

**Leave No One Behind**

**2022 GLAA Questionnaire**

*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?
  1. Yes, I strongly support providing deeply affordable housing, encompassing 30% AMI (or Median Family Income — MFI) or less for households who are in need. The current system we have for Inclusionary Zoning and even calculations for MFI must be reformed.
  2. The District’s Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) policy represents a necessary first step in affordability, but requires significant reform. When someone thinks of inclusionary zoning, they think “welcoming all,” but this is not quite the reality. D.C.'s zoning policy factors out a group of people who need deeply affordable housing at 30% MFI levels. Any individual or family making below 50% of the Median Family Income cannot afford housing IZ accounts for. The program requires that most new and some renovated residential developments include some affordable homes. In exchange, developers are able to add more density into their developments. Regular IZ set-aside requirements for affordable units are generally 8%-8.33% of the total residential floor area for buildings constructed out of steel and concrete, and 10%-12.5% of the total residential floor area for buildings constructed out of wood. We must develop mandatory policies for developers to encompass these deeply affordable units instead of leaving it to them to make the “right choice” when often the right choice is at odds with the community needs.
  3. There is also a broader issue in how we define affordability, especially with the Median Family Income (MFI). Washington Metropolitan Statistical Area Median Family Income is calculated for all of DC and other outside areas. Even though it encompasses the different levels of income, it’s not an equitable take as 30% MFI in Ward 3 is vastly different from 30% MFI in Ward 8.
  4. Lastly, the Housing Production Trust Fund (HPTF) needs rigorous oversight to ensure DC is developing housing for extremely low-income residents. A September 2021 report from DC's Office of the Inspector General revealed that the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) failed to allocate the mandated 50% of the annual Housing Production Trust Fund to creating housing for extremely low-income DC residents. Effective oversight by Councilmembers, even those who are outside of the Committee on Housing, can mitigate failures such as these to ensure that efforts to produce affordable housing are genuine and effective, and that appropriate funds from the Housing Trust Fund are set aside for extremely low-income communities.
* 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?
  1. Yes, I support improving voucher access to housing programs by increasing the number available and reforming the program’s eligibility rules. This is an important step, but only the first one as a voucher does not equal housing. It currently takes too many steps for a resident experiencing homelessness between receiving a voucher and getting into stable housing and properly integrating into their community. From what I have heard according to local organizations, DC is currently sitting on a backlog of 800 newly matched vouchers just in the first quarter of 2022 alone, and there is a hiatus on case worker matching. This means matched unhoused residents are in a state of limbo, which can last months. We cannot just give vouchers and then expect the problem is solved.

**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?
  1. Yes, I support full decriminalization of all sex work for consenting adults. The criminalization of sex work is a tired, harmful practice that largely masquerades as “safety” but largely functions as a way to aggressively target, surveil, and incarcerate mostly Black and brown LGBTQOA+ folks. Sex work is legitimate work, period. Sex workers deserve decriminalization to ensure they can carry out their business in peace and continue to earn a living in their chosen profession without fear of retaliation. Just as importantly, decriminalization would go a long way to help sex workers feel that they can safely come forward and report harassment, violence, or coercion without being being victimized by police officers themselves.
  2. I firmly believe that legislation to decriminalize sex work must be developed in a transparent way and in partnership with DC sex workers and not outside consultants or national organizations that steamrol local sex workers, disrespect local organizing, exploit years of activism, and whitewash the movement for sex work decriminalization. In our capacity as Councilmembers, we must ensure that any proposed legislation has the support of the people it would first and foremost affect. It is unacceptable to tokenize sex workers, and we must ensure that we are meaningfully engaging with them so that the representation represents their wishes, and not watered down by constituents pushing against decriminalization for outdated and problematic reasons.
* Do you support repealing the subminimum wage for tipped workers?
  1. The minimum wage is exactly what it’s called — the minimum. I’ve spoken with tipped workers and the local businesses employers. Each has expressed how we must move towards a livable wage and I believe Council has the tools to subsidize this move instead of pitting parties against each other. We’re facing concurrent crises — inflation, supply-chain issues, and retaining talent. The DC Council has the ability to subsidize developments and tax abatement for large developments, why aren’t we helping these local businesses that want to pay their employees and not struggle with their own business operation at the same time.
* 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?
  1. Absolutely. There were over 400 cases that met the OHR’s standards in both 2019 and 2020, but less than 50% of each were settled. We need to properly fund OHR to ensure that people who file receive a timely response and that mediation is carried out on a reasonable timeline. I believe that with more resources, OHR can also more effectively mediate cases and potentially have higher success rates.
  2. I also strongly support more funding for their educational and outreach programs, particularly those that educate DC residents of their rights, advertise the existence of the OHR, and encourage residents to bring forward cases. I also believe there should be significantly more funding for the school-based education geared toward students and youth as part of the bullying intervention program. This is particularly important as cases of discrimination against people based on race, religion, gender, and sexuality are rising nationally. I am particularly interested in investing in the bullying intervention because it stresses a public health approach rather than a discipline-based approach, which all too often, especially in public schools, leads to the criminalization of mostly Black, brown, and disabled students instead of truly addressing the heart of the matter.

**Health**

* Do you support establishing overdose prevention facilities in the District to reduce deaths from drug overdoses?
  1. Yes. Overdose prevention facilities are proven by many, many peer-reviewed studies to decrease overdoses but also increase a variety of positive outcomes, including increased entry into substance use programs, reducing the frequency of drug usage, and reducing risk of diseases like Hep C and HIV. Overall, they significantly improve safety and wellbeing for people who use substances, particularly those that may be laced with Fentanyl. This year alone, at least ten people in the District have died from overdoses related to Fentanyl. Overdoses have increased because of isolation, fear of criminalization, and limited access to resources. Establishing these centers would address the fear of stigma and remove the threat of criminalization, approaching drug use and overdoses from a public health approach.
  2. Overdose prevention facilities are also a much more effective use of taxpayer dollars for public health measures, saving lots of money in emergency medical and first responder services. Our city has taken many important steps to improve the ability of our first responders to administer care by equipping them with Naloxone, but establishing overdose prevention centers takes the burden off of first responders who respond to many types of calls, and who are not experts in public health. Public health leaders and fully trained professionals should be the ones working with users to ensure their safety and help set them on a path to long-term safety and potentially rehabilitation.
* Do you support removing the criminal penalties for drug possession for personal use and increasing investments in health services?
  1. Yes. Criminalization leads to more death and wraps users up in the justice system when they should be receiving care and pathways to rehabilitation–and not just through court-ordered programs that are coercive and involuntary. Again, drug use and overdose prevention should all be approached with a public health framework. Putting doctors, therapists, and social workers at the forefront instead of police and emergency responders will take the strain off of our emergency system and allow drug users to get the specific type of care they actually need instead of being cycled endlessly through the system.

**Policing and incarceration**

* Do you support reducing D.C.’s total pre-COVID-19 incarcerated population by one-third to one-half by FY30?
  1. Yes.
* 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?
  1. I believe that there must be an independent oversight body to supervise the conditions of jails, and that that body must work in constant coordination with the Council. During the pandemic in particular, it became abundantly clear that concerned Councilmembers were being shut out of the process and their requests for data and updates continuously stalled because it was clear that the conditions were abysmal and only growing worse with the spread of COVID. I was personally distressed to hear that when quarantining for a disease they caught because of shockingly absent prevention and testing strategies, incarcerated people were forced to stay in cells alone for up to 22 hours a day. That is inhumane and completely unacceptable. So, I want those in charge of running the jails to be held accountable and for there to be a clear plan in place as to how incarcerated people will be cared for should the spread of COVID get worse or another variant arise, without relying on these kinds of inhumane practices.
  2. Any person of a marginalized background should be protected in jail. All too often, discrimination comes not just from other incarcerated folks but from staff themselves, who engage in abusive and prejudiced behaviors. Providing for transgender, queer, and disabled people in jails should be a top priority, and any particularly healthcare needs that they have should be provided without question or delay. Living conditions for jails must be brought up to standards and jails should be subject to unexpected visits from Councilmembers or the independent board at any time to ensure that reforms are being followed. Public health services must also be expanded so that incarcerated people receive the full spectrum of care that any other person would, whether for physical, mental, or psychological care.
  3. It is unclear to me whether increased training for Correctional Officers and jail staff will actually result in improved behavior for those who are long accustomed to getting away with it, but I believe everyone should be expected to follow the training and understand that they will no longer be employed within the jails should they diverge from acceptable procedures. All new staff should also go through extensive training prior to starting work within the jails.
* 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?
  1. Yes, I completely support diverting funding from MPD to social service and violence intervention and prevention strategies. MPD officers and the police union frequently complain that they are being “defunded,” that they are severely understaffed, that any other form of public safety, intervention, or prevention strategies don’t work, and that they are essentially being kneecapped by Council. In my opinion, the Council has not gone nearly far enough. I have developed a comprehensive, 14-page [safety plan](https://sabelforward1.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Layers_of_Safety_Ward1_SabelHarris.pdf) that I believe is just the start of what we can do to invest in true public safety and wellness for our communities beyond simply relying on traditional policing, which has a track record of consistently causing harm in communities across our city.
  2. MPD has been awarded a $516 million operating budget for FY 2022, while violence prevention programs like Violence Interrupters have only received tens of millions. Already, people (MPD included), are clamoring for those meager funds to be invested back into the police. MPD has had decades to prove that they can use the hundreds of millions they are provided with to fairly enforce the law and truly protect the communities they are sworn to protect. But we have seen, year after year, regardless of anti-oppression trainings or so-called reforms, that racial profiling still plays a major role in policing, that Black and brown residents of DC are still disproportionately targeted and incarcerated, and that in the face of public protest, MPD will still rely on relentlessly violent forms of policing to shut down dissent. MPD constantly fear-mongers about the rise of violent crime, even though the vast majority of the cases they handle on a day-to-day basis are nonviolent. And even in those situations, people are routinely stopped, harassed, frisked, or wrongfully arrested for little to no reason at all, except perhaps their race or the neighborhood they live in. In the last decade alone, MPD has paid out $91 million in DC taxpayer money for police misconduct settlements. That is an absurd amount of money, and no other agency would be able to continue without major changes or restructuring with that kind of a performance review. That’s why I support continuing to divert funds from MPD’s budget to the host of other strategies we have at our disposal, ones we have often only tried for a few years.
  3. I believe we should consolidate Violence Interrupters under one cohesive program run by DC, instead of the two currently in existence. People say there hasn’t been a clear success rate, but I don’t believe the programs have received enough funds for us to truly know. Moreover, Violence Interrupters currently operate in only a few areas of the city. While it’s perfectly understandable that more resources are being directed to the parts of the city where residents are burdened with the most violent crime, it shouldn’t be that violent crime in any Ward is ignored. We must fund the VI program so that every Ward can have a robust prevention program.
  4. There are many things that police officers are called on to do, that they are not equipped to handle, or have proven that they cannot do without bias or harmful behaviors. I fully support replacing first responders with licensed social workers, nurses, and mental health practitioners trained in trauma-informed care for any calls involving mental illness. This can and should also include significantly more funding for existing nonprofits addressing mental health in our communities who are doing important work and have already established long-term relationships in the community. Not everything needs to be run by the city, but we can fund those ventures that are already working, especially if we can increase options for and access to therapeutic services for low-income residents, queer residents, and POC residents, who cannot always afford therapy, and when they can, don’t always get to see therapists who understand their lived experiences. I also support comprehensive, long-term follow up victim services for everyone who has experienced the trauma of violent crime, because people are still left with the scars of the crime whether the perpetrator is apprehended or not.
  5. Right now, our understanding of public safety is largely still constrained to preventing violent crime, and punishing those who commit violent crimes. I believe we should expand our view to think about true public safety and wellness. That means we should also be prioritizing investment in our communities, housing, and environment, or as I call it, “investing in place.” That means clean homes and healthy environments, because public health is a key aspect of safety, too. I support a Green New Deal for DC and complete rehabilitation of all public housing and city-run shelters so they are up to standard. We also have to update our physical infrastructure in ways that will help keep us safer–permanently closing slip lanes, identifying and putting in place traffic calming measures, raised and illuminated sidewalks, reflective & LED signage, four-way stops, expanded sidewalks, protecting bike lanes, and more. We can even change things as small as fixing broken street lights, making sure security cameras work, and cleaning streets of trash can help people feel more comfortable in their surroundings. Our physical environment matters and these small adjustments can go a long way.
  6. Since MPD will continue to play a role in public safety, we need to have a clear approach on how they will enforce laws in a way that is truly accountable to our communities. It’s worth repeating from the adage in the Police Reform Commission’s 256 page report from April of 2021 — “The police cannot police themselves.” We need a desk audit of MPD and their practices in the community. From there we can understand what is working and what isn’t while actively restructuring the department to transition away from the confrontational “warrior” model of policing into an empathetic, communicative “guardian” model. This shift necessitates a reconstruction of officer training, recruitment processes, performance evaluations, and internal auditing. Officers must be trained to think critically about the situations they encounter, turning first to de-escalation tactics and peaceful problem solving instead of conflict.

*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.*