

# CHOICES

Special Edition: Meet Your Candidates | October 2022



## Meet Your Candidates

By: Robert Stack, President & CEO, Community Options, Inc.



Election Day is November 8th. The election this year is extremely important. I was born in McKeesport Hospital and grew up in West Elizabeth. My father was a milkman and my mother was a homemaker. They taught me the value of democracy.

We have asked the four most critical candidates in the Commonwealth their views on issues confronting persons with disabilities enabling those interested in this vital subject to make an informed decision before they vote.

### Question 1. What policies will you support to ensure people with disabilities have access to safe and affordable housing in the community?

CANDIDATE FOR SENATE



John Fetterman

**ANSWER:** People with disabilities must have the right to affordable, accessible housing that is close to the services they need. Too often, the lack of affordable accessible housing leaves people with disabilities unhoused, institutionalized or forced into unacceptable living conditions. It is our responsibility to protect individuals with disabilities against discrimination, and that includes housing discrimination. We must provide proper funding to HUD and other social services that ensure increased availability of this type of housing.



Mehmet Oz

**ANSWER:** I believe we should expand the Money Follows the Person program which provides direct funding to community organizations. This existing funding assists states in rebalancing their services towards community centers that provide affordable, targeted care.

CANDIDATE FOR GOVERNOR



Doug Mastriano

**ANSWER:** Governor Mastriano will direct local governments to establish community-based partnerships where the services provided are most efficient and closest to the people. Policies implemented by the current Wolf Administration such as high property taxes, overzealous environmental rules and other regulatory barriers to affordable housing will be reduced to provide greater access to safe and affordable housing for people with disabilities. Governor Mastriano supports eliminating property taxes, slashing burdensome regulations, and implementing pro-economic policies.



Josh Shapiro

**ANSWER:** As Governor, I will take a multi-pronged approach to increasing housing stability and home ownership for people with disabilities. I will sign legislation to triple the funding for the Commonwealth's Housing Trust Fund to \$120 million, allocating specific monies for housing for Pennsylvanians with disabilities. I will also ensure that the fund has the money necessary to address the Commonwealth's lack of accessible housing so that landlords and homeowners can renovate their units to fit the needs of renters with disabilities. I will also support legislation to provide down payment and closing costs for qualified first-time home buyers with disabilities who meet certain income thresholds and are purchasing a home in one of 300 federally designated "qualified opportunity zones." Lastly, I will work with banks and private lenders to evaluate their lending practices for disability discrimination, and create public-private partnerships that approve mortgages at fairer rates for all Pennsylvanians.

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# John Fetterman

CANDIDATE FOR SENATE



## Question 2:

**How do you plan to reduce barriers for people with disabilities to achieve competitive integrated employment?**

**Answer:** Far too many workplaces create barriers for people with disabilities. Many workplaces lack the physical infrastructure to accommodate persons with disabilities; there is also a lack of training and education materials that are accessible to all. Public transportation is still not fully accessible. And people with disabilities often face discrimination because of stigmas, myths, and misconceptions held by employers. We can fix this by better training employers and staff, providing funding for employers to make their workplaces more accessible, and encouraging and incentivizing private sector programs that focus on training people with disabilities for full-time employment.

## Question 3:

**What steps would you take to help provider organizations attract direct support professionals and other essential frontline staff?**

**Answer:** So many families rely on direct support professionals and frontline staff to care for loved ones. Direct support professionals and frontline staff have difficult jobs, but too often they are not compensated or respected appropriately for the work they do. If we want to retain and attract direct support staff, we have to provide adequate funding, pay them a living wage, and offer them proper benefits.

## Question 4:

**How do you plan to reduce the segregation of people with disabilities through models such as sheltered workshops and institutions?**

**Answer:** There are so many workers with disabilities who struggle to find work due to the stigmas attached to having a disability. Sheltered workshops pay unfair, subminimum wages, and isolate people with disabilities, depriving them of valuable opportunities and experience. We also must close the loophole in the Fair Labor Standards Act that allows sheltered workshops and subminimum wages for people with disabilities to exist.

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# Mehmet Oz

CANDIDATE FOR SENATE



## Question 2:

**How do you plan to reduce barriers for people with disabilities to achieve competitive integrated employment?**

**Answer:** We must support policies that support job growth and help individuals retain employment. If we empower nonprofits such as community organizations and expand their role in service provisions, we can eliminate barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities.

## Question 3:

**What steps would you take to help provider organizations attract direct support professionals and other essential frontline staff?**

**Answer:** These frontline staff are providing essential care, and it's clear we continue to have a shortage. I'll do everything I can to provide them a voice at the federal level and look at new ways to promote how critical it is that these jobs are filled.

## Question 4:

**How do you plan to reduce the segregation of people with disabilities through models such as sheltered workshops and institutions?**

**Answer:** My whole campaign has been about reigniting the divine spark inside every American and empowering everyone to live better lives. I have started nonprofits because I know how individuals can empower others to take charge of their lives. Workshops are segregated facilities. I feel that people with disabilities should be paid real wages for real work. Through education programs, community organizations can help integrate more people into society. As your US Senator, you will have an open door to my office so that I can learn more about how I can empower you.

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# Doug Mastriano

CANDIDATE FOR GOVERNOR



## Question 2:

**How do you plan to reduce barriers for people with disabilities to achieve competitive integrated employment?**

**Answer:** Governor Mastriano will create a task force to support community-based services and cut the red tape that prevents full competitive integrated employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The task force will empower disability service providers closest to the people to reach creative and unique solutions specific to each individual instead of ineffective state-established mandates. Governor Mastriano will create a Center on Innovation to fund grants for agencies to push for people with disabilities to have jobs – not just programs – in Pennsylvania.

## Question 3:

**What steps would you take to help provider organizations attract direct support professionals and other essential frontline staff?**

**Answer:** As Governor, Doug Mastriano will make sure that those who provide care to our most vulnerable citizens will be taken care of. For far too long they have been paid wages equal to a custodian or a fast food worker – they are professionals and need to be compensated accordingly. Governor Mastriano will maximize revenue from the federal government to ensure that direct support professionals are fully paid as professionals. Instead of mandating mask and vaccine mandates, Governor Mastriano will make sure that direct support professionals have the support necessary to fulfill their critical responsibilities.

## Question 4:

**How do you plan to reduce the segregation of people with disabilities through models such as sheltered workshops and institutions?**

**Answer:** Community-based services provide innovative solutions to people with disabilities that are often more inclusive, safer, more effective, and more affordable for taxpayers. Governor Mastriano will direct the task force to work alongside community-based organizations to ensure they have the support necessary to establish community-based solutions throughout Pennsylvania.

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# Josh Shapiro

CANDIDATE FOR GOVERNOR



## Question 2:

**How do you plan to reduce barriers for people with disabilities to achieve competitive integrated employment?**

**Answer:** Across the Commonwealth, many people with disabilities rely on public transportation to commute to work so transportation challenges can mean fewer and lower paying jobs for people with disabilities as well as increased isolation. As Governor, I will sign legislation to expand the existing free senior transit program to include free accessible transit for low-income Pennsylvanians with disabilities. I will also sign the Paid Family Leave Act so people with disabilities can work full time while taking care of their medical needs and so caregivers of disabled relatives can have paid time off for their caregiving responsibilities. People should be able to care for themselves or their families without going unpaid.

## Question 3:

**What steps would you take to help provider organizations attract direct support professionals and other essential frontline staff?**

**Answer:** In Pennsylvania, as of 2021, the waitlist for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) is over 12,000 people long including over 5,000 people in need of emergency assistance. It is unacceptable that some of the most vulnerable among us are unable to access the care they desperately need. The long waitlist is in large part due to short staffing and lack of funding. As Governor, I will increase the number of direct service professionals by boosting funding in the budget for these vital services so providers can hire more staff members and pay them more. I will also support loan forgiveness initiatives for Pennsylvania workers who work in fields with severe workforce shortages such as the direct support care field.

## Question 4:

**How do you plan to reduce the segregation of people with disabilities through models such as sheltered workshops and institutions?**

**Answer:** As your next Governor, I will direct my administration to review the current procedures in place and work with the legislature to ensure that people are not being taken advantage of in the Commonwealth. I will sign legislation to phase out subminimum wages and bring people with disabilities to the table because I know that everyone deserves access to fair employment and a living wage, no matter their background.

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# The Future of Nonprofits

By: *Mark Davis*

Nonprofits have an uncertain future, faced with COVID-19, inflationary pressures, workforce shortages, stock market volatility, and uncertain funding. Nonprofits have a future full of opportunities that will result from their strategic approach to this uncertainty.

A focused and inclusive strategic planning process, followed by significant reform, will open up possibilities for nonprofits. There are many obstacles to realizing this vision. This column will address only a few – chronic underfunding of nonprofits, lack of a focus on outcomes, and over-regulation.

Nonprofits have been funded below their cost and with no annual adjustment for inflation for decades. Advocacy for additional funding will need to be accompanied by organizational and social services reform. Leveraging technology, partnerships, family and community supports, and other strategies for decreasing their cost of impact will help nonprofits survive.

Many nonprofits remain focused on process, instead of quality outcomes. The future will demand increased accountability for funder return on investment. Funders will be increasingly focused on the impact of the nonprofit on stated objectives (poverty reduction, employment of people with disabilities, health care status, food security, and other measurable objectives).

Over-regulation is costly to both people receiving support and nonprofits. It diverts resources away from critical work and to administration. Nonprofits need to work to eliminate regulations that do not clearly improve the quality of life for people receiving supports, or are necessary for accountability associated with the use of public funds.

Through it all, nonprofits will need to remain mission-focused, resulting in stronger communities and better lives. May all of our futures be bright.

*Mark Davis is President & CEO of Pennsylvania Advocacy and Resources for Autism and Intellectual Disabilities. This column is the opinion of the author, not to be construed as an opinion of any organization or affiliated person.*



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# A Message from the President & CEO

We all have tremendous challenges as nonprofits and government agencies supporting persons with significant disabilities in Pennsylvania. Much of it has to do with providing the absolute highest quality supports against a backdrop of high turnover; private sector competition luring staff; the obvious need for onsite care, management training, and realistic wages.

Much of the paper chase revolves around documenting the care, rather than providing it. Community Options wants to work in greater partnerships with government leaders and regulatory authorities. We look for caregivers that have common sense; empathy; understand basic behavioral supports; schedule medical appointments; act as a mentor, advocate and confidant; monitor complex dietary needs; have direct oversight and monitoring over medication; drive or arrange for transportation; clean; facilitate and conduct food shopping; understand, observe and document any potential issues that may result in a breakdown in health, family relations and community involvement; monitor and document progress within the persons they support, all for a little less than \$20 per hour.

We are hamstrung to establish better pay because the rate is established by the Commonwealth. When we look at the rate against a backdrop of skyrocketing insurance costs; inflation and a generational meltdown for new staff cultivation, things seem somewhat grim.

Prior to the last budget cycle, advocates were relentless to push for greater Medicaid support. To date, there remains little public support for our industry.

We need to vote. We need to communicate better with families, government leaders, regulatory authorities, and the public regarding the value of those we support and most important, the value of those who are providing the support.



*Robert Stack, President & CEO  
Community Options, Inc.*

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## **SAVE THE DATE**

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**GOLF CLASSIC**  
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Union League Liberty Hill  
in Lafayette Hill, PA

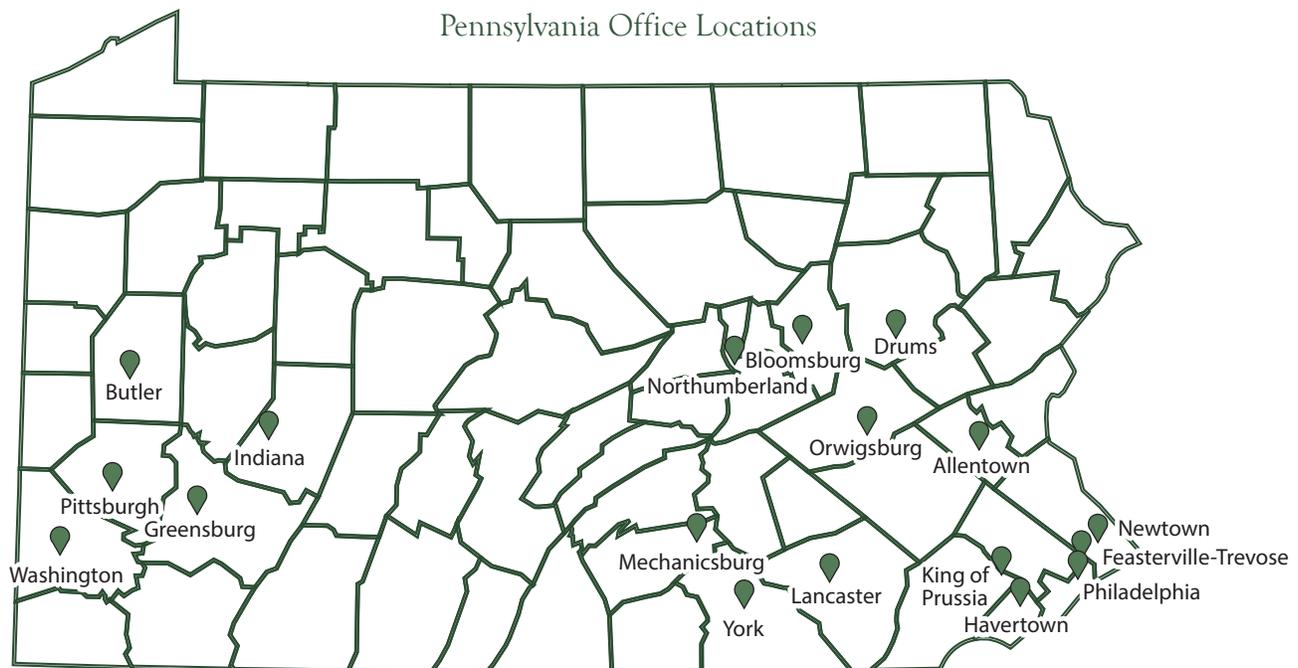
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Community Options believes in the dignity of every person, and in the freedom of all people to experience the highest degree of self-determination. Embracing this philosophy, Community Options provides housing and employment supports to people with disabilities. #AllItTakes

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