

**Leave No One Behind**

**2022 GLAA Questionnaire**

**Charles Allen - Ward 6 Councilmember**

*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 link relevant documents such as letters to the editor, legislative testimony, campaign literature, etc.*

**Housing**

* Do you support providing sufficient affordable housing units for all households earning less than 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI), such as, allocating vacant apartments to very low-income households, ensuring sufficient funds for the Housing Production Trust Fund are dedicated to these renters, and strengthening inclusionary zoning laws?

I support using every tool in our toolbox to ensure that our housing supply meets the District’s housing needs, including deeply affordable units and workforce housing. I support using the HPTF to build more housing for individuals earning less than 30% of the AMI, and I support strengthening our inclusionary zoning laws.

The HPTF is probably the most efficient tool we have to subsidize housing for extremely low-income families, and it’s troubling that the Mayor has in the past not hit the statutory requirements for affordability levels. The Council needs to engage in more forceful oversight to ensure that HPTF dollars are used first to subsidize housing affordable for families at extremely low-incomes, while layering other tools to subsidize housing at higher income levels.

If oversight isn’t working, the Council may need to take matters into our own hands. For example, working with affordable housing developers and advocates, I led an effort to ensure that the Mayor actually uses the local low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) program that the Council created in 2015. For years, the Mayor ignored this tool for funding low-income housing, so I added language to the law that removed much of the Mayor’s discretion in issuing the local LIHTC, guaranteeing that it will get to affordable housing projects that can use it. The local LIHTC can be used as gap funding for projects around 60% AMI, which are already getting federal LIHTC funding, leaving more HPTF funding for 30% AMI projects. We need more solutions like this to free up the HPTF while still ensuring we encourage affordable housing at a range of income levels.

#### I also believe that as a Councilmember, I have a responsibility to actively use my voice to advocate for more affordable housing. I’ve helped take a project from 30% affordable to 100% affordable by using community partnerships to build a shared vision and the power of my seat to change the expectations and possibilities of a project. And similarly, when some in a community fought against affordable housing like permanent supportive housing, I stood up to push back on misguided fear-mongering and shepherded an important project through the community and Council process. As elected leaders, we must fight with more than just budget and legislative action, but also bring the power of our seats and our voice to deliver outcomes our city needs.

As co-chair of the Council’s Special Committee on COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery, I also ensured that the Special Committee’s recently-released recovery plan emphasizes the need to explore a wide range of policies to build more affordable housing. In particular, I ensured that the report recommended using the upcoming Comprehensive Plan rewrite to ensure more dense housing and strengthen inclusionary zoning requirements.

* Do you support improving access to housing voucher programs by increasing the number available, as advocated for by The Way Home Campaign and LGBTQ+ Budget Coalition, and reforming program eligibility rules?

In the FY 2022 budget, I successfully led the effort to increase income taxes on the District’s highest earners and then directed that revenue into housing for our unhoused neighbors, among other transformational investments. This funding created thousands of new vouchers, and much of that increase was directed to providing permanent supportive housing vouchers for individuals experiencing homelessness. While I am not familiar with the specific proposal you mention for reforming program eligibility rules, I am certainly open to improving access. I’d also add that in the FY 2022 budget, I identified funding from my Committee specifically for targeted services and emergency housing for LGBTQ+ residents.

**Workers’ Rights**

* Do you support enacting legislation decriminalizing sex work for adults, including the selling and purchasing of sex and third party involvement not involving fraud, violence or coercion?

I generally support the decriminalization of commercial sex work, and I believe that we should be having robust community conversations about the impact of criminalization on District residents, and particularly LGBTQ residents and residents of color. Two Council sessions ago, legislation was before the Judiciary Committee that I moved forward to a hearing. The hearing was very powerful but also very contentious - particularly between sex worker advocates and anti-trafficking advocates. I had concerns about the specific bill before the Council at the time, its potential unintended consequences, and these deep divisions, but would certainly evaluate any future legislation with an open mind. There is not currently enough support on the Council to move a bill forward, so importantly, the topic of decriminalization would benefit from renewed community engagement and advocacy to educate my colleagues and the District at large.

Speaking more broadly, my own professional background is in public health. I bring that lens to bear in all my work on the Council, and particularly as Judiciary Committee Chair. I also consider myself a common-sense problem solver, so I just don’t believe that community concerns about sex work are only resolved through continued criminalization. I fully support health- and social services-based supports for individuals who consensually engage in sex work and those who are trafficked, whether or not there is support on the Council for legislation at this time.

* Do you support repealing the subminimum wage for tipped workers?

Yes. I am glad that the ballot initiative will be on the general election ballot, to ensure all District residents will be able to make their voice heard on this issue. I voted against overturning the last ballot measure in 2018, and I promise to respect the will of the voters once again.

* Do you support funding the Office of Human Rights (OHR) at a level that ensures the agency ends its case backlog, completes discrimination cases in a timely manner, and effectively engages in community education and outreach?

Yes. I have funded numerous new positions and public education campaigns at OHR when the Judiciary Committee had oversight of the agency and also last year to accompany the LGBTQ+ panic defense legislation I passed through my Committee. Their mission is critical and has been long neglected by the Executive. Through partnerships between advocates and Councilmembers, we are finally right-sizing OHR’s staffing, but there is much more work to do operationally to shorten case processing times. I am fully supportive of more resources for OHR and have directly delivered many myself.

**Health**

* Do you support establishing overdose prevention facilities in the District to reduce deaths from drug overdoses?

Yes. Speaking again to my public health background and my own experience with the opioid epidemic across the city and in Ward 6, personal opioid use is a health crisis, not a criminal behavior. I fully support the District establishing prevention and treatment facilities and think it would go a very long way in addressing the epidemic of opioid use and overdoses in our community. This is a particularly relevant question right now, given a recent cluster of fatalities in the Southwest neighborhood in Ward 6. I knew some of the victims and was very affected by those losses – and renewed in my own dedication to bringing more attention and resources to this hidden crisis.

* Do you support removing the criminal penalties for drug possession for personal use and increasing investments in health services?

I believe personal drug use is primarily a health issue. I authored and passed legislation to decriminalize the personal use of paraphernalia for the same reason. As I mentioned in my response to the decriminalization of sex work question above, though, my political evaluation of the support for such a proposal on the Council has likely the same chance of success, so continued advocacy and education are needed among Councilmembers and also in the community. I have been very impressed with the work of the coalition supporting the proposal this session but still see significant resistance among many of my colleagues, which I think stems from a real or perceived lack of support in the community. I fully support increasing investments in health services.

**Policing and incarceration**

* Do you support reducing D.C.’s total pre-COVID-19 incarcerated population by one-third to one-half by FY30?

Yes, but the real question is do I support a transformation of the District’s criminal justice and corrections system, and the answer to that is also yes. We have single-mindly viewed incarceration as the only response to social behavior that violates community norms. While I believe – depending on the crime, harm done, and the danger to the community – that detention or incarceration will be warranted in certain cases, for the large majority of minor incidents, it only increases the likelihood of reoffense because jails and prisons are not environments that promote rehabilitation. Most people should receive rehabilitative services in their communities that will allow them to stay connected to their families and jobs to facilitate their reentry. For those who do need to be held, the Department of Corrections and the Bureau of Prisons must be completely transformed, with the goals of safety and rehabilitation for both the individual and community.

Specifically, I think the gains we have made in reducing unnecessary incarceration during the pandemic (approximately 15-20%) must be sustained, and I say that informed by reoffense analyses conducted of the released populations during this time that conclusively indicated no increases in reoffending. It is both safe and just to be smart on corrections. I also believe that many people serving long sentences have much to offer the District, and their potential is wasted being incarcerated beyond when accountability has been met for the harm caused. Those who are no longer a danger to the community should have an opportunity to petition a judge for resentencing, and this process must be open and responsive, as well, to the wishes of survivors of their crimes. I authored and passed legislation - the Second Look Act - to create this resentencing mechanism.

* Do you support better oversight, transparency, and accountability in the process of investigating and improving D.C. jails, including establishing an independent oversight body, addressing issues impacting transgender individuals, repairing jails, and changing staff culture?

Yes. There already is an independent oversight body - the Corrections Information Council - but I have been disappointed with their performance. In a recent oversight hearing, I told them directly that I expected more frequent inspections, faster report turn-around times, and better communication with my Committee and the public. They immediately conducted inspections of all three facilities, which to me, was promising but only the beginning. I enhanced their staffing in this current budget cycle to provide them with more inspections and analysis capacity, and I will continue my oversight and financial support of the CIC to get them to where they need to be to fully monitor conditions of confinement. I have also visited all three Department of Corrections facilities numerous times to see and discuss the conditions personally with both residents and staff. Most recently this spring, I inspected the food services at the CDF and CTF and ate the meals that were served to residents (which needs significant improvements as well).

I also think we have some incredible reentry programming in the CDF and CTF, and without funding I identified this current budget cycle, the grants for both the Lead Up and Lead Out programs would have lapsed. I identified more than $2 million to continue these very effective programs, which provide pre- and post-release support and employment to residents and currently have zero recidivism.

* Do you support divesting from the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) to further invest in vital programs, including anti-poverty, violence prevention, crisis intervention, and reentry?

I’m a proponent of what I’d describe as a “both/and” approach to community safety. I believe there is a role for law enforcement in responding to and improving community safety, and I am also a strong supporter of investing in all the social programs listed above.

I have passed legislation and funded diversion programs to ensure calls for police service that don’t actually require a police response are diverted to more appropriate responses like a behavioral health or civilian traffic safety alternative. The District has a small but growing diversion program I championed at the Office of Unified Communications (our 9-1-1 center), and they’re currently ramping up to a 24/7 response and adding more categories of calls for diversion.

Every budget I’ve put forward as Judiciary Chair since beginning my tenure in 2017 has invested millions of dollars more in public health-based approaches to violence prevention, reentry services, victim services, and civil legal services. For example, while I have been Chair, the budget of the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement has grown exponentially, from $2 million in Fiscal Year 2018 to more than $34 million this year. We have created an entire violence interruption apparatus that I think complements traditional law enforcement approaches well. I’ve also funded workforce development investments for LGBTQ youth and LGBTQ reentry services grants out of my Committee budget, which I think are absolutely public safety initiatives.

So I don’t view safety as a dichotomy; I view it more as a continuum of approaches that should deliver the right response at the right time. That may sometimes be law enforcement, but will often be community-based and/or public health- and prevention-based.

*Please return your questionnaire responses in PDF format* ***by 11:59pm ET on Friday, April 22*** [*here*](https://forms.gle/BY2LdSwFxyURMwRN8)*. If you have trouble submitting your response through the form, you can email it to equal@glaa.org. GLAA will rate each response at our meeting on April 26 at 7pm ET.*