

Sara Grafstorm
ARRM
1185 N Concord St # 302
South St Paul, MN 55075



Chris Belflower for Senate
1021 Griffin Ave
Mahtomedi, MN 55115
651.402.1777
www.chrisbelflower.com

Good afternoon Ms Graff,

I am responding to your request to fill out the questionnaire. I sincerely apologize for the tardiness.

My name is Chris Belflower, and I am the Independence Party -endorsed candidate running for Minnesota Senate in District 43. I am a currently a safety trainer for a local construction company, and a retired volunteer firefighter of 22 years. I am also a small business owner, providing motivational speaking and specialized training around the US.

I am running for office because I see a need for true change. Not the current two party system, which has shown to be about themselves, and not the people for over a decade now. We need to set policies that will unite and protect ALL residents of a community, State and Country. I will fight to ensure that all Minnesotans are provided the equal opportunities for Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.

I have the benefit of having both a sister-in-law, and her fiancé that work with children and adults with disabilities. I have been disheartened to see the time, efforts and energy that they put into their jobs without the returning benefits, thus making it tough for them to make it on one job each. I will ensure that I champion the cause for workers that really do go above and beyond to help their clients. Too many people would not have the compassion to do what my sister and her coworkers have done. I will work with these centers and employees to find out their concerns and see what we can do to address any issues. I also promise to have an open door policy to have ANY of my constituents visit me, call me or contact me. I'm sure I'll get busier, but I want to make sure I am representing Minnesota.

I also get the opportunity to see many of these children and adults firsthand (although they do not know me personally) as I visit several of these centers annually as Santa Claus. Watching many of these adults with the ability to live and thrive independently is such an inspiration to what we as Minnesotans can really do. I was unaware that they were not being compensated competitively in the workforce. I will work to make sure that all working Minnesotans receive competitive pay for the work they do. Many adults I know are so detailed and diligent with their jobs, there is no reason not to be compensated appropriately. Income should not be limited for anyone, especially if they have a disability.

I have a plan set up where we get Minnesota back to work. Part of this plan includes revamping the MN Department of Employment and Economic Development to make sure we have programs available for all groups of Minnesotans (homeless, veterans, disabled, unemployed) to receive affordable if not free training more so than what is currently available. I became unemployed several years ago, and used some of the services offered. I feel that this program, although is good, could be made better.

We have apartment complexes all over the Twin Cities and Minnesota that cater to our elderly community, but why not our disabled community as well? I think this could be a great idea in order to, similarly to senior care centers, have assistants that can be called upon to help if necessary, but yet allow residents to live independently within the community. Ensuring that there is ample transportation available (bus lines, etc.) in order to make sure that all of our residents have the same opportunities. As I said earlier, watching some of the adults (and even children) be almost as independent as anyone else is really inspiring. I would really like to continue to help make that happen.

When it comes to education, our current incumbent Senator, who also chairs the Education Committee has failed us. He's failed our kids, and our teachers. I will work to implement policies that will not only help to close the achievement gap that we see currently (one of, if not the highest in the US), but I will work to ensure that our teachers are compensated appropriately. Minnesota educates and trains some of the best teachers in the Nation, yet, we have shortages all over the teaching spectrum. Why is that? It's the current policies. My education plan will empower teachers to be able to teach their classes and engage their students. I want to inspire kids to become teachers. And this means making sure that our teachers are not afraid of their classes, their superiors, boards or unions. It also means compensating them and providing all of the tools and resources they need to succeed. Many teachers get paid very well, but having perks for different teaching levels or genres versus just time and general degrees should inspire people to want to be teachers again.

I want to work to make sure that our children receive curriculum that a) interests them, and b) stimulates their learning abilities. I will work for smaller class sizes, so that there is more teacher-student interaction, and will inspire the learning abilities of the students. And I want to ensure that all of our students, with or without disabilities, have the same opportunities to learn and get the help they need when they need it. Smaller class sizes and even specialized educators will be able to make that happen. And having programs that develop teachers to focus on their students will benefit everyone. And students with disabilities are so often misunderstood for misbehaving. Having adequate numbers of staff that are trained and educated themselves in how to work with these students will allow our students to excel versus becoming a burden to an unknowing educator.

I understand many families' fees are not currently covered under insurance or healthcare plans. This flusters me as I can only imagine what financial burdens families are under in order to care for children with disabilities. The only thing I can use to relate is my kids and daycare before they started school.... I remember it was tough getting by back then and that was only for 5-6 years... I would prefer to see employers offer insurance programs that allow a) businesses to entice employees with insurance perks, and b) allow families/employees to pick and choose what services they wish to have covered. And I understand that many families don't have the luxury of being able to work as they stay home to provide care for their families. Honestly, I have to do a bit more research on the subject matter, but I would not be against having these fees become MNSure eligible. Or to provide additional State funding to program centers in order to offset the financial burdens currently being held by the families. With fiscal responsibility, I feel that we can earmark appropriate funds to make sure that our families are taken care of.

Please feel free to reach out if there are other questions regarding this questionnaire. Again, I apologize for the tardiness. Thank you for the opportunity to respond. I know the response was not on your form, so please cut and paste to make any answers fit your online format.

Sincerely,

Chris Belflower

IP candidate for MN Senate (43)