

# Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance of Washington, DC 2020 Questionnaire for D.C. Council Candidates

## GLAA Ethics Disclaimer:

***GLAA believes that elected officials are stewards of the public trust and therefore must hold themselves accountable to the highest ethical standards. GLAA, therefore, will not issue any rating for candidates who, in their capacity as elected officials, were expelled from any elected post, or resigned, for ethics violations that include, but are not limited to, conflicts of interest, self-dealing, and malfeasance.***

## HEALTH

1. Will you support budgets that target funds to address LGBTQ health disparities, including in mental health and substance abuse treatment, and mandate data collection and timely reporting on these populations?

Absolutely. As Chairman of the Committee on Government Operations, I have oversight over the Office of Human Rights and the Mayor's Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Affairs. In my role as Chairman, I have supported increased funding for both offices, and have worked with the directors of both agencies to ensure that resources are aimed at addressing LGBTQ health disparities.

In my meetings with advocacy groups and conversations with residents about the health care needs faced by the community due to discrimination, harassment and stigma it's clear that we must do more to close this gap. In particular, investments and emphasis on the health care needs of LGBT youth, especially around mental health, is critical given an increased likelihood of suffering from depression and suicide. I also support safe spaces in the District and better access to mental health services.

## JUDICIARY AND PUBLIC SAFETY

2. Will you support Bill 23-435, the Tony Hunter and Bella Evangelista Panic Defense Prohibition Act of 2019?

Yes. I was honored to co-introduce this bill. The tragedies that befell Tony Hunter and Bella Evangelista should never happen again--in the District or anywhere else. The use of the "panic defense" draws on stigmas and legitimizes hate crimes. Although I am not a member of the Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety, so cannot vote in committee, I look forward to voting in favor of the bill when it comes before the entire Council.

3. Will you support revision of the DC Riot Statute, Section 22-1322 of the District's penal code, to correct its overly broad language that allows abuse of prosecutorial discretion against individuals who exercise their First Amendment rights?

Yes. I was a co-introducer of the Rioting Modernization Amendment Act of 2020. Freedom of speech is one of the most fundamental and important constitutional rights, even more so now, when federal policies are targeting our most vulnerable communities.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

4. Will you support a Gender Equity and Neutrality in the Official Code Amendment Act to update the D.C. Official Code as necessary to ensure that outdated terms are removed or replaced as well as to utilize language inclusive of the gender diversity of our population?

Yes. I fully support efforts to modernize language in both local and federal code that doesn't reflect our current values related to equality and our language around gender. I commit to vote in favor of this bill, or similar legislation that updates outdated language in our laws.

5. Will you support Bill 23-0318, Community Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2019, to decriminalize consensual sex work for people 18 or older and create a task force to monitor the implementation and effects of the act?

Not in its current form: I understand that many people turn to sex work because they cannot find legal employment due to bias and stigma. However, I am concerned that decriminalizing sex work would increase the illegal sex industry, potentially creating an environment ripe for trafficking. I'm not sure the bill, in its current form, does enough to protect the exploited, however, I would support the creation of a task force to look at the issue and how we might address these challenges.

6. Will you support increased funding for LGBTQ budget priorities, including fully funding the Office of Human Rights and establishing a new competitive community development grant program in the Office of LGBTQ Affairs?

Yes. Prior to the Covid19 pandemic, I was working with the Office of Human Rights to identify staffing and resource needs. I believe that for OHR to be most effective, they must have increased funding and additional staffing. I am committed to working closely with new Interim Director Michelle Garcia and OHR's stakeholders to identify opportunities for funding and capacity building. I have also worked closely with Director Sheila Alexander Reid in the Office of LGBTQ Affairs support developing a grant program to get more dollars into community programs to expand successful programs and explore new opportunities.

7. Will you support a study of employment of transgender individuals in the government of the District of Columbia as a first step to creating a truly inclusive workplace and the implementation of transgender employment initiatives?

Yes. I know that many transgender people have experienced some form of workplace discrimination, perhaps even losing a job due to bias. However, the District celebrates its diversity, and there is no place for this behavior. Although the OHR conducted a study in 2015, it is outdated, so I believe it's important to have updated data and information on this issue and I am committed to creating legislation that would require an updated study. Given the 2017 U.S. Department of justice memo authored by then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions, determining that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act doesn't protect transgender

individuals from workplace discrimination, the District has to be even more diligent in strengthening protections for LGBT workers.

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## **YOUTH**

8. Will you support improved services and treatment for homeless LGBTQ youth, including extended transitional housing?

Yes. I've worked closely with Casa Ruby, which serves as an essential safe space to some of our city's most vulnerable residents. I am committed to doing all I can to ensure it has the resources necessary to keep its staff and clients safe and protected from abuse and violence.

## **SENIORS**

9. Will you support improved services and treatment for LGBTQ seniors, including affirming senior housing and tenant based rental assistance and the Care for LGBTQ Seniors and Seniors with HIV Amendment Act of 2019?

I have a special passion for helping seniors, especially those who may not have traditional family support. I co-introduced B23-0037 - Care for LGBTQ Seniors and Seniors with HIV Amendment Act of 2019, and I held a hearing on February 19, 2020, when it was referred to my Committee on Government Operations. We were in the process of working with advocates and the Office of Human Rights on strengthening the legislation with the intent to move the legislation forward this spring, prior to the Covid19 pandemic, which has put a hold on non-emergency legislation and our work on this matter. However, I remain committed to passing the bill before the end of the year.

## **HOME RULE**

10. Will you oppose Trump administration efforts to nullify the legal identities of transgender individuals, such as by assigning a person's gender based on their "original" birth certificate?

Yes. I believe all people have constitutional protections against discrimination and the escalating actions being pursued by the Trump Administration to roll back progress made by the transgender community. It is shameful that taxpayer resources would be used to promote discrimination of any kind, and I would fully and publicly oppose efforts to do so.

***Please give more than a simple "yes" or "no" response to our questions — though you should begin with a "yes" or "no." The depth and completeness of your answers play a major role in determining your final rating.***

***Your record is part of your rating. Please list any actions that you have taken that may help illustrate your record on behalf of LGBTQ people. Feel free to attach relevant documents such as letters to the editor, legislative testimony, campaign literature, etc.***

- In FY20 Budget, the Committee on Government Operations supported a 29% increase in funding for the Mayor's Office of LGBTQ
- Co-introduced and voted in support of **B22-0840 - LGBTQ Health Data Collection Amendment Act of 2018**
- Co-introduced **B21-0804 - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Health Disparities Documentation Act of 2016**
- Introduced **CER22-0397 - Wanda Alston Foundation 10th Anniversary Ceremonial Recognition Resolution of 2018**: To recognize the incredible work and legacy of the Wanda Alston House
- Voted in support of **B22-0972 - Conversion Therapy for Consumers under a Conservatorship or Guardianship Amendment Act of 2018**
- Voted in support of **B22-0331 - Nonbinary Identification Cards Amendment Act of 2017**
- Voted in support of **B21-0016 - Collaborative Reproduction Amendment Act of 2015**
- Voted in support of **B21-0444 - Death Certificate Gender Identity Recognition Amendment Act of 2015**
- As noted above, prior to the Covid19 Pandemic, I was working with OHR to ascertain their staffing and resource needs. I believe that for OHR to be more effective, it must have increased funding and additional staffing.
  - OHR is under new leadership, and I will work with Interim Director Michelle Garcia to address OHR's needs