

**1. In your Opening Statement, please introduce yourself and tell us your message to Virginians with Developmental Disabilities and their families.**

*Hello, I am Michael Durig. I am a retired public school teacher, a military veteran, and a professional musician. My wife is an early childhood specialist, and we have been actively supporting 4 grandsons, all of whom have a range of problems to include apraxia of speech, dyslexia, auditory processing, and diagnosed Autism. Before that, we were engaged with the care of my Father-in-law who entered a nursing facility in 2001. He succumbed to Parkinson's disease in 2005 shortly after our first grandson was born. We have been in the battle of caring for our family members with specialized needs ever since. In each case, we had to battle bureaucratic nonsense as we tried to provide the best care for our loved ones. I am one of you. We need to share our collective experiences regarding this matter, actively research our loved ones challenges, increase our knowledge base, and pool resources in our community with the goal of preparing these folks to participate in our society successfully. I have seen civic leagues address these kinds of problems with kind consideration for all involved. I believe this to be the most humane and efficient way to address this challenge because we are actively caring for our loved ones, not some bureaucrat. This is one of the first issues I will address as your Delegate.*

**2. What do you think needs to be done to not only reach compliance but to ensure a thriving community-based system is developed and maintained in Virginia?**

*I believe civic leagues paired with business associations, education/therapy specialist, and law enforcement can organize care for these challenged citizens. With local people overseeing managed care for their family members, they will formulate a plan that will exceed all compliance standards.*

**3. How would you include people with developmental disabilities and their families in the decision-making process and support their voices when working on policy?**

*Civic leagues, again, are a great place for this discussion. When people with shared challenges assemble, they formulate unique solutions for their community. I have been engaged in this very problem for much of the past 20 years. It would be my pleasure to be the tip of your spear in this battle. As Delegate, I can collect information from the 40 civic leagues in the 92nd district as we create a plan of action for our loved ones.*

**4. What is needed to help protect people with developmental disabilities from unjust involvement in the criminal justice system?**

*There are individuals that take advantage of the disabled. I witnessed first hand as a disabled person was receiving instruction on how to panhandle at a traffic light one evening. This could easily evolve into something more sinister and is the starting place for action. Law enforcement has had a long relationship with civic leagues and I believe the pairing of these organizations can effectively deal with this problem.*

**5. What policies and funding would you support to help people to achieve full inclusion -- or talk about your values related to inclusion for people with disabilities.**

*I was a public school teacher from 2000-2019 and must sadly report that school administrators are so eager to comply with unrealistic inclusion goals that the challenged students' needs aren't met. This practice sets the challenged student up for ridicule and bullying by the general population which negatively impacts learning. I believe inclusion is very important so we can welcome them into society, but it must be done gradually as the student is comfortable using learned social skills to manage these kinds of situations. As a teacher I would regularly tell all my students they had something amazing they will share with the world and I hope I get to see it. It is true of these people as well. I currently live with 4 of them.*

**6. How do you think Virginia can better support students to have a robust quality education where they are included in their neighborhood schools alongside their siblings, friends, and neighbors?**

*A robust quality education must be determined by the citizens of that region to support and expand their local economy. Special needs children must be considered during this process and included according to their abilities.*

*Elementary school instruction should concentrate on traditional subjects with the goal of basic mastery of language/reading/writing, music/art, history and basic math for all students.*

*Middle school will offer more rigorous instruction on traditional subjects (language/reading/writing, music/art and elementary algebra and geometry) that utilizes/reenforces previously learned material. The introduction of practical skill classes at this level to include wood and metal working, electronics, drafting, home economic, science, and healthcare would reenforce subjects taught. This will introduce critical thinking and problem solving on several different levels applying learned skills. World history and American history will be include at this level to present past examples of critical thinking/problem solving and their results. This will prepare students entering high school to pursue individual interests. Students at this point should be employable at entry level positions within the local economy.*

*High School will offer classes in specialized areas providing the students with highly advanced knowledge and skills as they prepare for entry into the local job market. They will have the ability pursue a career or earn funds for higher education goals. This model creates a cohesive community as directed by the citizens for whom the school system serves.*

*We have a provider shortage in Virginia. Particularly of providers who are prepared and ready to offer the new inclusive and integrated services that were developed in response to the DOJ settlement agreement. What Virginia has been doing to develop Provider Businesses has not worked.*

***7. How would you work with the community of advocates, people with disabilities , and other grassroots stakeholders to innovate and finally stimulate provider businesses to grow and offer these new integrated services?***

*I support the funding of civic leagues partnering with Parent/Teacher Organizations to develop a local standard for education in their areas. Here is where the specific needs are identified. This will give business providers opportunity to service those needs in a competitive environment with citizen oversight. The end result will exceed DOJ requirements.*