



THE PLAN FOR **DISABILITY JUSTICE**

Approximately 10% of Chicagoans identify as a person with a disability, a number that will only rise with increases in Long COVID and other challenges. The longer you live, the more likely you are to acquire a disability over time. Disability is not just about some people, it's about all of us. The Mayor's Office plays an important role in the policies that impact people with disabilities most, and their ability to live independently in communities. As mayor, Brandon Johnson will strategically center the needs of people with disabilities, focusing on needed supports, accessibility, and interagency coordination. Hearing disabled people and then taking actions on their recommendations is the key.

As mayor, he will commit not only to accessibility, but to real access to City programs and services that help people with disabilities become more economically secure and better supported in their home communities.

The city's most disinvested neighborhoods are also the ones with the most people with disabilities. Brandon's plan to invest in neighborhoods across the city is a plan to invest in disability justice. **Economic security and community inclusion for people with disabilities is about accessible jobs, housing, education, social services, transportation, public safety, and other resources integrated in every neighborhood and community.**

A Brandon Johnson administration will:

- **Expand the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD)**
- **Strengthen Opportunities for Employment and Economic Prosperity**
- **Deepen Education Justice**
- **Strengthen Public Safety**
- **Improve Health Services and Long Term Supports**
- **Ensure Housing Affordability and Accessibility**
- **Improve Transportation Accessibility**

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Mayor's Office on People with Disabilities (MOPD)

Expanding city community support programs means adequately funding them. It is absolutely unconscionable that \$280 million of CARES Act funding was spent on the Chicago Police Department while just \$2,000 went to the Office for People with Disabilities. To expand these vital services means taxing the rich and getting our budget priorities in order.

Data

Brandon will actively recruit leaders from the disability justice community to join the administration to ensure that the city's data collection and program administration is focused on equity and justice.

Outreach

The city will fund local community groups and public service providers to do outreach and trainings on resources already out there that are underutilized, such as ABLE accounts.

Accountability

The MOPD must have the authority to push and enforce disability civil rights in the city, schools, housing, parks, etc. Currently, there is inadequate accountability, leading to people with disabilities being underserved and under-resourced.

Service Delivery

Brandon will increase the amount of home modifications and personal services provided through the MOPD, which are currently at woefully low levels. He will commit to increase the hours of personal service a week available to people with disabilities from the MOPD, which is limited to six hours right now. For many individuals, six hours is not enough to support full and independent living. A Johnson administration will also commit to expanding the City's reentry services for Chicagoans with disabilities returning from incarceration.

Employment and Economic Prosperity

As mayor, Brandon Johnson will review and strengthen the city's procurement processes to ensure that all city contractors have an equal employment opportunity policy and workplace non-discrimination policies that include disability as a protected category. He will work closely with the Chicago

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Commission on Human Relations to confirm that we are not doing business with contractors who have repeated workplace discrimination violations.

He will also champion a strong, fully-funded Office of Labor Standards to ensure that the City of Chicago leads the way on wage, labor, hiring and workforce practices that enhance equity, address wage gaps and create a fair and healthy economy for workers, businesses and residents.

Employment opportunities for people with disabilities are generally constrained to customer service jobs only; we need more diverse opportunities supported by the city. As mayor, Brandon will work with the private sector to create more entrepreneurship and business opportunities, encouraging remote work as much as possible so that the opportunities are accessible to all. He will explore the creation of an Office of Neurodiversity to improve hiring neurodiverse individuals and making city jobs more accessible. This is not just recruiting neurodiverse employees, but actively working within workspaces to make sure people have the space they need to succeed (Sensory break rooms / spaces, structured schedule, remote work option if needed).

Finally, the City of Chicago should model a local program like the State Use program, that operates with contracts paying workers above the minimum wage, so that Chicago agencies purchase more products and services produced and provided by people with disabilities. This will create more long term employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Education Justice

Chicago Public Schools has never made the education of students with disabilities a strategic priority. Under a Brandon Johnson administration, we will advance disability empowerment and self advocacy for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are Chicago students like any other, but for far too long have been left behind.

Accessibility

Every Chicago school must be accessible for students, staff, and parents - not just the first floor of buildings, but the entire building. Every disabled person entering a school building cannot be limited to first floor accessibility. CPS needs to use ADA capital investment funds to ensure all parts of schools are fully accessible for individuals with disabilities. Any new CPS construction or

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renovations must include plans to guarantee accessibility. In addition, CPS must make it a priority to make improvements to buildings that currently lack access including those buildings constructed pre-ADA. We need green schools and facilities upgrades in general, and these investments should always create accessibility.

Educational Outcomes

Brandon will work jointly with the district and the State of Illinois to make sure we are fully funding special education in CPS and meeting students' individual needs. CPS needs to incentivize special education hiring and provide the appropriate resources so students receive the support needed. We need to improve postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities, ensuring that students are prepared for the lives they want to live outside of school. Special education (SPED) staff must be solely used to provide services and instruction to students with disabilities and cannot be a school principal's "go-to" to cover non-special education duties. Contract rights for SPED educators to have time to prepare and write IEPs must be respected and expanded. Language translation must be provided for families in IEP meetings. Special education classroom assistants (SECAs) need to be included in IEP and 504 plan meetings to better inform the parent/guardians of progress or needs, as they work the closest with diverse learners.

We must improve communication between the CPS Office of Diverse Learners and Supports and Services (ODLSS) and special education staff and parents. Training for special education staff needs to be communicated clearly, with time provided to implement new policies or education programs. Parents also deserve timely and concise communication in their native language regarding their student's education, as well as updates to special education policies and practices in CPS.

With year-round programming for CPS students, there needs to be year-round plans to support disabled/neurodiverse students. Oftentimes, programming is inaccessible for them or they lack the proper support to flourish in these environments. When there is a disruption to student services or services are not being met, CPS must inform parents/guardians immediately and provide a plan as to how those services will be restored and/or made up.

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Brandon Johnson will commit to working to fully staff and resource specialty and occupational schools, and will continue to work with the General Assembly to fully fund education. It is inexcusable, for example, that Vaughn Occupational High School does not have a gym. The health of students with disabilities must be valued by the district.

Continuity of Learning & Supports

Often SECAs are switched out multiple times throughout a day. We know that relationships are critical in supporting behavioral needs; however, currently a student requiring a dedicated SECA may see 5-6 different SECAs throughout the day.

Tackling Vacancy Issues

SPED teacher vacancies are very hard to fill. CPS needs to incentivize and actually truly subsidize individuals so they can survive while getting credentialed to be a SPED teacher. SECA vacancies are around 400 in School Year 22-23. The Johnson administration will hire and maintain a full time recruitment and retention specialist to focus on centralized hiring to fill SECA vacancies. In the interim, we need to further incentivize substitutes to fill vacancies and call-offs.

Ending School to Prison Pipeline

One of the biggest problems that goes unacknowledged is students going without disability diagnoses, plus feeling internalized ableism/shame and feeling alienated by their peers. This is a key driver of children into the criminal justice system because they look to gangs to feel included.

Brandon Johnson will increase restorative justice resources and reduce punitive responses to decrease the number of suspensions for students with disabilities, and implement the Peacebook districtwide. He will fight for students with disabilities to have access to social workers, counselors, nurses and behavioral specialists every day in every school. He will also increase access to social-emotional learning (SEL) centered on dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline and provide better access to mental health services and diversion programs that can be provided by the city and sister agencies.

Furthermore, the Johnson administration will work with ODLSS to determine a robust safety and crisis intervention plan rooted in restorative justice and de-escalation when students have mental health crises in the schools to prevent

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police intervention solutions for all students, but especially diverse learners. This will require whole school training, support and staffing so that students, educators and families are part of the process of changing culture together; not just imposing fewer punishments, but creating space for more supportive accountability practices.

Transition Planning

Students with disabilities need better resourced and more comprehensive transition plans when they move from elementary to high school, and when they graduate from high school. As mayor, Brandon will make sure that elementary students with disabilities can be placed in the most appropriate high school environment for them, including having access to a full range of programs including IB, STEM, arts, and career and technical education. And that as a part of transition planning for graduating seniors, there are connections to local community programs and linkages for transition services, creating pathways for students for independent living, job skills or college.

Transportation

Bus aides play an integral role in student transportation. Bus aides are the first support staff students with disabilities see when they start their day and the last they see before they return home. Bus aides deserve to be appropriately compensated for their services and allowed to work within the schools in-between shifts to help make ends meet.

We clearly need better planning, allowing for transportation evaluations ahead of the summer, so students with disabilities are not late additions to bus routing and we can ensure proper resource allocation for the fall. A Johnson administration will realign budgeting cycles so staffing schedules are released in a timely manner, which keeps routes fully staffed in the fall.

The administration will review and revise student assignment policies so that students can be close to home, and ensure there is program coverage around the city so that once students do have transportation routes, they are not on bus routes that exceed an hour in each direction. Students with disabilities need to be prioritized for routing. CPS should not rely on parents/guardians forfeiting their legal right to transportation as a solution. The Johnson administration will explore a more robust partnership with PACE.

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Greater support for paraprofessionals

Special education classroom assistants (SECAs) do incredibly hard work, and we must provide more mental health support, greater pay, training, safety plans and better working conditions to attract and retain these critical workers. Bilingual SECAs should be compensated, supported, and trained for the translation services they frequently provide for diverse learners and families of diverse learners.

Parks

Our youth programs must be inclusive to youth with disabilities. Parents of autistic children need sensory friendly spaces for their kids. Summer and afterschool programs need support and resources to make this happen. Under a Brandon Johnson administration, we will create a direct SECA to summer program aides pipeline to ensure SECAs have employment opportunities and diverse learners are supported in summer parks programs by skilled professionals.

Public Safety

Treatment Not Trauma

Brandon Johnson will pass the Treatment Not Trauma ordinance in the first 100 days in office. The city of Chicago needs substantial investments in public mental health infrastructure that do not cause further harm to our communities. The underfunding of our social safety net means that police officers and the criminal justice system become the default sources of health care and housing for too many people. Armed police officers should not be the first line of mental health care, case management or rapid rehousing support, as this only increases the likelihood that such encounters will end in tragedy. We must do better by building real systems of care in our communities.

Police Accountability

Brandon will work with the police superintendent and the Community Commission for Public Safety and Accountability to hold police accountable and evaluate the goals and performance of the CPD, the Civilian Office of Police Accountability and the Police Board – including working to provide structural support for interactions with people who have disabilities. For example, advocates have been asking for communication access support for deaf perpetrators and victims for 40 years. This is completely unacceptable.

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Victim Support Services

The city must better support gunshot victims with the resources they need to live, so that they can provide for themselves and families. Many survivors also become people with disabilities, which can mean a major shift in life perspective and experiences. Survivors deserve support that is both empowering and accessible.

Re-entry Support

We must make sure reentry programs have the tools to become disability inclusive in their work. We will provide grants to help them be more accessible and get more training so that reentry providers actually serve people with disabilities. Everyone is responsible for all of us.

Health Services and Long-Term Support

Support for Community Living

Every person with a disability should be able to receive appropriate home and community-based services, and have the support to live the lives of their choosing in integrated community settings. As mayor, Brandon Johnson will prioritize policies that support people with disabilities in living full and independent lives in the community. For example, funding for the HomeMod program that pays for home modifications to help make individuals with disabilities' homes accessible is too low and needs to be increased. Funding for personal care through the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities to help keep people independent must be increased as well.

This also extends to helping individuals move back into the facility from nursing facilities and other institutional care settings. The City must use its power to assist in development of community-based services and supports, the lack of which those working to assist individuals moving out of nursing facilities are finding is often a barrier. Brandon will instruct the Chicago Department of Public Health to use its oversight powers to ensure nursing facilities and other institutional care settings are not creating obstacles that keep individuals who want to move out stuck in their facilities. He will also ensure the long-term care ombudsman services in the city continue to be publicly provided through the Department of Family and Social Services, and that DFSS fully staffs the ombudsman program.

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Mental Health Services

Many communities in Chicago are hit hard by a lack of mental health services, which is why Brandon is a strong supporter of Treatment Not Trauma. He will open public mental health clinics across the city that will provide services with competence that affirm people's cultures, sexual orientations, and gender identities. This goes beyond opening the clinics that were closed. We will ensure close collaboration between these mental health services and other healthcare providers, as well as robust connections with basic needs that affect health and wellbeing such as housing. We will expand mental health crisis teams with trained care providers, not the police.

Long COVID

The effects of the pandemic are still felt in senior living facilities and among individuals living with disabilities. As mayor, Brandon Johnson will create programs around improving access to COVID-19 testing, vaccines and treatment. He will ensure a fully funded Chicago Department of Public Health works to address gaps in services, improves access to care and better supports the individuals and communities most affected by the adverse effect of long COVID.

Addiction Services

People are starting to look at substance abuse disorder as a disability. If we count people who are affected by the disorder as disabled, the population of disabled Chicagoans drastically increases. Brandon's commitment to expanding public health clinics and mental health clinics is one piece to a multi-step strategy we must adopt to address rising rates of addictions in our communities.

Housing

Brandon Johnson believes that housing is a human right. City government has a major role to play in helping to secure this right for all, and especially for individuals with disabilities who often have difficulty finding or maintaining affordable, accessible housing. This role ranges from preventing discrimination to supporting construction of affordable housing.

The City has a responsibility to prevent housing discrimination against people with disabilities and responsibilities to ensure physical accessibility of housing. This includes enforcing the Fair Housing Ordinance, accessibility review of new

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construction, and a responsibility to ensure housing the City supports with federal funds is accessible. All of these could be done more forcefully – but especially enforcing the accessibility requirements, where, distressingly, Chicago did not do onsite inspections for these requirements until recently being pushed to do so.

As mayor, Brandon would go well beyond this legally-required baseline on accessibility. The ADA only requires *new* buildings to be accessible, so structures before 1990 don't have to if there is a "major financial limitation" to improving accessibility. Chicago needs to proactively work with landlords to identify grant money that would make these services more accessible. We need to expand programs that rehab existing housing to be more accessible – elevators, handrails, etc. – including the HomeMod program which can be initiated by renters with disabilities as well as by homeowners.

While housing cost is a major issue for many households in Chicago, finding and maintaining affordable housing can be an even bigger struggle for individuals with disabilities. Brandon's long-standing support for strong affordable housing measures emphasizes addressing the issue for those experiencing or most at risk of experiencing housing instability.

A Johnson administration will also direct the Department of Housing to make accessibility in its housing projects a top priority. The City has not enforced disability fair housing rights for decades, and is the subject of a class action lawsuit by Access Living.

The Affordable Requirements Ordinance must be amended to become much more effective at incentivizing the construction of affordable, accessible, family-size units (as opposed to studio or 1-BR units).

Brandon Johnson supports the Bring Chicago Home campaign to create a dedicated revenue stream for permanent supportive and affordable housing. We must make a commitment to ending homelessness by fully funding affordable housing and city community support services such that all people, including and especially people with disabilities, can live lives of their choosing in safe, stable and supportive housing.

The Chicago Housing Authority needs a wholesale change in order to effectively expand, administer and maintain the city's public and affordable housing stock.

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Moving families off the CHA waiting list and into safe, clean and stable housing will be a top priority of a Johnson administration.

Brandon is fully committed to co-governance and coalition-building, and will build an administration that is staffed with members of the housing justice and disability justice movements that have been driving this work on the ground for years in order to advance housing policies that expand accessibility and equity.

Transportation

Improving CTA Accessibility

It is critical that disabled persons have full access to CTA services. Too many “L” platforms, especially along the Blue and Red lines, lack basic services including elevators and escalators to assist disabled riders. Of the “L” platforms that do have these services, too many times riders find that the elevator or escalator is out of service indefinitely. As mayor, Brandon Johnson will work to identify capital funds so that we can make CTA stations 100% accessible. In addition, when elevators and escalators are closed due to maintenance, he will work to make sure riders know ahead of time and have alternative options to reach their destination.

Along with repairing the actual infrastructure of the CTA, a Johnson administration will also work on train and bus fleets to improve audio and visual announcements. For individuals with audio and/or visual impairments, these services are critical to help them reach their intended destination. Brandon plans to partner with CTA leadership, MOPD and other regional agencies to identify ways in which the CTA can improve these announcements to better serve riders.

In addition, he will work to expand training for CTA employees so that they are better trained in assisting disabled passengers, thus improving riders’ overall service experience.

Improving Pedestrian Access

In our city, pedestrians are just as important as drivers. We need to see our city’s sidewalks, curb cuts, and walkways become truly accessible for all. Brandon supports the Plow the Sidewalks campaign for winter sidewalk snow clearance, as well as efforts to keep our city’s sidewalks safe for mobility device users and people with other disabilities.

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Paratransit Services

Too often, PACE paratransit riders experience late pick-ups, sometimes up to 30 minutes past the scheduled pick-up. Not only is this disrespectful to riders' daily routines, but it is inefficient for serving all needed customers. As mayor, Brandon Johnson will work to increase investment in our paratransit services, including a more unified ride sharing and taxi program. He will also work to streamline PACE's Taxi Access Program (TAP) system so that riders have transportation options that do not require advanced planning. In addition, he will work with appropriate city departments to create an easy-to-use app that allows for riders to schedule and request paratransit and TAP services. This will modernize the existing system and simplify riders' transit experiences.