

Initial HT

Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance of Washington, DC 2010 Questionnaire for D.C. Council Candidates

RESPONSES OF COUNCILMEMBER HARRY "TOMMY" THOMAS, JR.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

- 1. Will you oppose any effort to hold an initiative in the District that would take away the civil marriage rights now enjoyed by same-sex couples, and publicly campaign for marriage equality in the event such an initiative is held?**

As a member of the Council of the District of Columbia who voted in favor of marriage equality, I will oppose any efforts or initiatives that would take away this right. To me, the civil marriage right now enjoyed by same-sex couples is a human right. Should someone or organization decide to undertake an initiative to revoke this right, I will support defeating it and publicly state my support for marriage equality.

- 2. If the District's civil marriage equality is taken away either directly by an act of Congress or by a ballot measure, will you support immediate re-passage of civil marriage equality?**

Absolutely. At this juncture, marriage equality appears to be secure in the District of Columbia. DCBOEE has indicated marriage equality is a human right under DC law and therefore, cannot be a ballot measure, and Congress has not moved to strike down the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Equality Amendment Act of 2009.

- 3. Do you agree that private contractors doing business with the District should be required to provide equal benefits including health insurance to same-sex partners?**

I think that for-profit and non-profit organizations incorporated in the District of Columbia need to provide equal benefits packages -- including health insurance -- to all of their employees. When selecting contractors, especially because some contracting firms may be incorporated in states that do not recognize same-sex marriage, the District government should include in its weighting factors whether the firm's personnel practices incorporate are non-discriminatory and include equal benefits packages for all employees.

- 4. Will you oppose legislation containing either a "conscience clause" that would allow anyone to claim a Human Rights Act exemption at will, as was proposed by Councilmember Yvette Alexander during consideration of the marriage equality bill last year; or a "business necessity" exemption that would allow taxpayer-funded charities run by religious groups to discriminate against married same-sex couples, as was proposed by the Archdiocese of Washington?**

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Yes. I do not support a "conscience clause" or "business necessity" exemption from the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Equality Amendment Act of 2009. These measures would dilute the Act. And because marriage equality is a human right under District law, such exemptions, to me, seem contradictory to the intention and parameters of our human rights law.

PUBLIC HEALTH

- 5. Do you support sufficient funding to ensure that the drive to make HIV testing routine among District residents includes counseling and treatment referrals for those testing positive?**

Yes. Ward 5 has one of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in the District. We need to make HIV testing routine and provide counseling and treatment referrals. While the severe decline in the District's revenue stream has forced all government agencies to cut their budgets and program spending levels, it is critical to preserve funding as much as possible for HIV/AIDS programming because addressing the high HIV/AIDS rate in the city is an important public health issue.

- 6. Are you committed to continuing and expanding the District's condom distribution program to include water-based lubricant and tracking of their distribution to specified locations?**

The best way to prevent HIV/AIDS is to practice safe sex. I am committed to continuing and expanding the District's condom distribution program to best meet the needs and preferences of residents. For example, I support DOH's decision follow teens' preferences and switch from distributing Durex to Magnum condoms so as to increase use. I also support the distribution of water-based lubricants along with condoms, which other cities are already doing. My research indicates that this is a best practice and has been adopted in New York and Milwaukee.

- 7. Will you support legislation giving the directors of the Office of GLBT Affairs and the Office of African Affairs the authority to issue competitive grants as other minority constituent offices have, that will be open to organizations serving the populations within the offices' purview?**

The Office of LGBT Affairs has a strong track record of achievement, and I fully support the office having the authority to issue and monitor grants. I also fully support allocating funds to enable the Office of LGBT Affairs and the Office of African Affairs to offer grants, and expanding the grants budget of both offices as revenue permits.

- 8. Describe steps you will support to improve performance at the HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, STD, and TB Administration (HAHSTA), including in HIV prevention, HIV/AIDS surveillance, and mental health services.**

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Through the Council's oversight role, I will work to improve the performance of HAHSTA. Specifically, I will work with the Council's Chair of the Committee on Health to resolve outstanding performance issues. As a former member of this committee, I am aware of that room for improvements exist, particularly in the area of grants administration, as *The Washington Post's* recent series of articles aptly described.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE JUDICIARY

9. Will you support funding for mandatory lesbian, gay bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) sensitivity and diversity training for all members of the Metropolitan Police Department and the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department?

Yes. I will work with the Council's Chair of the Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary to address the need for mandatory LGBT diversity and sensitivity training, as well as mandatory sensitivity training relating to treatment of other minority groups. I support sensitivity training in all workplaces—public and private, for-profit and non-profit.

10. Will you support a budget for the Office of Police Complaints large enough to avoid developing a backlog of cases?

As the District's budget permits, I support ensuring that OPC has the resources and staffing necessary to avoid developing a large backlog of cases. In its Fiscal Year 2009 Annual Report, OPC indicates its backlog of open cases has grown from 36 at yearend 2008 to 50 at yearend 2009. In the report, OPC itself also acknowledges that the city's finances require that it must "focus on how to best use existing resources" and pledges to work with the Mayor and the Council to "fulfill its obligations to the public."

11. Will you support efforts to rein in police officials who respond to legitimate crime concerns with unsustainable, media-centric quick fixes that infringe constitutionally protected civil liberties? And will you do so without waiting for courts to overturn them, as the U.S. Court of Appeals did to the Neighborhood Safety Zone initiative in 2009?

I do not support police tactics that infringe on constitutionally protected civil liberties. I did not support MPD's Neighborhood Safety Zone initiative, which was instituted in Ward 5's Trinidad neighborhood, which I represent. Most of the residents of Trinidad did not support the initiative, either. At a meeting I held on June 13, 2008, I conducted a survey to obtain residents' input on the Neighborhood Safety Zones. The survey results indicated that most Trinidad residents had negative opinions about the checkpoints. More than three-quarters viewed the checkpoints as ineffective at deterring criminal activity. More than seven in ten opposed the strategy of closing streets and alleys to funnel vehicular traffic to the checkpoints. The vast majority also opposed turning away at checkpoints drivers who could not or would not state their purpose for entering the community. Instead, residents indicated that more foot patrols were needed to reduce violence, as well as community-based programs for youth and ex-offenders and

vocational training opportunities. Not only were the checkpoints illegal, but they were implemented without adequate input from Trinidad residents. We cannot solve the underlying causes of violence without community buy-in and input.

12. Will you support maintaining the award-winning Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit with both a citywide scope and a dedicated and well-trained central core unit with a full-time sergeant?

Yes. This unit performed a vital function and it should not have been dismantled and folded into a larger unit with a broader focus. I will work with the Chair of the Council's Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary to address this.

13. Will you press for increased oversight of the Metropolitan Police Department's gathering and analysis of crime statistics to ensure greater comprehensiveness and objectivity, including transgender-related hate crime data?

Yes. I support MPD having the best and most comprehensive crime statistics possible, particularly given the emphasis placed on statistics when making resource decisions. Incomplete or substandard data can lead to poor decisionmaking and misallocation of scarce resources.

14. Do you support making the D.C. Attorney General an elected position?

Absolutely. The DC attorney general needs to be independent and not an appendage of the Mayor's Office. The actions of the current attorney general aptly demonstrate why this position should be an elected--not appointed—one.

HUMAN RIGHTS

15. Will you support a budget for the Office of Human Rights large enough to allow it to keep the backlog at below 70 aged cases; keep below 210 days the average time it takes to issue a probable cause finding; and expand education, prevention, and language access efforts?

I support increasing OHR's budget as the finances of the city permit. All agencies had their budgets cut to balance the FY2011 budget.

16. Will you block ceremonial resolutions and otherwise decline to honor individuals or organizations that promote any sort of bigotry?

Ceremonial resolutions that honor individuals or organizations that promote bigotry are insensitive and divisive. I will be mindful of this and appraise each ceremonial resolution to ensure individuals or organizations that promote bigotry or engage in any type of factious activities are not honored for these actions or views. I will expect the same standard of behavior from my colleagues, and will inform them of any disagreement I have with their actions in this area.

17. Are you committed to including a transgender representative on the D.C. Commission on Human Rights?

Yes. It makes sense for the DC Commission on Human Rights to include a transgender representative, especially because transgender persons are so often the targets of hate crimes and other human rights violations. I will work with the Council's Chair of the Committee on Aging and Community Affairs to achieve transgender representation on this commission.

18. Do you agree that the Director of the Office of Human Rights should be required to have professional training and experience in civil rights law enforcement?

It makes sense that the Director of the Office of Human Rights should have professional training and experience in civil rights law enforcement. Such experience could include practice as a civil rights attorney, but could also include other practical experience as well. A law degree alone doesn't mean a person has the skill set necessary to run the Office of Human Rights. I don't think the absence of a law degree should necessarily rule out a person from the job.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND YOUTH

19. Will you oppose both federal and local voucher programs that fund students in religious schools that are beyond the protections of the D.C. Human Rights Act?

I have been a supporter of the voucher program, but understand GLAA's point that taxpayer dollars shouldn't be used to pay for students to attend private schools that do not adhere to the DC Human Rights Act. I am committed to working with GLAA to address this issue.

20. Will you support improved services and treatment for gay and transgender homeless youth, including transitional housing?

I support improved services and treatment for gay and transgender homeless youth, including meeting their housing needs. I have been and will continue to work to expand the supply of affordable, transitional, and emergency housing so that every family and person in the District has a clean and safe place to live. That is why against significant community opposition, I introduced and secured passage of property tax abatement legislation for the St. Martin's affordable housing project, located in Ward 5's Eckington neighborhood. That is why I support funding programs like Hyacinth Place, slated to open in Ward 5 within the next year. Hyacinth Place, a project of the Center for Urban Living, will provide supportive housing and services for 15 formerly homeless women with mental health challenges, including specialized education and job training, and any other type of assistance these women will need to move toward self-sufficiency and becoming productive members of the workforce. Hyacinth Place has been made

possible by funding from DCHD and DCHFA, and I support both of these agencies in their mission to fund supportive and transitional housing for special needs populations.

21. Will you oppose the use of either federal or District taxpayer funds to promote "abstinence only until marriage" sex education that undermines safer-sex programs by excluding more comprehensive information?

Sex education must provide teens with realistic messages. Research indicates that abstinence only sex education is ineffective with teens and does not change behavior—it is a message that "falls on deaf ears." I agree that sex education in our public school systems must be both comprehensive and realistically geared to address teens' behaviors.

CONSUMERS AND BUSINESSES

22. Do you support the right of adults in the District to choose adult-oriented entertainment for themselves, and the right of appropriately licensed and zoned businesses to provide it?

Yes. My record demonstrates my leadership on this issue. When my office received complaints about The Stadium, a gentleman's club that opened earlier this year in Ward 5's warehouse district of Bladensburg Road, I reiterated my support for the law that requires the equitable location of such clubs in each Ward. I encouraged concerned residents to meet with The Stadium's management team to learn more about the establishment and its operations. As a result of this open and civil dialogue, community concern has dissipated.

23. Will you support legislation to curb abuses by NIMBYs who are now allowed to file an endless series of baseless complaints to harass or extort bars and restaurants?

I will support the Council's Chair of the Committee on Public Works and Transportation, the committee that has oversight of ABRA, to hold hearings on whether excessive abuses are occurring in the filing of complaints with the agency. I agree that if the system is being abused, something must be done to address that abuse. In its Agenda 2010, GLAA provides some good suggestions on how to curb such abuses.

24. What are your thoughts regarding GLAA's proposal, explained in Agenda: 2010, to mitigate the problems associated with prostitution by legalizing and regulating it? What will you do to provide alternatives to survival sex for at-risk populations like homeless youth and transgenders?

My preference is to beef up the services and outreach to at-risk populations like homeless youth and transgenders so that they have the resources needed to support and lift themselves out of poverty. I appreciate GLAA's steadfast advocacy and goal to eliminate survival sex, and stand ready to work with the organization on meeting the needs of homeless youth and transgenders—and all other special needs groups.

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Your record is part of your rating. Please list any actions that you have taken that may help illustrate your record on behalf of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgenders.

Your answers should be typed on separate paper rather than on this form. *You must sign your name on each answer sheet to indicate your personal commitment to your answers.*

Please return your signed questionnaire responses by Tuesday, August 17 to GLAA, P.O. Box 75265, Washington, D.C. 20013.

In addition to sending your signed hard copy, please email a copy (in any major word processor or text format) for loading on GLAA's website (www.glaa.org) to equal@glaa.org. Thank you.

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