

The following answers to ten general questions about Indiana's compliance with the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) were provided by Dr. Woody Myers, Democratic candidate for Governor of Indiana and former state Representative Linda Lawson, Democratic candidate for Lt. Governor.



Question 1:

2020 marks the 30th Anniversary of Congress' passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. State government is required to comply with the ADA in many ways, and some believe that it should set the standard for the private sector. What is your general understanding of the purpose of the ADA, and state government's obligations under this legislation?

The ADA has been transformative for Indiana, and yet we have much more work to do. This was a landmark civil rights law, which was intended to bring about sweeping changes. In a Myers/Lawson Administration, there is the letter of the law and also the spirit of the law. As Governor and Lt. Governor, we will make sure that everyone is assured equal access and opportunity.

State government can and should lead the way in achieving both the letter and spirit of the ADA for each of our disabled residents – to address ALL of the issues they have identified – and we must improve the way by which we ensure that those who are being directly affected by decisions that state government makes have a clear path to tell us what they need. And then, of course, we need to work WITH them, not FOR them, collaborating to find the best way to get those things accomplished.

Question 2:

How would you rank Indiana's performance regarding the following:

a. Ensuring physical accessibility of all state government buildings

This is an area that we need to continually monitor, in both spaces the State owns and also rents. While we can point to specific changes we have made, we have to continually be vigilant and listen to people with all types of disabilities on accessibility issues. We have learned that when we address accessibility, all Hoosiers benefit. Unlike the current administration, a Myers/Lawson Administration will see it as an ongoing task, not a one and done activity. In addition, we have to make sure the tools of democracy are open to all – voting places must be accessible to all, and we have to work with each county to ensure that access protects our cherished right to vote

b. State agency provision of accommodations such as ASL interpreters and other alternative means of communication upon request.

We must make available ASL interpreters or other means of communication at every opportunity so that each state agency can communicate with every constituent and all of its employees. This should not be an afterthought, but part of the planning for every event – just as we make sure there is a microphone so everyone can hear, we need interpreters and/or other means of communication to make sure our message is received by everyone.

c. Providing equal access to home-based services and community supports as an alternative to nursing homes and other institutional settings.

The Supreme Court Olmstead decision requires equal access to home-based services, and we need to make every effort to ensure this choice is available in Indiana. We need to address

expanding choices, not limiting them. Home and community-based care is often less costly and more appealing to those in need of long-term care.

- a. **Requiring local government to include and enforce ADA accessibility guidelines in their building and zoning ordinances.**

Some feel we have achieved this already, but too many examples exist showing that this is not the case. A Myers/Lawson administration will use our offices to take proactive steps that will support access throughout the state.

Question 3:

How well do you think Indiana is doing to ensure that “special education” services meet all requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)?

Pre-pandemic, we were facing challenges for all children and ensuring that under IDEA, our state provided the opportunity to grow and develop beyond school. A Myers/Lawson administration will work with the new Superintendent of Public Education to ensure that kids with IEPs are part of all planning for success in school. This includes the right funding and the right support to help students thrive in the classroom and reach their full potential.

We are painfully aware of what is happening during the pandemic as schools cannot re-open and families – especially those with children who have IEPs – are struggling, as are the school corporations, to meet those needs. We need additional supports in the short term to get through this time.

Question 4:

How would you describe the work being done by the agencies housed under Indiana's Family and Social Services Administration and/or special councils and task forces to meet the needs and improve the lives of seniors and people with disabilities?

The results from the many overlapping programs, councils and task forces are unclear. Under a Myers/Lawson administration, we would call for an overall assessment of all of the disability programs, committees, councils and task forces to ensure they are properly represented with people with disabilities at the table, have high standards for qualified candidates, are effective/efficient, and offer real actions, not just lip service.

In addition, this administration will ensure coordination of the efforts of all these programs and groups through the planning and budgeting process, to assure synergistic improvements are made every year in addressing the needs of seniors and people with disabilities.

Right now, we are very concerned about the impact of social isolation on seniors. It was a problem before and has been exacerbated now even more. Implementing more technology supports for seniors to communicate with family and friends virtually would help mitigate some feelings of isolation.

We believe there is more we can and must do to protect and support seniors in their homes, identify and break down barriers to support them, and find the solutions that keep people in their homes as long as they want to be there.

Question 5:

Statistics show that many nursing home residents, who are at a higher risk for Covid 19, would prefer to receive support services that would allow them to live in their own homes. What are your thoughts about this situation?

The system currently steers people toward nursing homes, as opposed to home-based services and supports. We need an active way to keep people out of nursing homes and to help those that may be there unnecessarily to return to a home or home-like setting. We can learn from other states on ways to meet those needs more effectively, and must take immediate action to ensure our most vulnerable populations have real choices. We can start by offering higher reimbursement rates for home-based care and investing in staff to address current shortages to ensure the home-based services are of high quality.

Question 6:

What are the top three issues of concern for Indiana's senior citizens and people with disabilities, and how would you address them?

While everyone is unique and has their own individual needs, we believe that there are key themes that must be addressed. If limited to three, we would say affordable/accessible housing, transportation and jobs/economic security. These three are what we hear most often from people with disabilities, their families, and seniors. We need to improve access to public transportation systems, support local government in repairing and building sidewalks to make our communities more accessible, invest in affordable housing development that allows seniors and individuals with disabilities to live in any community they choose, and increase job training and placement for those who are willing and able to work.

Question 7:

Considering the top three issues of concern that you identified in response to the previous question, in what ways do you see the population of temporarily-abled people benefitting from these issues being addressed?

They are often one and the same. When we address issues for people with disabilities, our entire state is stronger.

Question 8:

What is a position about the condition of people with disabilities you previously held that was changed by your gaining increased understanding and correct information about this topic?

Dr. Woody Myers: I was trained as a doctor on how to treat a condition, to cure a disease, to make people well. I have learned from advocates and friends that we need to focus on individual strengths and gifts – not always on how to fix people. We have seen the tremendous gifts people have when given the opportunity, and we need to extend that opportunity to all.

Rep. Linda Lawson: I thought all agencies and services for people with disabilities across the state received equal funding opportunities, but I learned that this was not so. In many cases, there is significant inequity with the way that funds are allocated to different communities.

Question 9:

Is there anything else you would like to discuss during this interview?

A Myers/Lawson administration will continue to need the advice and counsel of the senior and disability communities. We have big goals and some huge challenges ahead that we can collaborate on together.

We can achieve our goals by putting the right people at the helm, and that includes making sure the leaders in the disability community are a key part of the decision-making process.

Question 10:

What ideas do you have for people in the state who have been traditionally disenfranchised, in a variety of ways, to take a more active role in gaining information about governing bodies who make decisions that affect them, and participating in those processes?

Dr. Woody Myers: I understand what it's like to be marginalized. The Civil Rights movement that allowed me to become a doctor and now run for the highest state wide office shares much with the Disability Rights movement. We truly are in this together, and I look forward to serving as your Governor.

The Myers/Lawson administration will change the way government information is handled when it comes to transparency. Our goal is to be the most transparent administration in Indiana history. Therefore, the presumption will be that all government information is available to all Hoosiers in all necessary formats unless there is a strong reason for confidentiality.

Rep. Linda Lawson: I understand what it's like to be marginalized as a woman. I had to sue the Hammond Police Department so I could become the first female police officer. First of all, I'd say, never give up. If one door closes, look for others to open. There are resources and organizations, like Everybody Counts, who are there to make a difference in your life. I leaned on experts and organizations to assist me when I was faced with challenges. We, as a state, need to support organizations that proactively educate Hoosiers on the resources available to them.