create a pilot program in states to move individuals out of segregated settings and into integrated, supported employment.

For young people, we need to ensure that they have access to career-building opportunities like internships that give important experiences. We must improve transitions to postsecondary education and accessibility services in college, as well as post-graduation transition plans. In addition to having integrated employment opportunities, persons with disabilities deserve the chance to explore their interests and find jobs that engage and excite them.

I also believe we need to make the Work Opportunity Tax Credit for veterans permanent to provide greater incentives for employers to hire veterans with disabilities.

**QUESTION  6: Do you have a plan to enable students with disabilities, including those from historically marginalized communities and backgrounds, to receive the diagnosis, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and accommodations/services they need to succeed in school and be prepared for competitive employment? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. I have introduced legislation, the IDEA Full Funding Act, to increase funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part B grants to states to finally reach the forty percent average per pupil expenditure promised by Congress more than forty years ago. However, we also need to increase and sustain funding for IDEA programs focused on early detection, alongside early childhood education programs like Head Start and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program to improve early diagnosis and interventions.

**QUESTION  7: Do you have a plan to reform the benefits system (Medicaid, Medicaid buyin) to enable people with disabilities to work to the best of their capacities without losing supports they need to work? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. More needs to be done to level the playing field for people with disabilities without a looming fear of losing important benefits.

I was the lead Democratic sponsor of the ABLE Act, which helps level the playing field for people with disabilities and their families through equal access to tax-free saving accounts. The accounts provide individuals with disabilities greater financial freedom and security by allowing them to save a certain amount of assets and still receive vital benefits. Earlier this year, my colleagues and I introduced a package of bills aimed at enhancing the ABLE Act. One of the bills, the ABLE to Work Act, builds on the success of the ABLE Act by making it possible for disabled people who work to save a portion of their income in an ABLE account without risking loss of benefits.

Additionally, I introduced the Transition to Independence Act (TIA), which would help and incentivize states to move individuals with disabilities out of segregated work settings and into competitive, integrated employment. Participating states must have a Medicaid Buy-in program. Medicaid Buy-in programs allow people with disabilities to keep Medicaid coverage, by paying an affordable premium, even if they are earning too much money to usually qualify for Medicaid. This lets people with disabilities keep important services that let them live in the community.

**QUESTION 8: Do you have a plan to ensure people with disabilities are eligible for affordable health insurance regardless of preexisting conditions? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. As a member of the Democratic leadership team, it was an honor to be part of the fight to get the Affordable Care Act (ACA) passed into law. This historic reform legislation has expanded affordable coverage for millions of Americans. Today, 20 million previously uninsured Americans have health insurance coverage. Americans with pre-existing conditions are no longer denied coverage or treatment through private health plans, Medicaid, and Medicare. Additionally, not only are young adults able to stay on their parents’ insurance until their 26th birthday, but now millions more have access to preventative health services, like cancer screenings, without cost sharing.

Even though the ACA has made several strides to improve quality care and make health coverage more affordable, there are still gaps that need to be filled. I will continue to fight against the outrageous skyrocketing costs of prescription drugs and to ensure people are not denied needed devices and accommodations to live independently.

**QUESTION 9: Do you have a plan to provide home and community-based services to people with disabilities who would rather live in their own homes instead of institutions, and have the community attendant supports they need to work? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. More people are choosing to live in their own home to be more independent and need home and community-based services to address their chronic health conditions. And as the baby-boomers continue to age, this need for home and community-based services is exponentially increasing as resources fail to keep up. Unfortunately, some of these shortfalls include long waiting lists and funding for the program. Another issue is people with disabilities are refraining from seeking competitive employment in order to keep needed benefits. One of the avenues I have taken to help with this issue is to introduce the Transition to Independence Act. Under this bill, individuals with disabilities will be able to work and earn a competitive income and buy in to their state Medicaid system to secure critical supports such as home and community-based services. And under the ABLE law, I introduced with my colleagues, individuals with disabilities are able to save up to a certain amount of their assets in a tax-free savings account while still having home and community-based services.

**QUESTION  10: Do you have a plan to ensure that individuals with disabilities receive services that would prevent them from being swept up into the criminal justice system, divert individuals with disabilities who are arrested to treatment options in lieu of jail where appropriate, receive needed accommodations in the criminal justice process and while incarcerated, and offer appropriate reentry support to help individuals with disabilities leaving jails and prisons reintegrate into their communities and secure jobs? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. Mental health interventions, treatments, and restorative justice are critical parts of my overall criminal justice reform strategy. This should begin with positive behavioral interventions in the education system to avoid the school to prison pipeline that begins all too early for vulnerable populations. It must also include increased collaboration between law enforcement and public health agencies to ensure proper referrals for needed services. And for those already incarcerated, we need to improve access to treatment and expand Second Chance Act programs to help ex-offenders reintegrate into the community.

**QUESTION 11: People with disabilities are twice as likely to be victims of crime as those without disabilities. People with disabilities also are far more likely to suffer from police violence, partially because manifestations of disability can be misunderstood as defiant behavior. Do you have a plan to address these issues? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. This is a particularly personal issue to me, because a constituent of mine with Down Syndrome, Ethan Saylor, was killed by police as they attempted to forcibly remove him from a movie theatre. This tragedy occurs far too often. We need to improve training, including on de-escalation and implicit bias. I also strongly support police body cameras for greater accountability.

We also need to address the abuse of seclusion and restraint in education settings by passing the Keeping All Students Safe Act, which would improve training in positive behavioral supports for teachers and staff, prohibit extreme interventions, and ensure that parents are notified any time that restraint or seclusion are used to prevent physical injury to the child.

**QUESTION 12: Both children and adults with disabilities are more likely to be victims of rape or sexual assault. Do you have a plan to address this issue? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. The horrific reality of sexual assault of persons with disabilities must be addressed with urgency. When I was in the state legislature, I worked to strengthen penalties for rape. We must educate both persons with disabilities to be self-advocates and service providers to be aware of signs of sexual assault so these crimes will be reported, investigated, and prosecuted. We must continue broader strategies aimed at prevention of sexual assault and rape, including comprehensive sex education and understanding of consent.

**QUESTION 13: Do you have a plan for veterans with disabilities facing barriers transitioning from active duty to civilian employment? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. With the Walter Reed National Medical Center located in my Congressional district, I am very concerned with the treatment and transition of our wounded warriors. We must continue to expand research into traumatic brain injury, advanced prosthetics, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and other issues that many of our returning veterans face and that can present barriers to employment. In addition to continuing to work to improve access to health care through the VA system, we must also provide necessary resources to tackle the disability claims backlog. Finally, we must increase investment in education and job training programs and make the Work Opportunities Tax Credit for veterans permanent to prepare veterans for employment and incentivize employers.

**QUESTION  14: Do you have a plan for accessible, affordable, integrated housing to allow people with disabilities to live in the communities where they work or are seeking work? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. We must build on progress made over the last twenty years in the *Olmstead* case and improvements to the Americans with Disabilities Act that have made it clear that persons with disabilities have a right to reasonable accommodations for community-based, independent living over institutions. This includes investments in programs like Section 811 to provide supportive housing for persons with disabilities and in rehabilitation of homes for the elderly to allow them to live independently later into life.

I have also worked diligently with local leaders in my Congressional district to address veterans homelessness with the acquisition of HUD-VASH vouchers and supportive services. I am very proud that Montgomery County was recognized as reaching “functional zero” for veteran homelessness late last year, with enough housing and services to ensure that no veteran in the county would be homeless.

**QUESTION 15: Do you have a plan to address the lack of accessible transportation options that is a barrier to work for people with disabilities? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. We need to ensure that persons with disabilities have reliable transportation to access work, their doctors, and other errands that help them remain independent. I have worked closely with my constituents to help them navigate programs like MetroAccess in the Washington, D.C. area, which has struggled to provide reliable service. I have also supported pilot programs in Maryland to provide transit options for persons with disabilities attending community programs, so they would have a safe and reliable ride to and from the site. In addition to specialized services like these, we need to ensure that public transit is broadly accessible, with working elevators and clear and accessible signage and announcements.

**QUESTION 16: Do you have a plan to advance innovations (i.e., assistive technologies, devices) that can help people with disabilities become more successfully employed, productive and independent? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. Assistive technology is an exciting area that can broaden opportunities for persons with disabilities and allow them greater independence. We need to both invest in research, including public-private collaboration, to develop ever more innovative devices, and ensure that people have access to these technologies through health insurance and in schools. In addition to being tremendously empowering for the individual, these technological advancements can save long-term costs by making individuals less dependent on supportive services.

**QUESTION 17: In your foreign policy and national security plan, do you plan to continue America’s tradition of standing up for the rights of oppressed people, including people with disabilities, around the world? If yes, please describe.**

**ANSWER:**Yes. It is unconscionable that the Senate has so far failed to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and has in fact shamefully blocked it on the Floor. It is particularly inexcusable as the Convention would simply require other countries to meet the standard the United States set with Americans with Disabilities Act. Over 150 nations have signed the treaty and America has failed to show leadership. We must do better.

In addition to finally ratifying the convention, we must continually monitor for human rights abuses across the world and stand up for the rights of all people, including those with disabilities. My father was in the Foreign Service, and as I traveled the world with my family as a child, I was always struck by the example the United States set for so many people as a beacon of freedom and democracy. We must continue to uphold that example and speak out for the rights of all.