

Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance of Washington, DC

2014 Questionnaire for D.C. Council Candidates

PUBLIC HEALTH

1. Will you act to ensure that the District provides transgender-inclusive health insurance to all D.C. Government employees, to include coverage for sex affirmation surgery (also known as sex reassignment surgery)?

Yes, I will. I agree with the position that sex affirmation surgery is not a cosmetic surgery. I believe that current attitudes regarding transgender inclusive health insurance are tinged with biases that have yet to be fully eradicated. In terms of building on the recent victories of the DC LGBT community, I believe that ensuring full and equal rights for transgendered individuals is one of the primary focuses.

I believe that DC should follow WPATH health insurance standards, and set the example for private industry as it relates to the health care of transgendered individuals. I cannot think of any more discriminatory act than to have arbitrary exclusions on the provision healthcare that is based on one's identity. Once again, I believe that the bias that underlies such discrimination is that transgenders are "choosing" to be so, instead of affirming what is their true identity. Given the mental and psychological issues that result from lack of medical attention, I believe that the government has a duty to meet medically necessary obligations of it's employees. And sex affirmation surgery qualifies as medically necessary by every mainstream health organization in the country. DC should lead the way in aligning our policies to be more just and equal in today's society.

2. Will you support budgets that target funds to address health disparities in the LGBT population, including in mental health and substance abuse treatment?

Yes, I will support budgets with targeted funds to address health disparities in the LGBT population. Health care should always be targeted to address the areas with the greatest need. I am not an advocate of an one size fits all approach to health care distribution, I am an advocate of specialized approaches to address varying needs. To begin, we must focus and target our programmatic approaches, by using data to determine which groups or which subsets of the LGBT population are at high risk for mental health or substance abuse problems. Then we must use our budget to support the adoption of programs and policies that are based on evidence and are culturally appropriate in terms of the focus on the LGBT community.

We must not only learn more about the root causes of disparities by analyzing data, but we must educate the public, policymakers, and other stakeholders about such disparities and the data centric strategies to effectively address specific issues in the LGBT community. Finally we must build partnerships with agencies and organizations that either focus on LGBT issues, health, or substance abuse so that there are broad coalitions to address some of the root causes of these disparities (poverty, health care access, and discrimination). It is important for the planning of programs to address health disparities actively involve and engage members of the targeted community. Finally, we must begin to do a better job of documenting the impact of our programs. We must do a better job at monitoring the health outcomes of those at high risk, and in evaluating the success of programs that focus on LGBT health disparities. As such, we can better make the case for increased budget expenditures to address demonstrated needs. Our goal must be to achieve health equity. Health equity has also been defined as "the absence of systematic disparities in health between and within social groups that have different levels of underlying social advantages or disadvantages—that is, different positions in a social hierarchy"

3. Will you support reforming the medical marijuana law and regulations to delete the outdated list of qualifying conditions and rely instead on a physician's diagnosis of medical needs?

Yes, I believe that our current framework is overly restrictive and not aligned with current trends as it relates to treatment of medical needs. I support reliance on a physician's diagnosis, with some limitations and/or restrictions to a broader list of qualifying conditions, to ensure that we do not set up a system that is frequently abused, such as the system in California.

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

First, HAHSTA has to determine and do a better job of communicating its vision with stakeholders. I believe that HAHSTA needs to take a holistic approach in the design of its public health programs, that focuses on understanding then responding to the social determinants of health outcomes. As we make major changes in terms of health care distribution, with the implementation of the ACA, we must take steps to avoid unintended consequences and improved outcomes as a result of the new distribution framework. In terms of HIV prevention, we must begin with a recognition that social determinants of health like poverty, unequal access to health care, lack of education, stigma, and racism are linked to increased rate of HIV in certain populations. In general, the goal of HAHSTA needs to be to achieve health equity. First, HAHSTA must do an assessment to determine areas of inequitable health distribution as it relates to HIV prevention, surveillance, and mental health services.

Above all, we must ensure that there is stability and certainty as it relates to the leadership of the agency, and we must reform the model of the agency so that is not so reliant on subcontractors that can have varying degrees of quality and cultural competency. In terms of surveillance, we must ensure that the

computer tracking program has capacity for HIV surveillance. In terms of prevention, we must first have as robust of a testing framework as possible. To strengthen the testing framework, we must record late testers and the proportion of first time testers. We must continue with the strides that have been made in terms of condom distribution. In addition, we must ensure that there are standards as it relates to sexual health education in our non traditional schools. Sexual health education is critical as it relates to HIV prevention. Opposing criminal liability for transmission is something I support for health reasons, in that drives unsafe and underground activity. Finally, we must mitigate and address concerns regarding the new Ryan White structure. We must document the impact and analyze the data to ensure that improvements to the structure can be made.

JUDICIARY AND PUBLIC SAFETY

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 am a believer in evidence based policy solutions, and one cannot implement said solutions without comprehensive and objective data. Currently, we must improve stats for LGBT related hate crimes and for intimate partner violence. These crimes are easy to misdiagnose, which leads to uneven and suboptimal policy responses. We must ensure that we implementing comprehensive training to deal with these issues. DC is one of America's most LGBT inclusive cities, therefore our response to LGBT related crime should not be a niche approach but an comprehensive approach that underscores the scope of the problem. As such, I support a full GLLU unit and for multi agency approaches/data collection practices to ensure that across DC's multi jurisdictional police ecosystem there is consistency as it relates to crime statistics.

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

We must first work on programs to address the root causes (poverty, access, and discrimination) that drive those who rely on sex work for survival. Understanding the causal factors of those who rely on sex work for survival is instructive in designing policies to promote public safety. I support community courts designed to offer correctional alternative programs to those populations that have social determinants that drive higher rates of crime. The alternatives should focus on providing resources to address the causal factors of the activity. A good example are drug courts used across the country or the East of the River Community Court in DC.

Alternatives to prison include: fines, mediation, community service, electronic monitoring, intensive supervision, day reporting, drug rehabilitation centers, community courts and, residential restitution.

7. Will you support funding to hire qualified trainers to provide LGBT-inclusive cultural competency training to all police officers, including in the handling of intimate partner violence?

Yes, I support this as part of a comprehensive approach to strengthen the skillsets of the MPD. LGBT inclusive policing is not a niche focus of our police department. With the large LGBT population in DC, LGBT inclusive policing is essential and fundamental to maintaining and promoting public safety here in DC. Our approach is not comprehensive or substantive enough to meet the demonstrated need for increased cultural competency across the MPD.

HUMAN RIGHTS

8. Will you insist that anyone appointed as Director of the Office of Human Rights be required to have professional training and experience in civil rights law enforcement?

Yes, we must do a better job in vetting and selecting the best candidates for appointed positions. Far too often, we conduct limited searches or we hire the politically connected to execute important city functions. Given that the DC Human Rights Law is one of the most expansive, and certainly a model for others, you would expect the our director would be an expert as it relates to civil rights law enforcement. Clearly, such experience should be a basic criterion for said appointment.

9. Given the limited results from trans-inclusive Project Empowerment training, will you push to establish a project at the Department of Employment Services to increase government hiring from under-represented populations, including the chronically underemployed trans population?

Yes, I will push for a project to increase government hiring of the trans population. I am a believer of using the government as a vehicle for apprenticeships and targeted hiring to drive our city's employment goals. As such, I think that the government is well position to demonstrate our city's commitment to full employment for all, and to demonstrate to the private sector that our chronically underemployed trans population is underemployment for lack of opportunity not due to lack of merit/skill. I believe in promoting entrepreneurship as a pathway for those who have obstacles and barriers to their employment.

Discrimination and educational disadvantage provide seemingly insurmountable barriers to employment. Our city leadership must find ways to not only create more jobs, but also provide opportunities for our residents to break through their barriers to employment and become economically independent. Entrepreneurship is a proven path to economic independence. Our city government is in the position to provide the tools and support for entrepreneurs to build successful small businesses in the District of Columbia.

Here are some ways we could do it:

Help Small Businesses Get Started

For many business owners, the hardest part is getting started. Our government should support innovation and encourage entrepreneurship. I support the creation of a **city-funded venture fund** to provide seed and early-stage funding for local businesses.

We must also provide the space for businesses to start and grow. I support the **creation of innovation incubators and hubs across the city**. Successful incubators like 1776 on 15th Street NW, Hive 2.0 in

Anacostia and Affinity Lab on Historic U Street give us the blueprint for how providing the space and support for burgeoning entrepreneurs makes all the difference in helping them to grow and thrive. The District government can provide that type of support on a broader scale for so many other District entrepreneurs and make DC a city that not only supports, but encourages, entrepreneurship and economic independence.

Connecting to the tools to Start, Grow and Thrive

The District Government can be a common house for collaborative efforts to help small businesses start, grown and thrive in our city. Sometimes, the hardest part of getting resources is finding them. We can create the network necessary to get resources to entrepreneurs who need them most.

I support **bringing together a network of existing private sector venture and private equity funds** to increase access to investors willing to leverage capital into DC businesses. The innovation of our residents is a worthy investment and the District government should provide the space for the necessary networking and collaboration to take place and make this investment possible.

YOUTH AND SENIORS

10. Will you support improved services and treatment for LGBT homeless youth and seniors, including transitional housing?

Yes, as a young high school student, I volunteered at SMYAL, and gained an awareness of issues impacting LGBT youth in general. What I learned that social problems that impact at risk populations in DC are more prevalent in the LGBT community. This is also the case as it relates to homelessness. There are additional drivers of LGBT homelessness that are distinct from traditional drivers of homelessness (poverty, mental health, substance abuse). As such, we need a more robust approach to address LGBT homelessness than our approach generally. Following the logic articulated above, if homelessness is a growing problem in DC in general, the problem is overrepresented in the LGBT community. As such we have to update our housing first and pathways to housing programs in order to accelerate the time-span in which we connect those without homes to solid, transitional housing.

In the District of Columbia, homelessness is a serious problem. D.C. has some of the highest levels of homelessness in the country, and the city's current policies to address it are ineffective and needlessly expensive. In today's Solution, I am going to discuss how deep the problem of homelessness is in the District, and how we can fix it.

In a [given year](#), about 15,000 people are homeless in Washington, D.C. And there is not enough emergency shelter to house them. On an average night, D.C. shelters are forced to turn people away 25 times. Families with children who apply for emergency shelter beds are routinely rejected, for lack of resources. The so-called capital of the free world literally has children sleeping on the streets, with nowhere for them to go.

Not only does D.C. not have enough resources to meet the needs of its homeless, it often wastes money it does put toward shelter efforts on short-term, stop-gap solutions. When it's so cold outside that

people are in danger of hypothermia, D.C. is required by law to provide shelter for anyone who doesn't have it. But because there simply aren't enough beds to meet demand, D.C. foots the bill for hotel rooms, costing the city millions of dollars, and not doing anything to fix an individual's long-term homelessness problem.

What's frustrating about the high rate of homelessness in Washington, D.C. is that we know what policies we need to support to virtually end it. We just need the will and leadership to make that happen. So let's make it happen, by prioritizing both *prevention*, so homelessness happens less in the first place, and *treatment*, so our city's most vulnerable residents no longer have to sleep outside against their will.

Addressing the root causes of homelessness

We know what causes homelessness. It could be any of these things, or some combination thereof: poverty, lack of affordable housing, mental illness, substance abuse, barriers to employment, and generally inadequate social supports. If we can systematically address these challenges, we can stop homelessness from happening before it starts.

First, **we need to pay all our workers a living wage**. According to [data compiled](#) by the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless, workers earning the minimum wage in D.C. (currently \$8.25 per hour) must work approximately 132 hours per week for 52 weeks a year to afford a typically priced two-bedroom apartment in the city. It is not right that D.C. residents can work so hard and still not be able to make ends meet, which is why I **support a living wage of \$12.50, indexed to inflation and the rising cost of living**.

And we need to **make housing affordable**. Current city policies are making housing more expensive. Since 2000, the number of available affordable housing units in D.C. has fallen more than 30 percent. Meanwhile, D.C.'s housing voucher programs are so underfunded as to be almost useless; the average wait for a voucher stands at 20 years. (The data in this paragraph is also from the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless, linked to in the paragraph above.)

Meanwhile, we have to improve social services for vulnerable residents so they are not at higher risk for becoming homeless. We must **ensure we have mental health and substance abuse services available to everyone in the city, regardless of their ability to pay**. We have to **help people find employment**, and **train people in technology and other marketable skills, so they have better employment opportunities in general**. We need to **stop job discrimination against D.C. citizens who have served time in prison** and who are returning to their communities, looking for work. And we've got to **prioritize education for our young people, from pre-K through college**, so D.C.'s youth have an economically vibrant future to look forward to.

Building social infrastructure to keep homelessness from happening is crucial. But knowing that homelessness does happen now, with great frequency, and will continue to happen in the future (though hopefully with less frequency), we need to make sure we have the resources in place to deal with it. We absolutely must **fund shelter expansions** so they can meet the needs of District residents. It is a shame that one of the country's wealthiest cities cannot supply enough beds for its most impoverished citizens.

Perhaps most importantly, we have to be visionary about how we house our homeless residents. Whatever problems homeless people face, housing is the most crucial thing. D.C.'s own Christy Respress, executive director of Pathways to Housing D.C., [recently explained](#) to Think Progress the role of housing in fighting the challenges of homelessness comprehensively:

"It's housing first. Housing ends homelessness — it's pretty straightforward. It doesn't cure mental illness and it doesn't cure addiction, but what it does is that it gives the human being who's living with those issues the safety and stability of a home so that they can begin to be able to deal with those issues... With a home, people start wanting to address [the mental health issues] naturally."

The state of Utah has come to the same conclusion as Respress. Through a ["housing first" policy](#), Utah has reduced its homeless population by 74 percent in a decade, and it on track to end homelessness in the state completely by 2015. How? The state recognized it was spending more on an annual basis to incarcerate, shelter, and treat its homeless population in emergency rooms than it would cost to pay for housing and case-workers services for every homeless person in the state. So Utah secured permanent housing situations for its homeless, provided other social supports (on which housing is not contingent), and managed to both save tax money and dramatically reduce homelessness generally. **D.C. should look to "housing first" programs**, like the one in Utah, to see how we can more innovatively and successfully find solutions to homelessness in our city.

CONSUMERS AND BUSINESSES

11. Will you support strengthening Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) reforms by eliminating license protests filed by citizens associations and ad hoc groups, requiring stakeholders to participate in the community process provided by the Advisory Neighborhood Commission?

No, I believe that citizens associations should have some voice in ABC matters. I am in favor of limiting the ability of the citizens association to unduly obstruct business formation. Perhaps the solution comes in allowing for the citizens association to have an influential VOICE on the matters without having the ability to protest and obstruct new licenses.

12. Will you defend 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, I will defend the right to chose adult oriented entertainment. As a world class city, we have room for a variety of forms of businesses. I was not in favor of the way that adult oriented businesses were removed from the Southwest/Half Street areas. Currently our zoning structure is too punitive as it relates to adult oriented businesses, which can have negative unintended consequences.

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, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.

Record

In high school, I volunteered with SMYAL and performed in a theatrical production that dealt with victims of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. In college, I organized as Vice President of my fraternity, a forum on homophobia. I attended Morehouse College, an same sex college that has experienced is diverse in terms of sexual orientation. We had recently had some incidents of homophobia, particularly an extremely violent assault on a young man in a dorm bathroom. By organizing the forum with my fraternity, we partnered with the LGBT community to get the message out the campus at large. As allies, we helped to foster a more supportive and empathetic community or our college campus.

At Morehouse, I was Executive Director of the Student Government Association. I joined Safe Space in efforts to build a coalition that reflected all of the interests of the student body. We helped to develop, build, and support Safe Space as an organization on the campus of Morehouse College. Our support helped make the organization to be accepted "mainstream" on my college campus.

At UC Berkeley, I've worked closely with the LGBT caucus as a member of the Coalition of Diversity. It is from this experience, where a small, tight knit progressive community was able to flourish through community, collaboration, and coalition, that I have developed my philosophy on building coalitions between progressive communities. It is my hope to build a similar coalition within the progressive communities of Washington D.C.

I am currently a member of the Stein Club and have done field interviews with the HRC to strategize on building LGBT support East of the River.

In terms of events, I've attended and marched in the Gay Pride Parade, Black Pride, fundraisers for LGBT elected officials, celebrations for the victory of marriage equality and the GLAA Anniversary Reception. I am an active member of the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club, and have worked to grow it's membership. I am also a member of Covenant Baptist Church, which is pastored by Rev. Dennis and Christine Wiley, who is one of the leaders of Clergy United for Marriage Equality. This church is known to be socially progressive and have a very diverse congregation in terms of sexual orientation. I've campaigned in gay bars, gay nightclubs, and in the homes of gay individuals, in that I believe that one must go directly to where your constituents are to learn their issues and effectively represent them. My staff in all of my campaigns and as Shadow Representative have included members of the LGBT community and I was awarded a Champion of Equality award by the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club.

Blade Articles I am mentioned in

<http://www.washingtonblade.com/2013/11/20/gay-republican-enters-council-race-marc-morgan/>

<http://www.washingtonblade.com/2014/01/15/d-c-council-candidates-court-lgbt-voters/>

<http://www.washingtonblade.com/2012/02/19/norton-bowser-win-stein-club-endorsement/>

<http://www.washingtonblade.com/2012/09/20/d-c-s-gay-friendly-election/>