

**GLAA Questionnaire Responses of James Butler,**  
**Candidate for Mayor of Washington, DC**

**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?

Yes, I support providing sufficient affordable housing units for all households earning less than 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Of the major American cities impacted by gentrification, Washington, DC has seen the highest level of displacement, especially of black and brown families. Gentrification has taken an unfair toll on the District, causing lifelong residents to be priced out of the city and forcing myriad other residents to have multiple roommates in order to make housing more affordable.

I will bring improved rent control to DC. Furthermore, I will update the current rent control laws to include more recent development, not just the buildings constructed before 1976 and will infuse income-based housing into the new law.

In terms of the AMI, I will work to make affordable housing truly affordable by examining how to calculate AMI. Currently, the District uses the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's formula, which factors in counties neighboring the District. This raises what is affordable in the District. There is no law that would prevent me from changing this once I'm Mayor. Changing the law to create our own local formula will make housing truly affordable.

Moreover, I will reduce tax breaks for developers for horizontal developers unless they promise to create affordable housing based on the median income standards for each respective ward.

Another way I plan to improve access to affordable housing is through strategic partnerships. As Mayor, I will monitor and, when necessary, reduce building permits until vacant units are filled to serve residents in our communities and intermingle income-based housing with affordable housing, allowing residents to live in different wards of the city.

- 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?

Yes, as described above, my housing plan looks holistically at how to increase affordable housing. In the District, homelessness is also a serious concern and one that disproportionately impacts people of color and LGBTQ+ residents, with the latter group

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accounting for 29% of people ages 18 to 24 who are experiencing homelessness. I support improving the access to housing voucher programs and this includes allowing individuals to self-certify identity instead of the current practice of requiring a government ID. I support changes to the DC Housing Authority (DCHA) voucher application that would permit self-certification in cases where applicants attest to difficulty in obtaining requested verification documentation. As the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless indicated, this would require changes to the DC Municipal Regulations' current Methods of Verification section. With regard to removing the section that permits DCHA to deny applicants where a member of their household is "proven to have committed" specific offenses, I am willing to support the modification that the DCHA can deny applicants that have been convicted of a crime. Those applicants with pending immigration procedures should not be denied by DCHA solely on that basis, either.

### **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?

No, I do not. While I understand the spirit of the movement to decriminalize sex work for adults, I do not agree that doing so would make sex workers safer from violence, reduce the spread of sexually-transmitted infections (STIs), or reduce stigma directed at sex workers. Instead, decriminalization may strengthen the hand of pimps.

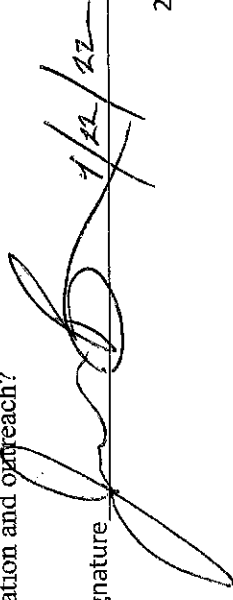
- Do you support repealing the subminimum wage for tipped workers?

Yes, I do support repealing the subminimum wage for tipped workers. Given the high costs of living in the District, a subminimum wage of \$5.05 for tipped workers is unconscionable. In states with the subminimum wage for tipped workers, female restaurant workers are twice as likely to experience sexual harassment compared with female workers in states without a tipped minimum wage, according to "Sexual Harassment & The Tipped Minimum Wage," a fact sheet from Georgetown Law's Center on Poverty and Inequality. The same research found that women of color were disproportionately impacted by sexual harassment as they comprised nearly 50% of women paid \$10.10 an hour or so.

The income disparity and subjugation to sexual harassment led a majority of District voters to repeal the subminimum wage in a 2018 voter referendum. Unfortunately, a majority of the DC Council and the Mayor voted to overturn the referendum and sign the subminimum wage into law.

- 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?

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Yes, I do support funding OHR at a level that will end the backlog of cases there. As an advocate, I'm currently representing clients before OHR and can attest first-hand to the backlog – some cases have been sitting for almost 2 years.

While advocates from LGBTQ, civil rights, and legal have persuaded the DC Council to increase OHR's budget, it is still insufficient to handle the backlog from multiple years. No doubt, the COVID pandemic created strong competition for positions, making it likelier that qualified candidates would choose to work elsewhere where the pay and benefits are better. If OHR is going to attract and retain qualified personnel, the budget must increase more.

### **Health**

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

Yes, I do support establishing safe injection or Overdose Prevention Facilities (OPF) in order to reduce overdose deaths in the District. The estimated 411 deaths in the District in 2020 underscores the need for out-of-the-box approaches to mitigate overdose instances and deaths. When the first OPDs opened in New York City last year, there was an almost immediate and measurable difference – 59 overdoses were prevented within three weeks. A novel approach for sure, OPDs provide access to fentanyl detection tools, sterile equipment for use, access to counseling, and referrals to drug-treatment centers.

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

My ultimate goal is to reduce drug use in the District and save as many lives as possible while showing compassion to residents as they begin the long road to recovery. However, I oppose the decriminalization for possession and distribution. I feel that that sends the wrong message and keeps the city from getting a handle on this growing crisis by actually incentivizing people from other jurisdictions to come into the District to use drugs with impunity.

While no one at an OPF will be arrested for possession, people will face penalties for drug possession elsewhere.

### **Policing and incarceration**

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

No, I cannot commit to decreasing DC's pre-COVID-19 incarceration population by 1/3 without knowing why these individuals were incarcerated in the first place. The District does have an abnormally high incarceration rate, which has created absences in families and communities. Incarceration also takes an enormous mental, physical, and emotional

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toll on those who are locked behind bars. This is especially true for incarcerated transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, who faced increased harassment, violence, misgendering, and discrimination.

However, there are steps that the city can take to improve conditions for the incarcerated population that does not include committing to release a specific percentage within the next 8 years. I do believe that many incarcerated individuals who are serving sentences for misdemeanors can probably be released, but this truly has to be done on a case-by-case basis. For certain, the District needs to do a better job of helping returning citizens to readjust to life after incarceration.

- 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, I enthusiastically support better oversight, transparency, and accountability when it comes to investigating and improving DC jails. This includes establishing an independent oversight body, repairing jails, addressing issues that impact the safety and health of transgender inmates, and changing staff culture.

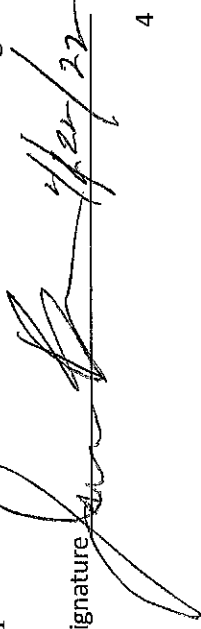
The Department of Corrections (DOC) has finally agreed to house inmates based on their gender identity and minimize their time in solitary confinement prior to their housing assignment. However, transgender inmates should not have to endure the humiliation and disrespect of being addressed by the wrong name or referred to by misgendered pronouns. There is no reason why inmates (whether they are transgender or cisgender) should be barred from wearing wigs.

In order to ensure greater transparency and truly begin to change the staff culture and expedite repairs in DC jails, I envision an independent review board that is similar to the Office of Police Complaints (OPC). As with the OPC, there would be a toll-free hotline where residents, employees at the jail, and former inmates can make complaints. In addition to hearing complaints received from the hotline, the independent review board should have autonomy to access DC jails and to issue reports.

- 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 feel that the MPD is overburdened dealing with a city experiencing a 20-year high in homicides, violent crimes, and carjackings. The officers are currently exceeding 1.1 million hours in overtime since the Department is stretched so thin. This officer shortage

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prolongs the MPD's response time and contributes to stress, illness, injury, and burnout. To mitigate this, I am recommending putting additional, well-trained community-based police officers on the streets in an effort to reduce response time, help reduce officer stress, and allow police to focus their attention on high-crime areas.

I do not feel that now is the time to cut the MPD's budget. However, I certainly see the need for enhanced investments in anti-poverty, crisis prevention, and violence prevention programs as well as programs designed to help returning citizens.

### **My record**

Here are some of the actions that I've taken which help illustrate my record on behalf of LGBTQ people:

- As an advocate, I have represented clients before the DC Office of Human Rights who were discriminated against based on their: gender identity; perceived sexual orientation; and sexual orientation. These cases involved workplace discrimination complaints ranging from nonprofits to Fortune 500 companies.
- I have volunteered as a certified HIV tester with Whitman Walker for over 10 years. To be certified, I attended classes to learn how to test Whitman-Walker clients, provide culturally-competent care, maintain confidentiality, and make referrals to counseling and support services when needed.
- On February 27, 2022, my campaign held a LGBTQ Town Hall at Mr. Henry's Restaurant. During the town hall, I answered questions posed by a moderator, live audience members, and residents who tuned in online. You can find a link to the town hall [here](#).

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