

Responses of Council Member Tommy Wells to the Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance 2010 Questionnaire for DC Council Candidates

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

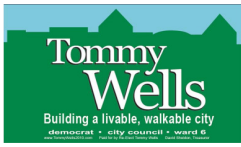
1. Yes, I will oppose any effort to hold an initiative in the District that would take away the civil marriage rights now enjoyed by same sex couples, and publicly campaign for marriage equality in the event such an initiative is held. In my judgment, marriage equality is the preeminent civil rights question of our time.

I have consistently and enthusiastically supported marriage equality in the District, and will continue to do so in the future. I co-introduced the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Equality Amendment Act of 2009 in the DC Council, advocated for the bill to gay and straight audiences, and enthusiastically voted for its passage.

Just as important is to challenge organizations that have traditionally stood by silently on this issue to acknowledge their responsibility to champion civil rights as well. For example, I publicly asked the Metropolitan Labor Council why they did nothing to actively support marriage equality or testify in favor of the legislation before the City Council. Marriage equality is not a "gay" issue. It is an issue for every citizen who cares about protecting civil rights, and political, labor, business, and other organizations need to weigh in as a matter of principle.

Equal marriage is a fundamental civil right; every person must be free to marry the person of his or her choosing. Government's role is to assure that the benefits of marriage are equally available to all. As the courts have correctly ruled, it would be illegal to use the initiative process to overturn provisions of the DC Human Rights Act. It would be immoral to use such a process to facilitate discrimination against individuals on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

No one should sit on the sidelines when fundamental civil rights are imperiled. In the event that an initiative to overturn this law was to be held, I would campaign aggressively for its defeat within Ward 6 and throughout the District. As I did in 2009, I would argue for the importance of marriage equality at any meeting, and forcefully



challenge the prejudices and misperceptions that underlie so many opponents' views.

2. Yes, if the District's civil marriage equality is taken away either directly by an Act of Congress or by a ballot measure, I will support immediate re-passage of civil marriage equality. Discrimination has no place in our laws; should Congress or D.C. voters unwisely impose such discrimination, it would be the obligation of the DC City Council to restore those rights.

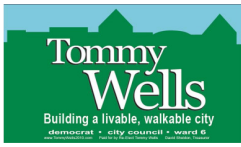
Delay in doing so would be unconscionable. Every day that discrimination is allowed to persist gives credence to the fallacious idea that inequality based upon sex or sexual orientation is a normal, natural, or acceptable circumstance. Every day that discrimination is allowed to persist injures those who merely seek the freedom to live their lives without judgment, persecution, or unfounded restriction. The District's laws finally reflect the value that all persons must have the right to marry the partner of his or her choosing, and if overturned, those laws must be immediately restored.

3. Yes, I agree that private contractors doing business with the District should be required to provide equal benefits, including health insurance to same-sex partners. Allowing them to do otherwise would undermine the basic premise of marriage equality.

As a member of the DC City Council, I sponsored and voted for marriage equality—not some sort of "Marriage Equality Light." That means that in every aspect of law, regulation, and practice, it is the obligation of the District government to assure that every married couple is treated equally. Private contractors doing business with the District should not be exempt from this basic and central tenet of the new law.

4. Yes, I will 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. Both ideas are misguided, and ought not be adopted into law.

The so-called "conscience clause" would have effectively gutted the marriage equality bill, undermining its central premise. Even the name is offensive: Prejudice cannot be prettied-up by erroneously labeling it an act of conscience.



Similarly, there is no “business necessity” in discriminating against legally married couples, and taxpayer-funded charities run by religious groups do not get to opt out of this fundamental truth. While it is sad that some denominations remain stuck in an outdated, discredited mindset, government funds must be used in a way that treats every person with equal dignity and to equal effect.

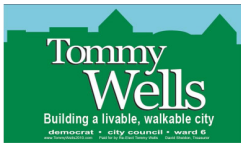
PUBLIC HEALTH

5. Yes, I 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. Given the extraordinarily high AIDS rate in the city, public health authorities must be provided all effective tools for curbing new infections and providing appropriate and sensitive care to those in need.

Although HIV/AIDS medications have revolutionized treatment, HIV still presents a serious and lifelong health issue for those infected. Most newly-diagnosed patients need some help navigating complex medical issues, finding appropriate care, learning about proper nutrition, coping with confidentiality issues, and managing emotional stresses. Many in the District need far more, including social assistance, legal advice, and help addressing risky sexual behaviors that might spread the virus to others.

HIV counseling and referrals has proven to be an invaluable tool in helping HIV+ individuals adopt healthy habits and get access to needed services. To be effective, both counseling and treatment referrals must be included in any AIDS public health project.

6. Yes, I am committed to continuing and expanding the District’s condom distribution program to include water-based lubricant and tracking of their distribution to specified locations. Condom distribution works, but only if they are provided to those at risk of infection. The District government must redouble its efforts to get condoms and lubricant out of warehouses and into the hands of people throughout the community.
7. Yes, I 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 populations within the offices’ purview. The best way to address the high-priority issues addressed by these offices is to combine direct government services with projects and programs administered by non-governmental organizations with



close ties to their communities. Community-based groups often have unique perspectives, invaluable experience, and long-established access to hard-to-reach populations; working together and sharing resources, the District government can maximize its effectiveness in serving the needs of both LGBT and Africa-American residents.

8. Oversight of the performance of the HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, STD, and TB Administration, including HIV prevention, HIV/AIDS surveillance, and mental health services, has improved with leadership of my colleague David Catania. I have served the last three and half years as an active member of the Committee on Health and supported the Council's work to implement many of reforms outlined in the 2005 DC Appleseed Center report.

As a former member of the DC Board of Education, I have long advocated for substantial improvements in HIV/AIDS education and services within DC public schools. That work has continued through the Committee on Health with its recent study and evaluation resulting in a significant youth sexual health report that was very enlightening on the views and perspectives of our teens and students in DC public schools.

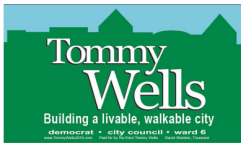
As has been proven convincingly, HIV prevalence among injection drug users can be significantly reduced through syringe exchange programs. I will continue to advocate for Needle Exchange Program funding, and press HAHSTA to demonstrate the effectiveness of its outreach efforts.

As with almost every aspect of HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, STD or TB infections, the mental, psychological and emotional impact is extremely serious and I would like to see even stronger connections between HAHSTA and the Department of Mental Health, and private mental health providers.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE JUDICIARY

9. Yes, I will support funding for mandatory lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender sensitivity and diversity training for all members of the Metropolitan Police Department and the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department. Every resident has the right to be treated with respect and concern by police and emergency personnel, and leaders of both forces must be vigilant to assure that all officers have the knowledge and sensitivity to do so.

Sensitivity training has proven to be an effective way to assure that public safety personnel understand the diversity of the communities

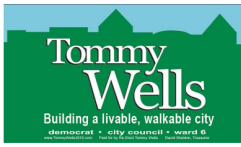


they serve, and are equipped to provide compassionate and effective service. Good discipline requires regular training, and I will support such programs in future appropriations.

10. Yes, I will support a budget for the Office of Police Complaints large enough to avoid developing an unsupportable backlog of cases.
11. Yes, I will continue working to assure that police officials respond to legitimate crime concerns with the utmost professionalism, and in ways that always protect residents' civil liberties. I didn't support Chief Lanier's Neighborhood Safety Zone (NSZ) initiative, and I would oppose similar efforts in the future. As always, the District's police force must focus its efforts on proven policing strategies that respect residents' rights and involve citizens in a shared effort to promote public safety without compromising civil rights.
12. Yes, I will support maintaining the Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit with a citywide scope and a dedicated and well-trained central core unit. I've worked closely with GLLU's former leader, Sgt. Brett Parson, and continue to believe the unit plays a critical role to LGBT community. At the same time, I do expect that all officers within MPD will receive the training, and perform with distinction, the requisite respect and sensitivity for all members of our community.
13. Yes, I will press for effective oversight of the Metropolitan Police Department's gathering and analysis of crime statistics to ensure greater comprehensiveness and objectivity, including transgender hate crime data.
14. Yes, I support making the DC Attorney General an elected position. I have been disappointed at the degree to which the current Attorney General has operated not as the advocate for all District residents, but as the Mayor's personal attorney. As a member of the DC Council I voted in February in favor of putting the change before voters this fall, and I will advocate for its passage.

HUMAN RIGHTS

15. Yes, I will support funding for mandatory lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender sensitivity and diversity training for all members of the Metropolitan Police Department and the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department. Every resident has the right to be treated with respect and concern by police and emergency personnel, and leaders



of both forces must be vigilant to assure that all officers have the knowledge and sensitivity to do so.

16. Yes, I will not support, and would seek to block, ceremonial resolutions and honorary acts by the Council for individuals and organizations that promote bigotry.

17. Yes, I will support including a transgender representative to join the DC Commission on Human Rights and believe that individual would represent an important voice.

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

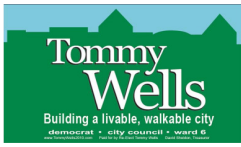
PUBLIC EDUCATION AND YOUTH

19. Yes, I have consistently opposed the federal voucher program that uses public funds to pay tuition at private, religious institutions that discriminate against gay and lesbian individuals. As a member of the Board of Education, and in my time as a member of the Council, I have spoken publicly about this position and will continue my opposition.

20. Yes, I support improved services and treatment for gay and transgender homeless youth, including transitional housing. As Chair of the Committee on Human Services, I have worked hard, especially in a time of shrinking resources in our city, to protect and expand homeless services to families and individuals in need, but in particular to youth that find themselves homeless and vulnerable. In the FY2011 budget, I tasked the Interagency Council on the Homeless and the Department of Human Services to prioritize better research on the issues surrounding youth homelessness and to develop a plan to end youth homelessness.

I have also been a strong supporter of the Interagency Council for Homeless (ICH) and have supported the service of a transgender youth who serves on the ICH and adds a valuable voice to the conversation and work of this body.

In addition, I have worked closely through the Committee on Human Services with Sasha Bruce Youthwork – with both homeless and foster youth – and organized the first-ever youth-led committee hearing on issues facing foster care youth. The young men and women that researched, staffed and ran this hearing explored issues that prevent youth – including gay and transgender youth – from achieving



permanency through the foster system and place them at risk of becoming homeless. Their work led to a series of recommendations, many of which the committee continues to work on.

21. Yes, I will oppose the use of public tax dollars to promote "abstinence only until marriage" sex education. Such a program is not sex education and only serves to undermine safer-sex programs and results in placing youth at risk by excluding comprehensive information.

CONSUMERS AND BUSINESSES

22. Yes, I do support the right for adults in the District to choose adult-oriented entertainment for themselves. I also support the right of a business appropriately licensed and zoned to provide such entertainment. Ward 6 is home to such businesses, most notably Ziegfeld's/Secrets.
23. While I would support legislative efforts to curb abuse of complaints to regulatory agencies about entertainment venues, I would want to carefully craft any proposal that impacts a neighborhood's ability to work with the government when legitimate concerns about bars, restaurants, or entertainment venues are raised. I expect that any business will hold itself to a high standard the same as any resident. I believe it is appropriate to hold the same level of expectations for our businesses, as we do our neighbors, in contributing to making a vibrant and safe neighborhood.
24. I appreciate the thoughtful and forthright proposal regarding prostitution outlined in the Agenda: 2010 document shared by GLAA. I welcome a conversation about what can be done to improve the lives and circumstances by all impacted by prostitution. As a Councilmember and a policy maker, I must weigh the requests and needs of a community when they ask their elected representative for help battling against the negative community impact and public safety risks they experience from rampant prostitution. But I am sympathetic to the situation that leads many prostitutes to these acts. I am open to working with GLAA and others to find a proposal that both protects neighborhoods struggling with the horrible impact that prostitution brings to their streets, alleys, homes, and community, as well as works to provide at-risk individuals relying on prostitution the means to have access to health, addiction, counseling and other services.