2026 Nonpartisan Candidates Forum: Shaping the Future of Disability Rights

Date: October 7, 2026
Location: Bristol, Connecticut

Forum Recap

The 2026 Nonpartisan Candidates Forum, *Shaping the Future of Disability Rights*, brought together candidates to discuss issues affecting individuals with disabilities, people experiencing mental health challenges, and those who rely on publicly funded health and social services. The discussions addressed Medicaid funding and privatization, accessible housing, voting access, nutrition assistance, protections under the Olmstead Act[1], and the need for greater accountability in disability-related services.

The following summarizes the candidates I heard speak and the key issues they addressed.

Candidate Highlights

- **Ryan Fazio (R-Candidate for Governor):** Discussed accessible housing and proposed providing tax credits to municipalities that develop housing for individuals with disabilities. He also expressed support for privatizing Medicaid.
- **Ned Lamont (D-Incumbent for Governor):** Expressed opposition to Medicaid privatization, stating that previous attempts had not worked and that Connecticut should not move backward. He also addressed the challenges individuals face when obtaining specialized wheelchair repairs, emphasizing the need to hold providers accountable for completing repairs in a timely manner. Additionally, he opposed the Medicaid cuts associated with H.R 1[2] and stated that he would continue fighting to restore funding.
- **Rosa DeLauro (D-Incumbent for 3rd Congressional District):** Addressed the Medicaid cuts associated with H.R 1. She proposed recovering funding for Medicaid by rescinding funding allocated to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

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[1] The Olmstead decision (1999) is a landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling interpreting the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). It requires states to provide services to individuals with disabilities in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs, supporting community-based services rather than unnecessary institutionalization when legally applicable conditions are met.

[2] H.R. 1, known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, is a major federal law enacted in July 2025 that includes significant changes to federal spending, taxes, Medicaid, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The law includes tax and spending provisions that may affect healthcare coverage, access to food assistance, and funding for social services, with potential implications for individuals with disabilities, people experiencing mental health or substance use challenges, and community-based service providers.

She also emphasized the importance of protecting the Olmstead Act from policies that could weaken its protections.

- **Jahana Hayes (D-Incumbent for 5th Congressional District**): Discussed protecting the Olmstead Act and the need to adjust Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)[3] eligibility requirements and income thresholds to better address the needs of individuals who rely on food assistance.
- **Susan Bysiewicz (D-Incumbent for Lieutenant Governor):** Highlighted the availability of curbside voting to improve voting access for individuals with disabilities and mobility limitations. She also voiced opposition to the institutional warehousing of individuals with intellectual disabilities and/or those living with a mental health diagnosis emphasizing the importance of appropriate, community-based alternatives.

Key Takeaways and Relevance to Advocacy

Several recurring themes emerged from the discussions, including the need to protect Medicaid funding, preserve disability rights and community integration, expand accessible housing, and improve the accessibility and accountability of essential services. The discussion surrounding the Olmstead Act reinforced the importance of ensuring that individuals with disabilities have opportunities to receive services in the most integrated settings appropriate to their needs rather than being unnecessarily segregated in institutional environments.

The forum also highlighted differences in candidates' approaches to Medicaid administration and funding, particularly regarding privatization and the impact of federal funding reductions. Other important issues included accessible voting, food assistance, and timely repairs for specialized mobility equipment.

For Advocacy Unlimited, Inc. these discussions underscore the importance of continued legislative engagement to protect the rights of individuals living with a psychiatric diagnosis.

[3] The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federally funded program that provides eligible low-income individuals and families with monthly benefits to purchase groceries and improve access to nutritious food. SNAP helps reduce food insecurity and support household stability, including for individuals with disabilities and families experiencing financial hardship.