

Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc.

Lawton “Bud” Chiles Response

1. What do you see as the most important issues facing Floridians with developmental disabilities and their families?

As a father who has a child with a developmental disability, this is not just a policy issue to me – the concerns facing Floridians with disabilities and their families are deeply personal for me.

Florida must do better in many areas, but I believe the most pressing issues relate to education, employment and building community. We’ve got to increase inclusion in both early education and K-12, getting children with disabilities spending more time in general classes with sufficient support systems. This will require better teacher training and incentives for schools to promote inclusionary practices. Then we’ve got to increase access to post secondary education and employment opportunities. I believe that every One-Stop Center in Florida should be equipped to assist job seekers with disabilities with vocational skills training and job placement.

One of the most challenging aspects of facing a disability is the isolation that it can bring, and the difficulty accessing not only basic and necessary services, but also the emotional, psychological and relational support that is so often lacking. I believe that these needs are best met in community.

This will require incentives and funding straight to communities instead of into bureaucracies in Tallahassee. It’s time to end the top-down system of service delivery that is, more often than not, confusing, time-consuming and impersonal. I will work to increase local partnerships between health care providers, affordable housing groups, nonprofits, public transportation agencies, and local governments to work in tandem to create broad support systems and improve the quality of life of Floridians facing disabilities.