

Michael Brown 2012
Response to the Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance of Washington, DC
2012 Questionnaire for D.C. Council Candidates

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

- 1. In the event of congressional action leading to a ballot initiative in the District that would take away the civil marriage rights now enjoyed by same-sex couples, will you oppose the initiative and will you publicly defend civil marriage equality?**

Yes. As you are aware, I faced extreme pressure from the opposition to speak out against this law. Standing with my belief of fairness and equality, I was proud that I co-introduced and voted in favor of the "*Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Equality Amendment Act of 2009*." I also publicly opposed the proposed ballot initiative through interviews with the media and in testimony from the Council dais. While I believe that the majority of the residents of the District would overwhelmingly support marriage equality, I do not believe that granting basic civil rights to a specific population should be dependent on the will of the majority. These rights should be granted to us all. This would not have been acceptable during the civil rights movement and it would not be acceptable now. If warranted, I would support any efforts to fight such a move in the courts.

PUBLIC HEALTH

- 2. 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?**

Yes. These offices should have the authority to issue competitive grants and should receive levels of funding for those grants that are not only similar to other constituent offices, but determined based upon the needs of the community and its population.

- 3. Will you defend the District's hard-won and life-saving medical marijuana program against attacks or further restrictions, whether from Congress, federal officials, D.C. officials, or residents?**

Yes. I was proud to co-sponsor and vote for the "*Legalization of Marijuana for Medical Treatment Amendment Act of 2010*" and will continue to publicly support and defend the implementation of this law. While I believe that it is reasonable to allow neighborhood residents to voice concerns on location decisions, especially when they are being concentrated in one part of the city, I have continued to advise and educate residents that the cultivation centers and dispensaries do not present any inherent problems to an adjoining neighborhood. I have also shared concerns over the delay and implementation of the program and will continue to work with the relevant agencies to begin enacting the program as quickly and safely as possible.

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4. 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.

Sadly, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is one of the biggest health concerns within the District. With the highest rate in the country and with an infection rate of 3% (3 times what the CDC defines as a generalized epidemic) it is clear that reducing the transmission of HIV needs to continue to be a priority for our local and national government. Even prior to joining the Council, I was deeply involved with the fight against this epidemic while serving on the board of the Whitman Walker Clinic. Since I have joined the Council, I have continued to be an advocate for greater testing, education, outreach, treatment and funding. I often cite the findings and recommendations of the DC Appleseed report and the subsequent periodic "report cards". One of the first bills that I co-introduced was the "*Comprehensive HIV Prevention Plan Act of 2009*," which called for a science based 5-year strategic plan to prevent the transmission of HIV. I have also been the only Councilmember to ever sit on the board of the local chapter of the Black Leadership Commission on AIDS which is a collaborative effort that brings black clergy to the table to engage in grassroots outreach through their ministry. The goal is to educate their congregations on how to prevent the transmission of HIV as well as to take on the stigma associated with HIV and get past some of the more conservative views within the church that have been damaging in the fight against HIV. I was also happy to co-sponsor and vote for the "*Senior HIV/AIDS Education and Outreach Program Establishment Act of 2012*" and the "*HIV/AIDS Continuing Education Requirements Amendment Act of 2012*." These bills will help facilitate peer-based outreach and education to the senior population in DC which has been disproportionately impacted by HIV and will ensure that our medical professionals are getting further education on how to address the issues associated with HIV.

Moving forward, I will continue to be involved with and supportive of these efforts. I will also continue to support the recent progress the District has made regarding routinized testing, health data collection, condom distribution, needle exchange programs, and science based health education in our schools. Furthermore, I will remain committed to increasing access to mental health services for those who are grappling with issues related to infection and access to treatment and housing for those living with the disease. There has been significant research that has shown that housing and treatment is not only important to limiting the numbers who die of this disease, but it is also an important method of reducing transmission. Lastly, no matter what my role, I will always devote myself to ending the damaging and unjustified stigma associated with HIV.

While I have focused my answer on HIV, it is important to note that many of these actions will similarly have a profound impact on limiting the transmission of many other Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND JUDICIARY

5. 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?

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Yes. As a proponent of Hate Crimes legislation, I believe that it is imperative that law enforcement properly categorizes, records, and makes transparent these crime statistics. Without access to this information in an accurate and timely manner, we will not be able to analyze and make fully informed decisions regarding our policing strategies. Last year, in the District, we experienced an unprecedented rash of crimes against the Transgender Community. I publicly spoke out about these crimes and personally reached out to the affected community organizations and the victims' families to share my concerns and sorrow.

6. Will you support funding for MPD to hire or contract qualified trainers to provide LGBT-inclusive cultural competency training including the handling of intimate partner violence?

Yes, if we do not have the qualified expertise internal to the Department (such as the Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit) than I would support funding for such an initiative. The District benefits from numerous non-profit organizations that could facilitate these needed cultural and awareness trainings including many I have worked with such as the DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Transgender Health Empowerment. Moreover, I find it equally imperative for the training to be continual throughout the year as opposed to a responsive knee-jerk reaction as has been customary.

7. Will you oppose legislation to make permanent the so-called Prostitution-Free Zones (PFZs), which facilitate anti-transgender profiling, and will you vote to repeal the current PFZ law?

Yes. Despite the fact that 8 of my colleagues supported the "*Prostitution Free Zone Amendment Act of 2011*" when it was introduced, I opposed the bill and heavily advocated my opposition to the Chair of the Judiciary Committee who, after a public hearing, rightfully refused to move the bill.

HUMAN RIGHTS

8. 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?

Yes. It seems reasonable to expect the Director of the Office of Human Rights to have the relevant training and experience necessary to effectively fulfill the duties of the office, preferably including a background in civil litigation and social services. The Office is the front line for residents, especially those in minority populations, to rely upon when faced with discrimination. I would also expect the Chairs of relevant Boards and Commissions to have a similar background.

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YOUTH AND SENIORS

9. 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?

Yes. I remain fundamentally opposed to the congressionally mandated expansion of the voucher program in DC, especially as it relates to religious institutions. I have, on numerous occasions, written statements and letters to Congress, Mayors, and Unions expressing my opposition to this program. Federal Education funding should not be seen as a way of compelling our government to relinquish our commitment to the DC Human Rights Act and the separation of church and state. Furthermore, diverting needed funding from our public school system, while in the midst of major reforms, to test an ideological policy that is not supported by the residents of DC (or academic research), is not something that I will ever support. Frankly put, no public monies should be used to subsidize the agenda of a religious institution.

10. 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?

Yes. The research is clear that abstinence only sex education doesn't work and with DC's STD rates that is simply not an option for our youth. I will continue to proactively support evidence based, comprehensive, and developmentally appropriate sex education and condom distribution in all our schools, including our charter schools that have been hesitant to adopt these across the board standards.

11. Will you support legislation to ensure equal Medicaid spousal impoverishment protections for same-sex partners, including providing local funding to pay for benefits that are denied at the federal level due to the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act?

Yes. While I wasn't aware of this issue until reading the GLAA 2012 agenda, I am committed to not only supporting this legislation and related funding, but I will explore introducing the bill myself. I would be interested in working with interested advocacy groups to establish such legislation that can be used as a model nation-wide.

CONSUMERS AND BUSINESSES

12. 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, without excluding any ward?

Yes, I believe adult entertainment is protected under freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. However, I also do believe it is important to have proper regulations and licensing standards to protect the business, the worker and the patron at such businesses. No Ward should receive differentiated treatment from another. However, I believe that valid concerns,

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such as traffic or noise, voiced by affected neighborhoods surrounding the business should be factored in to the decision.

13. Will you support legislation to curb abuses involving endless series of baseless complaints to harass or extort bars and restaurants?

Yes, however this legislation would have to be carefully crafted to ensure it does not result in the loss of one's ability to file legitimate complaints against a business.

14. What will you do to provide alternatives to incarceration for marginalized and at-risk populations like homeless youth and transgender people who resort to prostitution for survival?

I will continue to champion the need for more proactive programs that give marginalized populations real opportunities to succeed in today's society. Since joining the Council I have been the biggest advocate on the Council to protect and increase funding for job training programs, homeless services, and affordable housing, all of which are needed to help stabilize the lives of many who are economically marginalized. I have also passed legislation that would require detailed outcome measures for this funding so we can be sure we are funding the most effective programs and providers.

As the former chair of the Committee on Housing and Workforce Development I also worked with the Mayor and the Department of Employment Services to launch a targeted Project Empowerment pilot program, which provided job training to transgender people. I also authored and introduced the "Homeless Services Reform Amendment Act of 2009" which, among other things, mandated that a homeless youth provider be represented on the Interagency Council for the Homeless (ICH) and that the strategic Homeless No More plan include a section on addressing issues of homeless youth. I also was the only Councilmember to advocate that an additional \$1.7million be placed on the FY13 Budget Priority list specifically to increase the capacity of homeless youth providers.

Additionally, I strengthened inter-agency coordination, planning and budgeting regarding services for returning citizens by modifying the constitution and purpose of the Commission on Re-Entry and Ex-Offender Affairs. ("Returning Citizens and Ex-Offender Services Reform Act of 2010") and added hiring incentives within the reformed First Source Law for returning citizens disconnected youth and other marginalized populations.

I will continue to fight for these and other necessary programs that provide opportunity to our marginalized populations.

Your record is part of your rating. Please list any actions that you have taken that may help illustrate your record on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

In addition to the many items I listed in the above answers I also would like to note that I have been a vocal supporter of MPD's Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit (GLLU) and have supported the goal of maintaining this award winning community policing unit with a fully staffed core unit as well as the growing affiliate officer program. I have also spoken out against hate crimes and stressed the importance of better tracking and enforcement of our hate crimes statute.

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Furthermore, I was the original author of the "Bullying Prevention Act of 2010" which was recently passed by the Council, which included strong protections of one's sexual identity.

Additionally, I have been working throughout the summer with the DC Trans Coalition to implement the passage of the "Vital Records and Name Change Amendment Act" to facilitate an individual to obtain a new birth certificate with a gender designation other than the one originally assigned.

In closing, I am heartened by the passage in California of legislation prohibiting "reparative" therapy that seeks to change a minor's sexual orientation from gay to straight. I am very interested in working with GLAA to determine if such legislation is needed in the District of Columbia.

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