

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)? [Note: this question has been overtaken by events since it was drafted at the start of 2014. Study the Mayor's executive action here: <http://tinyurl.com/kn2dzty>]

Yes. I strongly support the Mayor's executive action to remove exclusions in health insurance on the basis of gender identity or expression. I agree that gender dysphoria is a medical condition that should be recognized as such by insurance companies, and insurance plans should cover medically necessary treatment, including gender reassignment surgeries. In the future, I would like to see laws that expand this removal of discriminatory exclusions to all health insurance providers.

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. The LGBT community is at disproportionately higher risk among youth and adults with respect to mental health and substance abuse issues. For example, 16% of students in DC public high schools identify as LGBT and face increasing instances of bullying, while almost 20% of all students have reported being bullied for being LGBT. The government should target funds to address health disparities in the LGBT population.

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 Will you support reforming the medical marijuana law and regulations to delete the outdated list of qualifying conditions and rely instead on a physician's diagnosis of medical needs?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 support the Medical Marijuana Expansion Emergency Amendment Act of 2014, which Mayor Gray signed on July 29, 2014. Under the law, DC physicians may now recommend marijuana for any debilitating condition they think would respond favorably to the therapeutic use of marijuana, and licensed medical marijuana cultivators may possess 500 plants. These amendments, however, expire on October 27, 2014, and I believe these changes should be made permanent pending review.

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.

As a pro bono attorney, I have worked for years with The DC Appleseed Center on its HIV/AIDS reports. I have tremendous respect for Executive Director Walter Smith and the social justice work he advances in the community. Along with my colleagues at Paul, Weiss LLP, I led the Public Education section of the report, assessing policy and providing legal advice to DC Appleseed.

As the Eighth Report Card outlines, I support further improvements of HAHSTA in grants management; HIV surveillance; monitoring and evaluations; and sexual health education across charter schools.

I agree that HAHSTA's HIV prevention measures must include programs targeting overlooked populations, continuation of the needle exchange program, and continued distribution of condoms, among other measures.

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. Gathering and analysis of crime statistics is critical to improving law enforcement efforts. In 2008, there were 29 reported violent crimes against members of the LGBT community; in 2011, that figure climbed to 43. Careful analysis of statistics and responsive policing could help reduce these crimes.

Furthermore, based on a task force report released in February 2014, Police Chief Cathy Lanier acknowledged that the police had "fallen short" in relations with the LGBT community and needed to "revise and update training across the board" with respect to LGBT issues. I strongly support these reforms.

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?

Our government must do more to provide alternatives and engage marginalized and at-risk populations. First, with respect to education, the government must invest in expanded learning (after-school activities) for students, LGBT and anti-bullying programs, and re-engagement centers that provide focused counseling and services for youth. Second, in terms of homelessness, the government should bolster family reunification programs, transitional housing, and shelter set asides for LGBT youth. Finally, mental health services and STD testing and treatment should be strengthened for at-risk populations.

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. With the police largely relying on volunteer efforts to provide LGBT-inclusive cultural competency training, it is important that government funding boost these efforts. Grants should be administered by the Office of GLBT Affairs, and implemented by the police in conjunction with the community.

I agree that training should incorporate the handling of intimate partner violence, which occurs in LGBT relationships at rates similar to heterosexual relationships.

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, I think it is important that the Director of the Office of Human Rights be required to have professional training and experience in civil rights law enforcement. In addition, I believe deeply in transparency and accountability, and support greater oversight by the DC Council of the Office of Human Rights.

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?

I will advocate for projects at the Department of Employment Services to increase hiring of under-represented populations. As you cite in your Building on Victory 2014 policy statement, transgender people are unemployed at a rate of ten times the national average. This is unacceptable, and the government should provide greater assistance to under-represented populations.

YOUTH AND SENIORS

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

Yes. I support Bill 20-51, the LGBTQ Homeless Youth Reform Amendment Act of 2013. If elected, I will also fight for greater affordable housing in our city, through consistent and more substantial investment, private-public partnerships, and increased oversight.

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?

As an ANC Commissioner and Chair of the ABC and Public Safety Committee for ANC 1C, I oversaw the renewal applications of over 70 liquor license applications and the Adams Morgan Liquor License Moratorium. I worked with local businesses, civic associations, and residents to find a balance between positive economic growth and quality-of-life concerns. My ANC also submitted a plan to ABRA to allow new restaurant liquor licenses in Adams Morgan for the first time in over 5 years. I support the ANC process and would consider limiting the involvement of ad hoc groups in the protest process.

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?

This would not be a priority of mine on the Council. Establishments that are appropriately licensed and zoned should be entitled to their rights under the law.