

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?

When the District's Human Rights Act of 1977 was passed, it was one of the most progressive human rights laws in the country, protecting people from discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and other areas. In 1979, the City Council passed legislation barring ballot measures that restrict the rights of citizens. The 1979 legislation, which is a complement to the Human Rights Act, became of monumental importance in the successful battle for marriage equality. Those who fought to pass the 1979 legislation prohibiting discriminatory ballot measures had extraordinary foresight. While our neighbors to the north have to contend with a ballot initiative that could overturn their recently won civil marriage rights, same-sex couples in DC are protected from discriminatory ballot initiatives that would violate the Human Rights Act. These protective provisions have stood up in the courts several times, protecting the civil marriage rights of same-sex couples here.

The only threat to marriage equality in the District is possible congressional action. The fact that the residents of the District even have to fear this speaks to the larger issue of Congress meddling in the affairs of the District and using this city as a political pawn. 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, I would oppose the initiative and would publicly and vehemently defend marriage equality. When I served on the County Council in Prince George's County, I fought hard to convince my constituents and state legislators to support marriage equality, even when doing so was not politically expedient. Therefore, I had no compunction about doing the same in the city where I was raised, if Congressional action leads to a ballot initiative here. Moreover, I would counter this egregious abuse of congressional power to mobilize national attention not only in support of marriage equality in DC, but also for more legislative and fiscal autonomy for the District of Columbia.

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, I will support legislation giving the directors of the Office of GLBT Affairs and the Office of African Affairs the authority to issue competitive grants. As someone who has served on the Board of the District's Latin American Youth Center, the Nonprofit Roundtable of Greater Washington, and the Washington Area Housing Partnership, I have understood for a long time how important nonprofits and other community organizations are to improving the lives of citizens. Let's face it – the DC government does not have the financial resources or expertise to address issues of vital importance to every resident or constituency in the city. Nonprofits do a great deal to meet the unique needs of major underserved segments of our population. This is certainly true of nonprofits and community organizations that serve the District's GLBT community and African community. It makes sense to give the authority for issuing competitive grants that could benefit these communities to the very constituent offices that currently serve as a bridge between these communities and the District government. No other government entity is better equipped to understand the needs of the District's African community than its Office of African Affairs. Likewise, no other District government office understands the unique challenges and workings of the GLBT community like the Office of GLBT Affairs.

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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 or D.C. officials?

Yes, I will defend the District's medical marijuana program against attacks or further restrictions, whether from Congress, federal officials or DC officials. Medical marijuana is a doctor-prescribed, life-saving tool that helps seriously ill patients. In DC, the medical marijuana program is tightly controlled and the Legalization of Medical Treatment Initiative Amendment Act of 2010, which legalized the use of medical marijuana, has survived the scrutiny of a congressional review period. The law enables patients to have safe access to medical marijuana, instead of having to turn to open-air drug markets, where the marijuana may be contaminated and where their doctor could not closely monitor the dose.

As is often the case in the District, there is irrational opposition to this law from a few sectors. Members of Congress occasionally threaten to overturn the District's medical marijuana law to score political points. Then, there is the possibility of a challenge from the U.S. Department of Justice, although this has only been exercised in other jurisdictions, thus far. There is also an occasional uproar from residents who do not understand or appreciate how closely monitored the city's medical marijuana program is. I am committed to defending this law and maintaining the dignity of those citizens who need this life-saving medicine.

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.

As a Council member, there are several steps I would take to increase the efficacy of the HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, STD, and TB Administration (HAHSTA). First, I would improve the HIV prevention measures that HAHSTA employs. Educating the public about post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and making the treatment available in all of the city's emergency rooms and health clinics (including on college campuses) are two things that HAHSTA could do to dramatically curb the rate of HIV infection in the city. The PEP drug regimen, if taken within 72 hours of exposure to HIV, greatly reduces the likelihood of infection. However, there are health-care professionals in the city who are unfamiliar with PEP and would not know the protocol for prescribing it to a patient who fears HIV infection.

HAHSTA could also do more to educate and engage hard-to-reach populations around HIV. Elderly residents are often overlooked in HIV prevention messaging and need special attention as so many feel that HIV is not an issue for them. The reality is that many seniors are sexually active and need to be reminded that they too need to use protection. Of course, HIV is spread by non-sexually means among seniors, too. An act as simple as sharing one's insulin needle with friends at a senior care center can put elderly residents at risk for HIV infection. Similarly, HAHSTA could do more to reach the deaf and hard-of-hearing community with HIV prevention messaging.

In terms of health surveillance, HAHSTA must do a better job of collecting data. During the previous administration, the Mayor's Office of GLBT Affairs released "A Report of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Health in the District of Columbia." This report - the city's first lesbian, gay and bisexual health report - left out the transgender community. This is especially egregious because so little national data on health disparities among transgenders is available. The national data is often an indicator of what communities should be examined more carefully on the state and local level, due to trends. The city's 2010 health report would have been an excellent opportunity to look at health disparities among the local transgender community. In the future, the DC Department of Health (including HAHSTA) must include the transgender community in health reports; moreover, the city should publish more frequent GLBT health reports.

Some of the tools HAHSTA currently employs are effective. For example, HAHSTA has had a successful condom distribution program for years. According to the DC Department of Health's FY2012 Proposed Performance Plan, the program goal set forth for FY 2011 was to distribute 3,000,000 condoms (male and female) and the actual number distributed in FY 2011 was 5,186,340. Moreover, HAHSTA

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launched the "Join the Rubber Revolution" campaign on November 10, 2010. This condom social marketing campaign resulted in increased condom requests made directly to HAHSTA and several community partners augmented their condom orders. The condom distribution program needs continued monitoring to ensure the gains made thus far continue into the future.

Likewise, the District's Needle Exchange Program has been a success to curtailing the transmission of HIV. Due to this program, the District saw a 62% decrease in the number of HIV cases resulting from injection drug use between 2005 and 2009. Therefore, it is essential that the Needle Exchange Program in the District continue. As an elected official in Prince George's County, MD, I led the fight to create a needle exchange program because I know how effective these programs are. I would certainly fight hard here to protect the District's needle exchange program, if Congress ever targets it.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND JUDICIARY

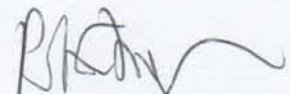
5. Will you press for increased oversight of the Metropolitan Police Department's gathering and analysis of crime statistics to ensure greater comprehensiveness and objectivity, including transgender-related hate crime data?

Yes, I will press for increased oversight of the Metropolitan Police Department's gathering and analysis of crime statistics to ensure greater comprehensiveness and objectivity. Several recent incidents reveal shortcomings in the MPD's gathering and analysis practices. For example, officers reporting to a crime scene where five lesbians were attacked refused to take a report from the victims on the scene. Had the mother of one of victims not complained to the department about the officers' failure to take her daughter's report at the scene, it is doubtful that a report would have ever been taken. Officer Joseph Morquecho of the Gay & Lesbian Liaison Unit (GLLU), which had no officers on the scene the night of the incident, interviewed Yazzmen Morse, one of the victims, three days later. The GLLU report characterized the attack as a hate crime. This incident underscores the need for better evidence gathering and analysis by the MPD.

This is especially needed when it comes to transgender-related hate crime data. The uptick in violence directed at the transgender community merits meticulous work at crime scenes by the MPD. However, there are some officers within the MPD who find it challenging to treat the transgender community with respect, courteous and professionalism. This is totally unacceptable. In August of last year, an off-duty MPD officer shot into a car of five people when one of the three transgender women in the vehicle rebuffed his sexual advancements. While the MPD responded quickly to the incident, the fact that it happened reveals how some within the MPD views transgenders. When negative attitudes about transgenders permeate the culture of MPD, it is no surprise that gathering and analysis of statistics about transgender-related hate crimes are not taken seriously. More oversight of the MPD gathering and analysis is definitely needed.

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, I support funding for the MPD to hire or contract qualified trainers to provide LGBT-inclusive cultural competency training, including the handling of intimate partner violence. Currently, Gays and Lesbian Opposing Violence (GLOV), Rainbow Response Coalition, and the DC Trans Coalition (DCTC) provide volunteers to train the MPD on cultural competency. While these volunteers have been invaluable in training new recruits and lateral transfers, the MPD should not rely on volunteer resources for this training. There are resources within the MPD that can be directed towards hiring or contracting qualified trainers who use an established curriculum to help eliminate homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism within the MPD. This training must include how to be sensitive to cases of LGBT partner violence since 75% of all reported GLLU cases involve such violence.



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?

Prostitution-free zones played an arguably small role in an overall reduction of prostitution in the city. In fact, police have never made an arrest using the prostitution-free zone statute. PFZs only contribute to short-term changes in how street-level prostitution operates. This type of law is discriminatory towards transgender individuals who congregate and give police the right to take action with a lower burden of proof. PFZs do not address the roots causes of prostitution, also known as sex work. Taking into account the aforementioned I will oppose legislation to make permanent the so-called Prostitution Free Zones and take healthy alternatives into account.

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, I believe that the Director of the Office of Human Rights should have professional training and experience in civil rights law enforcement. I take the work of this office seriously and feel that the Director must be able to vigorously pursue violations of the Human Rights Act of 1977, one of the nation's most inclusive human rights laws. The Director's ability to check staff work and defend the law rests on his or her expertise in civil rights law enforcement.

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?

I think this question paints with a very wide brush. I will not oppose all federal and local voucher programs that fund students in religious schools, because not all religious schools tolerate or teach violations of human rights, particularly of LGBT human rights.

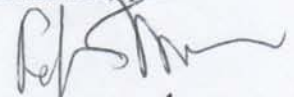
10. Will you oppose the use of either federal or District taxpayer funds to promote "abstinence only until marriage" sex education that undermines safer-sex programs by excluding more comprehensive information?

Yes, I will oppose the use of federal or District taxpayer funds to promote "abstinence only until marriage" sex education that undermines safer-sex programs by excluding more comprehensive information. It is unrealistic to assume that young adults will all remain abstinent until marriage. Even with the passage of marriage equality in the District, the very idea of "abstinence only until marriage" implies that everyone wants to get married and sets up the ridiculous fantasy where those that do not get married never have sex. "Abstinence only until marriage" sex education contributes to the spread of sexually transmitted infections by failing to teach young adults about effective risk-reduction methods that are highly effective, such as routine condom use.

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, I support legislation to ensure equal Medicaid spousal impoverishment protections for same-sex partners. Since DC Medicaid relies in part on federal financial support, it is subject to the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which may result in same-sex spouses of nursing home residents being denied full spousal impoverishment protections. According to a Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services memo in June 2011, State Medicaid Directors may offer some, but not all of these benefits. I believe that the repeal

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of DOMA is long overdue and that the denial of full impoverishment protections to same-sex spouses is discriminatory and wrong. Even if the District has to provide local funding to pay the benefits that are withheld at the federal level because of DOMA, I support full spousal impoverishment protections for nursing home residents' same-sex spouses.

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?

I support the right of adults in the District to choose adult-oriented entertainment and the right of appropriately licensed and zoned businesses to provide it, without exclusion of any ward. I also support full citizen participation in licensing and zoning hearings.

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

I will support legislation to curb abuses involving harassment and extortion of bars and restaurants so long as such a law doesn't impinge on legitimate rights the rights of neighborhood residents to have constructive input in permitting and zoning.

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?

Too often, individuals belonging to marginalized groups and at-risk populations are forced into prostitution as a means of survival. In many cases, gay teenagers who were kicked out of their homes or left school due to harassment and bullying resort to survival sex in order to sustain themselves. Likewise, widespread transphobia and harassment in schools leads many transgenders into prostitution. Arresting and prosecuting these individuals accomplishes little to dissuade people from engaging in survival sex and amounts to treating the symptom and not the root of the issue. As an alternative, the city should support the creation of more drop-in centers, job training programs, and counseling for these at-risk populations. The Office of GLBT Affairs is actually in the process of improving job training and placement opportunities for LGBT youth and transgenders through programs, such as Street Wise.

Another investment that offers an alternative to incarceration is the establishment of more transitional housing in the city. Transgender Health Empowerment's Wanda Alston House provides transitional housing for LGBT youth as well as job training opportunities. It is a major success story; however, before it officially opened, the Wanda Alston House had a long waiting list. The city needs to invest in more transitional housing for LGBT youth and at-risk populations, such as transgenders. In the future, the city must make every effort to keep the location of these transitional houses secret in order to protect the residents from harassment and free from the stigma often associated with living in transitional housing.

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

As far as my record, I would like to allow MD Del. Heather Mizeur speak for me, as she did in a recent letter to supporters: "He has a distinguished track record of advocating for social justice, especially for the LGBT community. Peter has long been a vocal advocate for marriage equality; he led the fight to create a needle exchange health program in Prince George's County; and he served on a state Commission to Study Sexual-Orientation Discrimination, which paved the way for a successful statewide anti-discrimination bill. Peter is a devoted, committed public servant who has stood with me countless times on the issues that matter to our communities. I know he will do the same for you as a DC Councilmember."

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