



Disability Advocacy in the Election Cycle

**A Guide to Candidate Forums and
Meaningful Community
Engagement**



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This manual is intended to provide general information about the election cycle, candidate engagement, and civic participation from the perspective of disability advocacy. The content is provided for informational and educational purposes only and is not intended to serve as legal advice. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information presented, election laws, regulations, and policies may change and can vary by jurisdiction. Readers should consult applicable state and local election authorities, legal counsel, or official government resources for guidance on specific legal requirements or questions related to election activities. Use of this manual does not create an attorney-client relationship, and the authors and publishers assume no liability for actions taken based on the information provided.

Nonpartisanship Statement

This manual is intended to support civic engagement and education within the disability community. The information provided is nonpartisan in nature and is designed to encourage informed participation in the democratic process. Nothing in this manual should be interpreted as supporting or opposing any political party, candidate for public office, or ballot initiative. The purpose of the materials is to provide guidance on engaging candidates, hosting forums, and elevating disability issues in public discussions in a manner that is fair, inclusive, and respectful of all perspectives.

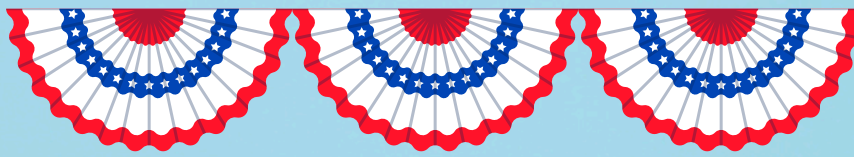
For additional information, please consult your county's Supervisor of Election page as well as:

 <https://www.vote411.org/>

 <https://www.vote.org/>

 <https://ballotpedia.org/>

 <https://www.vote.us/>



Why are elections important?

Disability advocacy does not begin or end in legislative hearings –it begins in our homes, schools, and communities, and it carries into every election cycle.

For parents and caregivers of individuals with disabilities, elections are more than political events; they are opportunities to shape the policies and decisions that directly affect our families' access to education, healthcare, employment, transportation, and community supports.

The choices made by elected officials influence the services our loved ones rely on every day.

That is why it is so important for disability advocates to be informed, engaged, and present throughout the election process.

By participating in candidate forums, asking thoughtful questions, and sharing our lived experiences, we help ensure that the voices of people with disabilities and their families are heard and considered in the decisions that shape our communities.





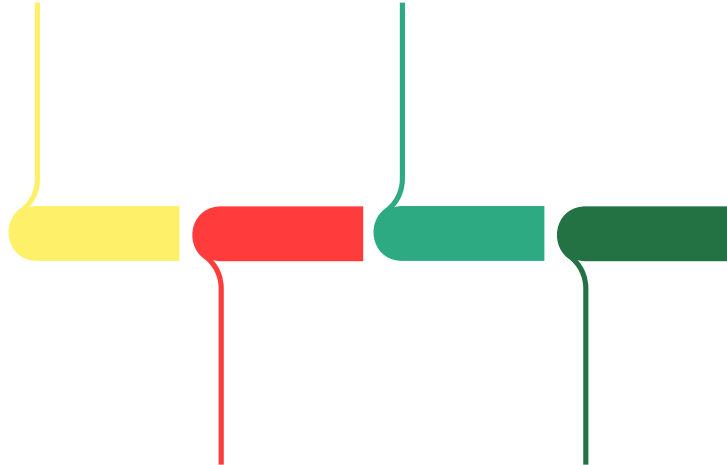
2026 Florida Election Timeline

*For current election information, please check your county’s Supervisor of Elections website.

Municipal and Special Elections
(March and May;
check county elections page)

State General Election Voter Registration Deadline: **5 October 2026**

State General Election (Early Voting):
24-31 October 2026



State Primary Voter Registration Deadline:
July 20, 2026

General Election Day:
3 November 2026

State Primary Election Early Voting Dates:
8-15 August 2026

State Primary Election Day:
18 August 2026

Many advocacy organizations plan their engagement around this general structure:

Timeframe	Election Activity	Advocacy Opportunity
Jan – May	Municipal & local races	Community forums
May – July	Candidate qualifying & campaign ramp-up	Early candidate engagement
July – Aug	Primary campaign season	Candidate forums and issue education
Aug	Primary election	Voter outreach
Sept – Oct	General election campaigns	Disability policy discussions
Nov	General election	Final voter engagement



What are candidate forums?



Candidate forums provide an important opportunity to elevate the voices and concerns of people with disabilities and their families within the democratic process. These events create a space where candidates for public office can hear directly from the disability community about issues such as access to education, healthcare, employment, transportation, and community supports. By asking thoughtful questions and sharing lived experiences, advocates help ensure that disability issues are part of the broader policy conversation.

When hosting a candidate forum, it is important that the event be conducted in a ***fair, nonpartisan, and inclusive manner***. Organizations should invite **all** qualified candidates for the office being discussed and provide each participant with an equal opportunity to speak and respond to questions.

Forums should also be accessible to participants and attendees with disabilities, including considerations such as accessible venues, communication accommodations, and clear participation guidelines. By following these principles, disability advocates can create forums that promote meaningful engagement while respecting the legal and ethical expectations surrounding candidate events.



Additional Resources

1. Florida Nonprofits Voter Engagement Guide:

https://assets.noviams.com/novi-file-uploads/fna/PDFs-and-Documents/Elections/FNA_Voter_Engagement_Guide_2024_final-1b7037a4.pdf.com

2. Florida Statute Chapter 106.011 (3) (Candidate Debates & Forums):

<https://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2025/106.011>



How do I host a forum?

1. Go to your county's Supervisory of Elections Page

Welcome to the Brevard County Supervisor of Elections
Tim Bobanic

Active Registered Voters as of: 03/11/2026	REPUBLICAN 202,245	DEMOCRATIC 109,764	NON-PARTISAN 105,757	OTHERS 17,625	TOTAL 435,391
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2. Gather contact information for the candidates in your area

Candidate Information ^
2026 Candidates

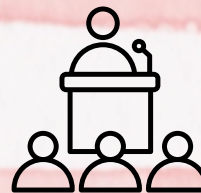
Candidate Listing for 2026 General Election

Group: ALL Status: ALL (except WIT/DNQ)
Office: State Representative County: Brevard
Last Name Like: Order by: Name

State Representative (Brevard County)

District	Candidate	Status	Primary	General
30	Amato, Ruth (REP)	Active		
	Bend, Heather (REP)	Active		
	Tranont, Chas *Incumbent	Active		
31	Gibson, Mindy (REP)	Active		
	Haltaway, Robyn (REP)	Active		
	Herman, Marcus (REP)	Active		
	Woodside, Matthew Davidson (REP)	Active		

3. Arrange forum location



4. Schedule date and begin invitations.



A few things to remember...



HELPFUL TIPS

- Invite ALL candidates running for each office represented (i.e. If you want to focus on the Governor's Race, invite ALL candidates running for that office)
- Set clear guidelines for your forum:
 - which races will you focus on - there are a lot
 - what kind of questions will you ask
 - ex. State-level questions for state-level candidates and county-level questions for county-level candidates (*Keep in mind that each race has different job descriptions, so they affect policy in different ways. It's a good idea to familiarize yourself with their job description and campaign social media in advance to personalize questions.)
 - will you allow for questions from the audience
 - will the event be streaming
 - will the press be invited
 - how long will each race segment take
- When you reach out to the candidate's campaign office, make sure you explain that you are a nonpartisan organization and your focus will be on disability-related questions
- You can not sell tickets for this event - it must be free
- Try to ensure your location is as accessible as possible (consider handicap parking and restrooms, screens for slides or ASL interpreters, etc)
- Bring water for the candidates - there will be a lot of talking!
- Having a certificate of appreciation or something similar to thank the candidates for participating is always appreciated.

Example Questions by Race

*These are just examples. Please customize to fit your forum for your county.

Governor

1. Home and Community Services

Many Floridians with disabilities rely on home- and community-based services through programs like the Florida iBudget Waiver to live independently and remain in their communities.

What specific steps would you take as governor to reduce waitlists and ensure people with disabilities and their families can access the supports they need to live safely and fully participate in community life?

2. Education and Transition to Adulthood

Students with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate public education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, but many families say the transition from school to employment and adulthood remains challenging.

What policies would you support to strengthen transition services so students with disabilities can successfully move from school into meaningful employment, post-secondary education, or community living?

United States Senator

1. Federal Education Oversight and Disability Rights

Recent changes and proposed restructuring within the United States Department of Education have raised questions among disability advocates about how federal oversight of special education laws will be maintained.

If elected, how would you ensure that students with disabilities continue to have strong federal protections and enforcement of laws like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, particularly as federal education programs and offices are being restructured or downsized?

2. Medicaid and Community-Based Supports

Many Floridians with disabilities rely on services funded through Medicaid for home- and community-based supports that allow them to live, work, and participate in their communities.

As Congress considers potential changes to Medicaid funding and program structure, what principles would guide your decisions to ensure people with disabilities can maintain access to essential services and long-term supports?

Example Questions by Race

United States Congressman

1. Federal Budget Priorities and Disability Services

Congress plays a central role in determining federal spending levels through the appropriations process. Many programs that support people with disabilities, including special education, vocational rehabilitation, and community-based services, depend on stable federal funding.

As Congress makes decisions about federal spending, how would you approach budget priorities to ensure that people with disabilities and their families continue to have access to critical supports and services?

2. Oversight of Federal Agencies Serving People with Disabilities

Recent reductions in federal staffing and resources at agencies that administer disability-related programs have raised concerns about oversight, compliance monitoring, and service delivery.

What role do you believe Congress should play in ensuring that federal agencies responsible for disability programs – including those within the United States Department of Education and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services – have the capacity and accountability needed to effectively serve people with disabilities?

State Senator

1. State Response to Federal Funding Shifts

Changes in federal funding and staffing for disability-related programs have raised concerns about how states will maintain services and protections for people with disabilities.

If elected, what priorities would you advocate for in the Florida Senate to ensure that people with disabilities continue to receive the supports and protections they need if responsibilities or funding shift more heavily to the state level?

2. Community Inclusion and Daily Life

For many people with disabilities, challenges related to accessible housing, transportation, and employment opportunities can make it difficult to fully participate in community life.

What policies or priorities would you support in the Florida Legislature to improve opportunities for people with disabilities to live, work, and participate in their communities?

Example Questions by Race

County Commissioner

1. Accessibility in Local Infrastructure and Services

County governments play an important role in ensuring that public facilities, transportation systems, parks, and community programs are accessible to all residents.

If elected, what steps would you take to ensure that county infrastructure, public spaces, and services are accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities, consistent with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act?

2. Local Planning and Community Inclusion

County commissions make decisions about land use, transportation planning, and community development that affect the ability of people with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in community life.

How would you work to ensure that people with disabilities and their families are meaningfully included in county planning decisions, such as housing, transportation, and emergency preparedness initiatives?

School Board

1. Supporting Students with Disabilities in Schools

School boards play a critical role in overseeing the implementation of special education programs and ensuring students receive the services guaranteed under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

If elected, what policies or practices would you prioritize to ensure that students with disabilities receive high-quality instruction, appropriate accommodations, and the support they need to succeed academically and socially?

2. Transition Planning and Post-School Outcomes

Many students with disabilities face challenges transitioning from school to employment, post-secondary education, or independent living.

What steps would you take as a school board member to strengthen transition planning and programs that help students with disabilities move successfully into adulthood?

One Voice Candidate Conversations

Join our movement!

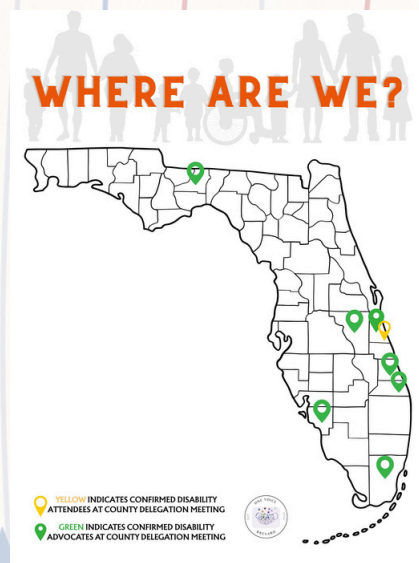
We are encouraging families and advocates across Florida to conduct brief “micro-interviews” with candidates running in their local district. These simple, 30-second conversations include **two key questions** about issues impacting the disability community. Participants are invited to share their videos on social media and tag “One Voice Coalition Florida”, allowing us to track engagement and showcase our collective impact across the state through an interactive map.



<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61587325207774>



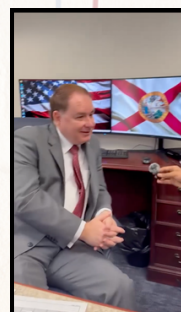
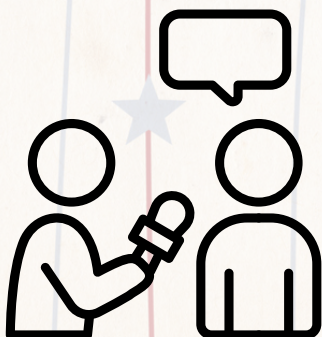
<https://www.instagram.com/onevoicecoalitionfl?igsh=a285dHNSbHQzbnJk>



See what's next!

Follow our website (<https://onevoicecoalitionflorida.org/>) for our next events, like candidate questionnaires, expert interviews, and partnership events, as we gear up for the midterm elections this fall!

For any questions, please email: info@onevoicebrevard.com, for more information.



One Voice Candidate

Conversations - Example Questions

*These are just some example questions for your 30-second interviews. Please feel free to ask about any areas of concern you might have regarding disability issues.

Mayor:

1. If elected, how will you ensure that people with disabilities can fully access city services, programs, and public spaces in our community?
2. What specific steps will you take to include individuals with disabilities and their families in decision-making processes that affect their daily lives?

County Commissioner:

1. How will you prioritize funding and policies that improve access to transportation, housing, and essential services for residents with disabilities in our county?
2. What actions will you take to ensure county programs and emergency preparedness efforts are fully inclusive and accessible to individuals with disabilities?

State Representative (State House):

- What is one specific policy you would support at the state level to improve the lives of people with disabilities and their families?
- How will you ensure that individuals with disabilities and their caregivers have a voice in decisions made in Tallahassee?

Generic and Fun Questions:

1. If you had a magic wand to make one place in our community instantly more accessible, where would you use it?
2. What's one small change that you think would make a big difference for families living with disabilities in our community?
3. What's one city or county service you think works well for people with disabilities—and one that could use improvement?
4. What's something you've learned—or would want to learn—from people with disabilities to do this job better?
5. What's one thing people would be surprised to learn about you?
6. What's your favorite local spot in the community?

DON'T FORGET

HAVE FUN