**EDUCATION & SKILLS: What is your plan for ensuring that all students with disabilities, including English Language Learners, receive a quality and appropriate education to acquire critical and marketable skills?**

As the former Secretary of Education, I oversaw English language learners and special education, and I serve on the [advisory board](https://ncld.org/about/advisory-board/john-b-king-jr/) of the National Center for Learning Disabilities. As Secretary, I worked on implementing the [Every Student Succeeds Act](https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/promising-changes-special-education-under-essa), which gave special education educators more freedom to focus on developmentally appropriate activities instead of rigid testing that disabled students were expected to complete regardless of their IEP. I will be prepared to address the needs of students with disabilities from day one. As the founder of Strong Future Maryland, I advocated for passing the Blueprint for education and getting more resources for at-risk students. A key plank of my education platform is building off of the Blueprint, which will make record investments in education, and that includes special education. I will phase in a minimum starting salary of $60,000 for teachers by 2023 and increase salaries for education support professionals. This will ensure that Maryland attracts special education teachers and other personnel to support them, which are typically in short supply. I will also increase the amount of student loan forgiveness for teachers teaching in shortage areas, which will encourage educators to go into special education and reward the ones already teaching in it. As part of my plans to increase the diversity of our teaching workforce, my administration will increase investment in a pipeline of bilingual teachers, which will help us meet the needs of English Language Learners. My education department will develop an Advisory Committee of educators, students, families and other stakeholders so that disabled students and their families are represented and have a voice. We must also entertain new ideas like a “13th year” for high school seniors with disabilities, to make sure they can recover from the educational loss from COVID and still earn a diploma and take advantage of transition services.

**EMPLOYMENT & ENTREPRENEURSHIP: If elected, what will you do to advance opportunities for people with disabilities who want to work and earn an income, just like anyone else? How will you support employers, large and small, to recruit and hire workers with disabilities? How will you promote evidence-based policies and best practices leading to meaningful careers as well as disability entrepreneurship opportunities?**

There are many systemic factors unjustly preventing people with disabilities from working who want to. One of my plans to ensure everyone has career opportunities is launching a Maryland College Completion Compact to improve rates of degree completion in community colleges and HBCUs with the goal of closing our existing gaps in completion rates across race and income groups as well as, yes, people with disabilities. This includes an investment in safety net initiatives to meet students’ basic needs for food, housing, child care and emergency financial assistance, obstacles that often harm people with disabilities disproportionately. We also cannot leave out the importance of accessible transit, which has only gotten worse in Maryland. The [MTA Mobility Service](https://www.baltimoresun.com/coronavirus/bs-md-mta-mobility-woes-20210903-raeukbd4yndqnglpaohgipwpyi-story.html) is down 500 drivers since 2019 and is reporting the worst on-time rates in years. This is unacceptable and makes it impossible for someone with disabilities to reliably get to work and back on time, not to mention just handling their regular errands and, crucially, even medical appointments. My administration will reduce or eliminate the use of outside contractors’ to run the service, who have proven by now that they cannot handle the job, and use union drivers who receive better pay and benefits. This will attract more drivers and increase accountability as they will work directly for the MTA and not a separate contractor. We have seen that contractors are just not incentivized to invest in Mobility. Lastly, my administration will improve Maryland’s policies and practices under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This means tracking working-age disability data we use to make decisions and disaggregating it by race, prioritizing closing labor force participation rate gaps by race and disability and building the caring economy by using proven disability employment programs, such as a school-to-work transition model used in other states, like the [Project SEARCH](https://www.projectsearch.us/who-we-are/) used by Cincinnati Children’s Hospital. We should take advantage of the technology available to us by expanding online, cohort-based apprenticeships in the knowledge economy and non-profit sector, which are significantly more accessible for people with disabilities than a traditional in-person apprenticeship. My administration will give support to disability-owned businesses, whether through the state procurement process or by establishing a state bank that can provide access to capital to groups historically denied or otherwise written-off. In the same vein, my government will support small businesses so that they are inclusive employers, providing consultations and advice on being ADA compliant and making suggestions on changes they can make in their workplace policies to be more friendly to disabled employees and customers. My administration will work with the small business community to dispel myths around the cost of hiring a disabled employee and misconceptions about the amount of talent available in the disabled community and highlighting disability rights issues small business owners may never have considered. Finally, my administration will look to leverage our community college resources to improve employment outcomes for students with disabilities, similar to how California gives state funding to its community colleges’ Disabled Student Programs and Services that provide support services and educational accommodations to students with disabilities.

**ACCESS & INCLUSION: Whether or not you have a formal platform, what specific plans do you have to incorporate the voices of people with disabilities into your decision-making processes, if elected? What steps, if any, have you taken to make your campaign accessible for people with disabilities and to ensure that our voices are heard?**

There are 669,208 people with disabilities in Maryland, and we can’t have an administration reflective of the state without people with disabilities in positions of power. As governor, I will appoint people with disabilities to positions in government and work with disability rights groups in Maryland as partners, actively seeking their advice and input. I will implement equity checks on every action as governor, from appointments to executive orders. On the campaign trail we continue to ensure our in person events are in facilities that are ADA compliant and if needed interrupters are available. We also host virtual events that provide auto captioning so that no matter the situation everyone is able to participate in John King for Governor events.

**FIGHTING STIGMAS: If elected, what will be your plan to fight stigmas, highlight the disability community, and promote higher expectations for success?**

We should not be doing the bare minimum in Maryland. The fact is, adaptive technology advances every day, so if we wait until regulations are written into law, we are already behind. Under my administration, we will have assistive technology and accommodations in all state and public buildings beyond what is just required by law. This will also apply to not just physical buildings, but other state properties such as websites as well. My Maryland Commission on Civil Rights will be active on enforcement around discrimination, accessbility and accommodation laws and I will increase its outreach to employers around developing unbiased hiring practices and to developers and landlords around equal housing opportunities and making properties accessible. I will also end practices that fail to treat individuals with disabilities with dignity, like excessive restraint and seclusion against disabled individuals who are incarcerated.

**OTHER KEY ISSUES: What additional policies and priorities, other than those already discussed above, do you plan to focus on to improve the lives of people with disabilities? If you have yet to develop them, what is your plan to learn about disability issues?**

My criminal justice reform plans as governor will emphasize decriminalizing disability. While criminal justice reform and issues around police and incarceration have rightly gained attention in recent years, much less of that attention has been paid to how people with disabilities are often criminalized by a criminal justice system that is not equipped to understand their needs. We’ve seen that over a third of state and federal prisoners had at least one disability in 2016 and that people with disabilities are much more likely to be killed by police. Those with behavioral health conditions need support from crisis services instead of law enforcement, who often escalate and worsen the situation. We’ve seen that police in areas of Maryland like Baltimore City have routinely violated the rights of people with disabilities by using unreasonable force even when no crime was committed. Police involvement can lead to a criminal record which makes it even more difficult to find employment, an area that people with disabilities already face immense discrimination in without a criminal record. Incarcerated individuals with disabilities face significant dangers to their well-being, from restraint practices barred in medical settings, to simply getting appropriate medical treatment, to being at higher risk in the pandemic, which we know spread easily and quickly in prisons and jails.

Another focus of my campaign is housing. Maryland faces a steep housing shortage and this shortage is even worse for people with disabilities who require housing that is both affordable and accessible. In 2021, a person receiving SSI disability got $794 a month, which in Maryland is only 13% of the median income. A one-bedroom unit would be 157% of monthly income. Even if a person with a disability finds a house they can afford to rent, issues like not having any elevators or entrances without wheelchair ramps automatically make them off limits to many. As governor, I will make common-sense changes that will increase the housing stock, like reforming zoning laws that stemmed from red lining and allowing accessory dwelling units (ADUs). However, increasing the housing stock alone will not be enough to ensure accessible housing is available, which is why I will expand Maryland’s rent subsidy programs for people with disabilities, which often have long waiting lists, and fully utilize Maryland’s Housing Trust Fund, which as a state we spend very little of. There’s no reason we can’t use the Housing Trust Fund, which is for creating affordable housing, to create affordable housing that also meets accessibility standards. We can also support statewide housing regulations mandating certain accessibility requirements, created with the input of advocates with disabilities, for all new building codes.