



## **People of Faith Encourage Candidates to Address Disability Concerns**

Dear Candidate:

We, the undersigned, are people of faith from across the nation concerned about the civil rights of the more than 56 million Americans living with a disability. Our faith communities are diverse and include people living with all types of disability: physical, sensory, intellectual, visible and non-apparent. We write to urge you to lay out a comprehensive agenda that addresses the civil rights of Americans with disabilities.

The 56 million Americans with disabilities make remarkable and valuable contributions to our communities. Despite these contributions and despite our numbers, Americans with disabilities continue to face discrimination in many arenas including employment, transportation, and education. Persons with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be impoverished and unemployed than non-disabled individuals; a reflection of devastatingly real discrimination.<sup>1</sup>

Candidates for public office must address these disparities and must set forth a vision to encourage the civil rights of people with disabilities and to promote their full inclusion in society. This is imperative in light of the gifts and talents Americans with disabilities bring to their schools, jobs, and faith communities. If elected, we strongly recommend taking action to:

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<sup>1</sup> Persons with disabilities experience the highest rates of poverty of any subcategory of Americans charted by the Census Bureau. Of the nearly 30 million individuals with disabilities ages 18–64, 27%, or more than 4 million people, live in poverty. This is more than double the rate of 12.5% for the entire population. Equally troubling and certainly related is the disproportionate labor force participation rate: For people with disabilities, it is 19.5% and for people without disabilities it is 68.7%. Office of Disability Employment Policy, Department of Labor. <http://www.dol.gov/odep>.



- Further expand opportunities for people with disabilities to live and work independently in their communities, including expanding access to affordable, accessible, integrated housing and transportation options.
- Increase productivity and innovation in the public and private sector by expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Further the progress made in the graduation rate of students with disabilities from high school by addressing remaining barriers to success in public education and transition to employment or post-secondary education.
- Support the continuation of reforms passed into law as part of the Affordable Care Act that help people with disabilities lead healthy lives and increase their access to long term services and supports, as well as support further expansion of mental health and substance use services.

We encourage you to share your positions on these issues and where these concerns fall in your priorities. Furthermore, we urge you to invite persons with disabilities into the conversations concerning the best ways to expand both access and opportunity for all Americans. We do not offer endorsement of specific candidates or parties, but we will share your efforts and actions on behalf of people with disabilities with our community. We encourage everyone to work towards the goal of ensuring that the American experiment of self-government increasingly includes and reflects the voices, concerns, and wisdom of people with disabilities.