

**Answers of Ed Lazere, Candidate for DC Council At-Large  
Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance of Washington, DC  
2020 Questionnaire for D.C. Council Candidates**

**NOTE: Many of my answers draw from my LGBTQ+ platform posted on my website as part of Pride Month 2020: <https://www.edfordc.com/issues/lgbtq/>**

**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?**

Yes.

As a Council member, I will work to improve access to mental health services, with a focus on LGBTQ+ residents and youth. We know that 38% of single youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ+ and that they are at higher risk for mental and behavioral health concerns. Through my work at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute, which I led from 2001 through March 2020, I participated in coalitions to expand school-based mental health services (such as the Do More with \$54 campaign) and to fully fund the District's plan to end youth homelessness. I would continue to push for these as a Council member, and would work to ensure a special focus on LGBTQ+ youth.

I also will work to fight for budget decisions to address HIV in the District. DC ranks 5th among all American cities in the number of new HIV infections and has the largest per capita number of adults diagnosed with HIV in the United States. In 2018, of new HIV diagnoses among men who have sex with men (MSM) two-thirds were Black and one-eighth were white. Black and Hispanic MSM are significantly less likely than white MSM to be aware of PrEP, to have discussed PrEP with a health care provider, or to have used PrEP within the past year. In 2016, Mayor Bowser released the 90/90/90/50 Plan to End the HIV Epidemic in the District of Columbia by 2020. While there has been steady progress, this year's report reflects the necessity to increase availability, accessibility, and acceptability of services.

Finally, I will push for funding to ensure comprehensive data collection on the health status of LGBTQ+ residents. In 2018, the DC Council adopted the LGBTQ+ Health Data Collection Amendment Act, but did not provide adequate local funding. I support the request of LGBTQ+ organizations this year to provide \$700,000 to adequately collect information on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression of respondents to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) and the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS).

## **JUDICIARY AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

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

Yes. We must fight for a society that embraces everyone for who they are and protects everyone who fears for their safety simply because of their identity. That includes never allowing someone accused of a crime to use their victim's identity as part of their defense.

As a Council member, I will work against anti-LGBTQ+ bias and strengthen capacity to address hate crimes motivated by sex, gender identity or expression, and sexual orientation. Anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes account for nearly half of all hate crimes reported in DC in 2018, and the majority of these crimes involved assaults—including assaults with dangerous weapons—followed by threats, robberies, and property damage. I support providing resources to the Office of Human Rights to ensure the LGBTQ+ community will receive justice in employment, housing and government services. I will use my bully pulpit to pressure the U.S. Attorney's office to investigate and prosecute hate crimes. And I support fully bringing DC's criminal justice system under local control.

### **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?**

Absolutely yes. The response of DC's Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) this summer to the protests in support of Black lives has shown why this is needed. MPD used tear gas, rubber bullets, flash bangs, kettling, and mass arrests without evidence in response to largely peaceful First Amendment protests. Even with emergency legislation from the DC Council banning these practices, MPD continued to use them by declaring they were responding to riots, when the incidents were not anything close to what a reasonable person would call a riot. We need to take many steps to increase police accountability, including this.

## **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. The English language includes unnecessary gender references, and this shows up throughout official documents and communications from the DC government. Gender references exclude people who are gender non-conforming and highlights their marginalization. We should work to promote universal language that reflects inclusivity of all residents and all of their identities. That means both 1) removing gender references when they are not needed 2)

and using language that is inclusive of all gender identities in any communication where reference to gender is needed.

**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?**

Yes. I'm committed to helping find a path forward to better protect this community and give them better access to resources.

Whether someone engages in sex work as a choice or because society has given them little other choice, sex work is work: something someone does to make a living. Criminalizing sex work does not stop it, and in fact further victimizes and puts at risk those engaged in survival sex, a disproportionate share of whom in DC are trans women of color.

I support decriminalizing sex work to protect the health and safety of sex workers. After criminal penalties were removed in New Zealand, sex workers were more likely to report instances of violence, and street-based sex workers were 62 percent more likely to refuse a client because they felt unsafe.

Decriminalizing sex work will reduce the likelihood of police harassment and violence. In DC, one in five sex workers has been approached by police asking for sex. 78% of DC sex workers surveyed said that when police approach them they fear violence, harassment, arrest, humiliation and other concerns. Almost 80% of sex workers surveyed went to the police for help when needed but officers often refused to assist them or made the situation worse

Addressing sexual exchange as a public health matter would improve connection to services, increase the ability to negotiate safer sex practices, and reduce the transmission of infectious diseases (HIV, STIs).

Decriminalizing sex work also will decrease human trafficking. Most sex workers are not coerced or trafficked. However, sex workers are in the best position to identify who is being coerced or trafficked, and removing criminal penalties allows them to be full partners in efforts against exploitation.

**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. I was impressed by the thoughtful and well-documented FY 2021 budget requests from the LGBTQ+ community this year. And I support their requests

As noted above, I support increasing funding for the Office of Human Rights to ensure the LGBTQ+ community will receive justice in employment, housing and government services.

I support expanding competitive grants to community-based organizations through the Office of LGBTQ+ Affairs, with community input and Council oversight, similar to those offered through the Mayor's Office of Latino Affairs (MOLA). MOLA provides small grants to Latino-serving organizations to provide services and programs in the areas of health, housing, education, jobs, and small business development based on the Mayor's priorities. Funding for grants in the Office of LGBTQ+ has been very modest in the face of significant needs. More granting would support the infrastructure of LGBTQ+-serving organizations in areas like housing, workforce development, crisis intervention, harm reduction and more.

**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 will support such a study and share any surveys related to it through my network. Unfortunately, job discrimination against transgender people is widespread. As a Council member, I will work to address it urgently, with a special focus on DC government. A 2015 OHR report found that In a test of job discrimination, 48% of DC employers appeared to prefer at least one less-qualified applicant perceived as cisgender over a more-qualified applicant perceived as transgender. 33% of employers offered interviews to less-qualified applicants perceived as cisgender while not offering an interview to at least one of the more-qualified applicants perceived as transgender. And the applicant perceived as a transgender man who had prior work experience at a transgender advocacy organization experienced the highest individual rate of discrimination.

**YOUTH**

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

Yes. We know that 38% of single youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ+ and that they are at higher risk for mental and behavioral health concerns.

I support fully funding DC's plan to end youth homelessness, and I support the budget request of the LGBTQ+ community this year to support targeted workforce development services to transgender youth experiencing homelessness, including work readiness and skills training, and making connections with employers; building those relationships are key to overcoming the many barriers that transgender youth face.

## **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 LGBT Seniors and Senior with HIV Amendment Act of 2019?**

Yes. I am committed to meeting the unique needs of LGBTQ+ seniors, including housing, social isolation and food security. Housing is not affordable for many older adults and elders with low and moderate incomes. LGBTQ/SGL elders are more likely to have low incomes than their heterosexual counterparts, particularly those who live alone. LGBTQ/SGL elders fear subtle and overt discrimination in medical and social services, retirement homes, and assisted and long-term care facilities.

As a Council member, I will work to ensure there are dedicated housing vouchers for LGBTQ+ seniors and that discrimination is prevented in senior facilities, and that reports of discrimination are investigated and addressed.

## **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 oppose the ongoing attempt by the Trump administration to remove sexual orientation and gender identity as a protected class as established by the Obama administration. I support enforcing existing protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in all walks of life, including the workplace, housing, healthcare, education, and transportation. That must start by allowing people to self-identify their gender, including the full range of non-binary identities.