

2018 Candidate Questionnaire on Criminal Justice Issues

Facing the District

Dear Advocates,

Thank you for the opportunity to complete this questionnaire, and for your advocacy to elevate issues of discrimination, economic justice, police brutality, poverty, and more to create a District that is just, fair, and respectful of all our neighbors.

Over the last several months I've had the honor of meeting neighbors from every corner of Ward 6, many of whom my opponent doesn't know exist – or doesn't care that they do. That's because I'm out in Ward 6 every day knocking on doors, visiting community centers and shelters, and engaging with advocates. Our vulnerable neighbors are not well represented by someone who dictates how our community is best served from his Ivory Tower, coming out of the Wilson building and into our communities only to chase microphones, ribbon cuttings, or a photo-op. Ward 6 deserves leadership that will meaningfully engage with everyone, especially those who don't make political donations or contribute to our current councilmember's personal enrichment.

We are a progressive community that is strongest when we bring everyone with us, and leave nobody behind. That's not what we've seen over the last four years. The District ought to be leading when it comes to justice of all forms: economic, racial, social, reproductive, and more, yet by most measures we rank near the bottom among similarly sized US cities. As committed advocates, you are to be commended for your work on behalf of our city's most vulnerable and marginalized populations. You also deserve a partner on the DC Council who will fight tirelessly to protect the civil rights of all our neighbors.

An endorsement from this body of advocates would mean everything. It would signal the need for progressive change, and reflect our shared values of compassion and empathy. More importantly, it would send a message to the Wilson building that the status quo has harmed too many of our neighbors, and will no longer be considered good enough. I have had too many conversations with neighbors who cannot afford another four years of tepid oversight of our Metropolitan Police Department, aggressive development without truly affordable housing, discrimination and criminalization of our most underserved populations, and talking points that fail to deliver when it comes to matters of justice. Simply put: we can – and must – do better.

Thank you for the opportunity to earn your endorsement, and for your advocacy on behalf of everyone in the District.

With gratitude,

Lisa Hunter

Candidate for DC Council, Ward 6

The following questionnaire was developed by the ACLU-DC, CARECEN, HIPS, No Justice No Pride, Stop Police Terror Project DC, and Trans United Fund.

Please email your responses to [REDACTED] on or before May 31, 2018.

School-to-prison pipeline/Juvenile Justice

1. Black students in the District are 7.7. times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than their white peers. There is a wealth of evidence that the practice of suspensions and expulsions sets up students to fail by shutting them out of an education, decreasing their likelihood of graduating, and increasing their likelihood of interaction with the criminal justice system. This is the “school-to-prison pipeline.” What steps would you take to address the school-to-prison pipeline in the District?

[A system that lacks uniform definitions of basic punitive actions such as suspensions and expulsions and allows for automatic suspensions to be triggered is inherently unfair and has been shown to be discriminatory. Moreover, when we seek to suspend or expel students for absences, truancy and uniform violations, we are inherently targeting our low-income students who most need our help, and when we remove them from a classroom setting we are causing them to fall further behind.

We can begin to address the school-to-prison pipeline in DC by understanding that opportunity gaps and challenges do not begin when a student walks through the classroom door, nor do they end when a student leaves for the day. Students who already face severe disadvantages at home, and in the classroom, do not benefit from increased time away from the school setting where they will not receive opportunities for educational growth. Unfortunately, our city is home to some of the worst racial and economic disparities in the nation. Many of our students in DC face some of the same socioeconomic and behavioral challenges I observed in my students when I taught in the Peace Corps. In my community, Ward 6, we live among some of the wealthiest people in the city, as well as some of the poorest. Our low-income children face health disparities, food insecurity, undiagnosed medical conditions, unstable housing, and many other challenges that our high-performing students never need to think about. Many of our low-income children live with no access to internet, books or school supplies at home, lack a space at home to concentrate on homework, and they are often insufficiently fed, making it even more difficult to concentrate or get a good night of sleep. Many students come to school having experienced trauma or prolonged periods of toxic stress. We have learned from brain science that when students are in a heightened sense of stress response, it is incredibly difficult for them to learn. To inflict arbitrary punishment on these students in the form of suspensions and expulsions simply serves to widen the already staggering achievement gap we see in our city. We need to focus less on punitive responses in school, and instead commit to adequately funding health, housing

and human services programs so we can solve the underlying disparities that are at the root cause of these problems.

Moreover, I am increasingly troubled by the extent to which our schools continue to discriminate and police the bodies of our female students based on what they wear.

The National Women's Law Center recently issued a [study](#) on dress code policies at DC schools, finding evidence of gender and racial discrimination in the ways the rules are enforced. I have no tolerance for harmful policies that reinforce gender and racial stereotypes, and only serve to take students out of the classroom and widen the opportunity gap. We cannot possibly expect our youth to be successful when the standards we hold them to are flawed, discriminatory and serve to deny them of the education that they deserve.]

2. According to "Beyond the Walls," a recent report by the Georgetown Juvenile Justice Initiative and Rights4Girls, while overall youth involvement in the criminal justice system has declined, the rate of girls entering the juvenile justice system has steadily increased and, in D.C., black girls are significantly overrepresented. What are your recommendations for addressing the specific drivers of the increasing rates of girls in D.C.'s juvenile justice system?

[Simply put, this is unacceptable. DC needs to focus less on incarceration and punishment, and more on addressing the underlying inequities that are leading to these disparities in the first place. We can begin to do so if we start electing leaders who listen to people in communities outside their own.

I engage with neighbors across Ward 6 every day, discussing our juvenile justice system and where DC is falling short. These conversations confirm for me that we have failed our youth, and black girls specifically. **I don't pretend to know what it's like to grow up as a young black girl in DC, but I know enough to recognize that we have held black girls to standards that reinforce dangerous stereotypes, are discriminatory, and unfairly target and penalize black girls at alarming rates.** Enforcement of school dress codes are a glaring example of this.

We must elect leaders who recognize their privilege, care enough to go into marginalized communities to understand the challenges faced by girls in DC, and engage meaningfully with advocates to enact policies that will keep girls in classrooms and out of the juvenile justice system.

I agree with the authors of the "Beyond the Walls" report who call for better information and data on this issue. We should demand that District agencies collect and make available data on girls who are both at-risk and currently involved in the juvenile justice system so that stakeholders can establish tailored prevention and intervention

programs. **It is also critical to listen to girls prior to, and during, interactions with the criminal justice system. “Believe Women” is not just a mantra for straight, gender-binary, white women in 2018. It transcends age, race, gender identity and class and must be applied to the way we engage with our youth, especially black girls.** If elected, I would lead the DC Council on these issues, convening stakeholders and going into the community to elevate the issues and arrive at compassionate, commonsense solutions.

Finally, when vulnerable communities have access to jobs, health care, housing and social services, and mentorship, their interactions with law enforcement and our criminal justice system decrease. When we choose not to adequately fund these programs, and fail to address drivers such as domestic violence and homelessness, as the DC Council has done in recent years, we are failing our neighbors. Interactions with the criminal justice system do not serve a rehabilitative function, and in fact only make it more difficult to access jobs, housing and health care in our community, so our job is to provide support and services to at-risk populations before they find themselves in a position where they are interacting with law enforcement and our criminal justice system.]

3. A driving factor in the school-to-prison pipeline is the increasing reliance on police rather than teachers, administrators, and counselors to maintain discipline in schools, increasing the likelihood that students are subjected to school-based arrests. Currently, there are over 100 “school resource officers” (SROs) working in District schools. In addition to SROs, the ratio of security staff to students in D.C. schools is 1:114, while the ratio of social workers/counselors is 1:283 students. Do you support shifting resources from security and police presence in schools to social workers? Why or why not?

[Yes. We are grossly underfunding our special needs, language access and social work programs, in large part because the DC Council is funding schools at a lower rate in real dollars today than they were ten years ago, and keeps taking money intended to fund specialized services and using it to make up shortfalls in the general fund. This is unacceptable, because it leaves vulnerable students behind, and only serves to widen the already inexcusably wide opportunity gaps we see in our city. We should be adequately funding social workers in our schools because it’s the right thing to do.

Moreover, we know that students learn by example. **When we pump our schools with an abundance of security staff, students learn that militarization is more important than education. That’s wrong. As the Nation’s capital, we should be models for an education system that prioritizes social, emotional, and behavioral approaches to education by adequately funding our schools and the professionals that deliver on these objectives.]**

4. In FY 2016, D.C.'s Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services (DYRS) placed 26% of committed youth in facilities outside the District, not including New Beginnings Youth Development Center, the secure residential facility operated by DYRS in Laurel, Md. Many of these youth were committed to facilities as far flung as Texas and Illinois. How would you ensure all committed youth remain close to the District?

[DC must regain control of its prison population. The success of our returning citizens is largely dependent on the support they receive from family, and from our city in the form of health, job training and other social services. When we relinquish control of our prison population by sending them far away from family, to places that often do not offer the level of services that we should be demanding, we are relinquishing our ability to support returning citizens and help them achieve stability and success when they return home. That is a moral failure. **I believe DC should invest in ensuring committed youth, and indeed all of our neighbors who are incarcerated, are able to remain close to DC, whether through relationships with existing area facilities, or through investment in a facility built, owned and controlled by DC.** We should be invested in the success of all of our neighbors, including those who are incarcerated, so we must move toward a system that is more compassionate, and focuses on rehabilitation, and includes access to health care, mental health services, job training, and educational opportunities. **To that end, and in partnership with families, returning citizens, and advocates, I will push colleagues on the DC Council, and throughout DC government (including DYRS) to regain control of our prison population.**

Police Practices

1. In D.C., decisions to acquire and use surveillance technologies and military equipment are made in secret by the police department without any input from the public or their elected officials. In addition to being acquired in secret, these technologies are used without any community input or oversight. To date, seven other jurisdictions, most recently Oakland, Calif., have passed legislation requiring city council approval before any law enforcement entity funds, acquires, or uses any military or surveillance equipment, and only after the public is given a full and fair opportunity to voice its opinions before the council. Do you support the District enacting such a law here?

[Yes. I would not only support such a law, but would introduce the bill immediately upon taking office. It is unfortunate that my opponent, who chairs the Judiciary and Public Safety Committee, has not made this a priority. I believe we should follow the lead of communities who are seeking to add transparency, and pushback, to efforts that arm our law enforcement with equipment that poses a potential danger to many of our neighbors, particularly when we know that persons of color and members of the trans community are being disproportionately targeted by law enforcement officers.]

2. A recent report by the Office of Police Complaints on Use of Force by the Metropolitan Police Department found that use of force complaints in FY2017 increased by 36% over the previous year, and that since 2013, 90% of all uses of force were against black residents, even as black residents make up 48% of the population. How do you view the responsibility of elected officials in ensuring that local law enforcement operate in a manner that protects the rights of D.C. residents, and what would you do to address the significant racial disparity in MPD's use of force?

[We should start by requiring that the NEAR Act be fully implemented, and that MPD release all data required under the law. It is shameful that they have failed to do so. I am encouraged that the NEAR Act has now been fully funded, and the release of the first dataset required under the law was a positive step, but we are well behind where we should be. The release also shows that we have a lot of progress to make on things as simple as following a criminal offense from arrest through prosecution and sentencing. **I believe that sunlight is the best disinfectant, and we should be requiring full transparency when these disparities are identified.**

We should not only be demanding that MPD provide information about each of these instances, but we should be holding officers accountable when they are found to have used excessive force. **Unfortunately, under Charles Allen, the Judiciary and Public Safety Committee has reflected the interests and perspectives of its white upper-class male Chair, who does not seem aware of these issues, let alone capable of addressing them. We need to elect leaders who lead and govern with empathy, including for those who do not look like they do, or live where they do. For as long as this critical committee is being chaired by Mr. Allen, these are things that we can be sure will be sorely lacking.]**

3. D.C. recently launched a pre-arrest diversion program through an interagency collaboration between the Department of Behavioral Health, the Metropolitan Police Department, and the Department of Human Services. Unfortunately, the agencies did not seek community input or guidance before developing the program. What role do you believe community stakeholders should play in the implementation of a pre-arrest diversion program?

[The DC government, and particularly some members of the Council, seem to have difficulty listening to members of the community outside of their immediate neighborhood or donor list. It is unfortunate, and it has severe consequences when it comes to public policy.

Community input is critical, and when these programs that are intended to assist the very communities they are ignoring during implementation, we are failing before we begin. **This is why I have made it a point to knock on every door in Ward 6.** This program should not have been implemented without public meetings and input, a comment period, and an open and transparent process through which the city

responded to comments. It is time we demand a level of empathy, compassion, and understanding from our leaders. **It's time we demand leaders who work to close our opportunity gaps and eliminate our racial and economic disparities, not sit silently by as they grow. That begins with us; it is our obligation to elect leaders who understand and value perspectives of vulnerable populations, and will proactively seek them out.]**

4. Trans communities of color are among the most likely to experience police violence and misconduct; however, the role of gender is rarely discussed in the context of police brutality. How will you use your position to promote public-health and community-led approaches to community safety that consider the role of race and gender discrimination?

[I would start by sending a signal to MPD that the DC Council is watching, expecting progress, and ready to hold leaders accountable should they not deliver. **Unfortunately, my opponent, Charles Allen, chairs the Judiciary and Public Safety Committee. He has been asked – repeatedly - by over 50 local organizations, to hold a public hearing so we can discuss police violence, its impact on our communities as a whole, and its particular impact on people of color, the trans community, and women. For some reason, Mr. Allen has refused to hold a hearing.** One reason I am running a campaign based on transparency and accountability in our DC government is because I truly believe that sunlight is the best disinfectant. If we are not going to demand that our DC Council hold MPD accountable, we have nobody else who will, so these problems will continue to occur, be underreported, and go largely unresolved. **That stops with me.**

This is why it's so important to connect with neighbors directly, to understand these issues, and to govern with empathy. Last week I had the honor of attending the Trans Youth Ball at Casa Ruby where I met some of the most inspirational and courageous youth in our city. I also heard Ruby Corado, the Executive Director, talk openly about the ongoing challenges of the trans community when it comes to violence against trans people of color. To paraphrase, she said that people in her community are "being assaulted and killed because of who they are," and it was gut-wrenching. **We need to get back to a place where police are tasked with safety of the people they serve, not criminalizing, harassing, and assaulting our trans population. Unfortunately, we somehow find ourselves appalled at the almost daily viral videos of police brutality against non-white, and non-binary, communities, but we've failed to implement policies to stop them from happening.**

In concert with proactive, aggressive oversight, I would like to listen to the groups being impacted by police violence, learn from them, and act accordingly. There are so many wonderful organizations in DC working hard to solve these problems, and who come to the discussion with solutions based on experience. Yet, I keep hearing from these organizations that they are largely ignored by the DC Council, particularly by my opponent. It is inexcusable that we have elected officials who are unwilling or unable to

challenge MPD and other government agencies when they are falling short, and it's time to start electing leaders who are willing to take on any injustice, regardless of where it is occurring, or whether the victims are campaign donors.]

Crimmigration

1. Do you support the Access to Justice for Immigrants Act of 2017, which would expand access to justice for D.C.'s documented and undocumented residents by creating a separate civil immigration legal services program?

[Yes. [I have written about this very issue](#), in English and in Spanish.]

2. Many in the D.C. immigrant community face loss of their Temporary Protected Status in the coming 18 months, affecting, among other things, the validity of their official identification documents. Would you support the automatic transfer of a D.C. driver's license to a limited purpose driver's license upon the expiration of TPS status, without additional cost to the immigrant individual? Or, how will you work to streamline this process to ensure that TPS holders immediately have some valid form of ID available to them?

[Yes. This is a critical issue, and we have a moral obligation to act. Unfortunately, Charles Allen chose not to attend the only immigration debate of the 2018 election cycle, so the immigrant community was unable to determine where he stands on this issue, or any number of critical issues currently facing immigrant communities in DC.

I believe we should be working to proactively identify those who will be impacted, and automatically issue new limited purpose driver's licenses proactively through the mail where possible. The DC government should be proactively reaching out to leaders in the immigrant community to assist in enrollment and registration processes to make sure everyone in DC has access to a photo ID, and the requisite city forms should be made available at churches, local businesses, schools and other locations where they would be accessible to those who need them. We have a moral obligation to protect our vulnerable neighbors, and there are few more vulnerable at this time than those facing a loss of their TPS status.]

3. D.C. considers itself a "Sanctuary City." However, according to their policy and procedures, the D.C. Department of Corrections complies with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) notification requests. Specifically, when an inmate has an ICE detainer lodged against him/her, the DOC will notify ICE 48 hours prior to the expiration of their sentence, and in instances where an inmate is being released pursuant to a court order, DOC will notify ICE immediately to inform them that the inmate is being processed for release. Do you support closing the loopholes which allow for D.C. DOC to inform and notify ICE regarding the residency and release of inmates? Why or why not?

[Yes. DC should not be cooperating with ICE in any capacity when it comes to information sharing or providing other support. At the immigrant justice forum that Mr. Allen failed to attend, I went on the record as a supporter of abolishing ICE. Throughout my life, and as someone who has grown up on the U.S.-Mexico border, I have known too many families and friends ripped apart by the heartless policies and practices employed by ICE. As a resident of the District, I am deeply concerned to know that my city is complicit in collaborating with ICE for the detention of released inmates, despite considering itself a “Sanctuary City.” The policies being carried out by ICE are inhumane, and do not reflect our values. Above all, our DC government, and indeed each of us, has an obligation to protect our neighbors. **If elected, I would not simply be the first Latinx ever elected to the DC Council, I would also be the most vocal advocate for immigrants the Council has ever seen, and would move to eliminate these kinds of loopholes and enhance protections for all of our immigrant communities.**

Importantly, as a Jewish Latina, I am proud to be the only candidate in any of the races across DC communicating with neighbors in both English and Spanish. Nearly one in five households in DC speak a language other than English at home, and with dramatic changes in our demographics we need to start electing leaders who reflect our people. I know how important it is for myself, and for people like my daughter, to see ourselves in office and shaping policies that move the District forward and protect every neighbor from injustice.]

D.C. Jail/Incarceration

1. D.C. eliminated money bail in 1992. However, a significant percentage of the people held in the D.C. jail are detained pretrial, often for lengthy periods of time. What would you do to reduce D.C.’s jail population?

[I would start by working to address the underlying causes of incarceration so we can keep people out of jail in the first place, and would seek to identify and end discriminatory targeting by law enforcement, as outlined above. I would also seek to employ many of the strategies New York City has employed in recent years, including reducing the trial backlog, reducing case delay, identifying low-risk persons who can await trial from home, and employing additional supervised release programs. **If New York can do it, so can DC. We just need to elect leaders who are willing to try.]**

2. The population makeup of the D.C. jail is over 90% black, even though black residents make up only 48% of D.C.’s population. What would you do to reduce this disparity?

[DC is home to some of the worst racial and economic disparities in the nation, and over the last ten years they have continued to grow. Ward 6 has become our most glaring example, with public housing complexes being leveled so multi-million dollar condos can be built in their place. We begin to address the disparities in our criminal justice system

by addressing the underlying causes of the problem – inequitable access to housing, education, jobs, and health care. It is long past time for our DC Council to cast aside their wealthy donors and start taking care of our neighbors. **I would begin by repealing the recent corporate and estate tax cuts that my opponent voted for, and would use this revenue to address our homelessness and affordable housing crises. I would also end the practice of providing hundreds of millions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies to wealthy corporate developers, and would redirect these funds to educational programs, job training, and other programs that provide economic opportunity for everyone in our community, not just those who can afford to make political contributions.** For those already in jail, it is critical to ensure that before release these individuals are equipped with financial literacy and job training to combat recidivism. If we begin to address the underlying causes of the inequities in our community, we can begin to provide stability and opportunity to everyone in Ward 6, which will have a drastic impact on the disparate incarceration rates we see in our city.]

3. The Department of Corrections reports that people who are re-incarcerated within a year after their release have a significantly higher incidence of mental illness. However, D.C.'s Department of Behavioral Health has repeatedly maintained that the justice-involved consumers of mental health services are just too small a percentage of the population the department serves to be a priority. What would you do to ensure people with mental illness who are justice-involved are a priority in our systems?

[The answer is not to turn our backs on populations in need because they comprise a small number of the population the Department of Behavioral Health serves. That is never the right answer. If it is a question of available resources, then we should stop spending our time cutting taxes for wealthy business owners, corporations and developers, and instead demand that there is sufficient funding and expertise to address the mental health needs of this population. Further, following conversations with advocates, we must have greater transparency into how the Department of Behavioral Health operates, so we can understand how it prioritizes the populations it serves, as well as diagnose shortcomings in addressing the needs of all residents.

We must also demand close collaboration between DOC and MORCA as a returning citizen gets close to reentry, because coordination of services and identification of needs is critical. We should work to make sure MORCA is better able to collaborate directly with existing health, housing, educational and job training programs in DC for which returning citizens are eligible and could benefit from, and address issues related to agencies and departments not providing services as quickly or efficiently as they should be expected to. When we have particularly high-risk populations, the process of identifying and collaborating to ensure services are provided should begin with DOC prior to release, and we should expect MORCA to work with existing agencies to ensure that access to needed health and support services is achieved. This, of course, requires

additional funding for MORCA to hire case managers, and a commitment from the DC Council to conduct oversight to make sure we are providing essential services to everyone who needs them.]

4. As of April 2018, 4,679 D.C. residents were incarcerated in federal prisons as far away as Washington state, California, Texas, and Florida. This distance isolates those incarcerated from the support systems of family, friends, and local rehabilitative services that research shows is critical to successful re-entry. Do you support D.C. bringing people back from the Federal Bureau of Prisons system and, if so, how would you propose the District accomplish this?

[Yes. DC has a long way to go when it comes to ensuring a humane, compassionate, and supportive system for every incarcerated individual who is planning for re-entry. I've spoken with returning citizens and their families in Ward 6 who express despair at the current system that flings those who are incarcerated across the country to serve time. We can do better.

I believe DC should either invest in contracting with prisons in Maryland or Virginia, as was done in the past, or should begin to consider investing in a facility that is built and operated by DC. If it is the latter, I firmly oppose privatizing such a commitment simply because it is wrong to profit off of the backs of our incarcerated population. We should be using our public dollars to prioritize rehabilitation and opportunities that will ensure our returning citizens can achieve success. This means ensuring family support, and access to high-quality health services, educational opportunities, and job training. We should not be relinquishing these obligations to other jurisdictions, many of which are not carrying them out.]

5. A 2015 report by the Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs described the conditions of the D.C. Jail as "Damaged. Moldy. Crumbling. Infested with vermin. Smelling of sewage. Completely unconcerned with inmate safety." While incarcerated people, advocates, and the government are in general agreement that the conditions at the D.C. Jail are unacceptable and unhealthy, there is no consensus as to the process, timeline, and method of financing for the replacement of the jail. What considerations do you believe should inform the replacement of the D.C. Jail and what steps would you take to address the current conditions faced by inmates and those who work in the facility?

[I believe the time for talk is over. It's time to identify a location, and secure public funding, to start construction of a new jail. The conditions in the current jail are inhumane, and are harmful to incarcerated people, workers, and the community alike. The facility is also not equipped to provide basic health and human services that we should expect to be providing. This has long-term consequences for our communities, and it needs to be a priority. **First and foremost, I oppose using non-DC government**

funds to acquire land, construct the jail, or operate the facility when it is complete. Privatization of any element of our corrections system is wrong, and should be opposed during each phase of a new jail's lifecycle. In the interim, I also believe we need to provide DOC with additional funds to ensure the current jail is safe for everyone who steps inside. This includes remediation of black mold and repair of structural deficiencies. The theoretical presence of a new jail can no longer be a justification for failing to provide basic safety to those in the current facility.]

Reentry/Returning Citizens

1. Several other jurisdictions have taken steps to remove the criminal conviction records of people who were arrested on marijuana-related charges prior to legalization/decriminalization. Most recently, Seattle's mayor and city attorney announced plans to vacate all misdemeanor marijuana possession convictions that were prosecuted before it was legalized in Washington state in 2012. Do you support a similar move in the District?

[Yes.]

2. Would you vote in favor of the Removing Barriers to Occupational Licensing Amendment Act of 2017 (B22-0523), which would restrict the ways in which criminal records can be considered by occupational licensing boards?

[Yes.]

Criminalization of Poverty

1. The trans community, and particularly trans people of color, face a disproportionate level of violence, discrimination, homelessness and unemployment in D.C. Nearly half of homeless youth in D.C. identifying as LGBTQ, while 50% of trans Washingtonians live in extreme poverty, with a median income of \$10,000. How would you use your position to address these issues?

[In engaging with advocates from HIPS, CASS, Casa Ruby, and others, I know that we are failing our LGBTQ youth and the trans community. **I have already started to use my candidacy to push my opponent to support policies that protect our trans community – an area where he has fallen short over the last four years - and will continue to fight the injustices faced by our trans community as councilmember.** Two of the most immediate steps I would take would be to increase funding of the DC Office of Human Rights so they can effectively process claims of employment discrimination against the trans community, an issue that is widely reported yet largely unaddressed by the DC Council; and to decriminalize sex work in DC so trans sex workers can focus on safety, economic security and access to housing instead of being punished and given a criminal record that will preclude them from securing other work.

Of course, these reforms are only a start, but they reflect common-sense changes that I have written and spoken about extensively, and they could be implemented quickly and make an immediate impact. Unfortunately, my opponent opposes both of these efforts.]

2. Smart Justice means placing less emphasis on criminalizing conduct and a greater focus on directing resources to address the underlying problems, like substance abuse, mental health issues, and lack of stable housing. If you are elected, what concrete steps will you take to move away from a criminalization approach to a public safety approach to criminal justice?

[We need to start by committing to full implementation of the NEAR Act, and we need to demand that MPD provide the data they are required to provide, but to date have failed to produce. Addressing these widespread problems requires a level of commitment and dedication that the DC Council, and the Chair of the Judiciary and Public Safety Committee in particular, have not shown. We must then invest in programs that address the underlying causes of crime, as I have outlined above. We are a city that habitually spends too little money and focus on ensuring that our vulnerable residents have access to safe, stable affordable housing, high-quality health care, educational services, and job training. That must change.]

D.C. Criminal Code Reform

1. The "Reducing Criminalization to Promote Public Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2017," would remove criminal penalties for consensual sex work among adults in the District and would create a task force to study the effects of the law and make recommendations for further public health interventions. Do you support this bill? Why or why not?

[Yes. This is one of the many contrasts between myself and my opponent, Charles Allen. I fully support this legislation, and he opposes it. Most DC residents who turn to sex work in order to sustain themselves often have no other option: people with criminal convictions unable to find work elsewhere, young people forced from abusive homes, immigrants faced with a labyrinth of language, legal, and financial challenges, and people with disabilities of all kinds. On top of being disproportionately femme, female, of color, and homeless, these circumstances can often make sex work the only viable option for someone seeking to afford the ever-rising cost of living in DC. **Our city has failed sex workers before they even take a client, from allowing employment discrimination to sitting idly by as rents rise across DC, and wages fail to keep up.** Too often, when sex workers try to work through those challenges, they're criminalized. This only serves to exacerbate matters, by continuing a cycle of unemployment and an inability to secure stable housing.]

2. One of the major barriers to reducing the overcriminalization and mass incarceration of D.C. residents is D.C.'s bifurcated criminal justice system. All federal offenses, adult felony offenses and some misdemeanors are prosecuted by a federally appointed U.S. Attorney, and the federal government also exerts control over parole decisions, probation, and supervision for those convicted of crimes in the District. However, the Council does control D.C.'s criminal code, and arrests for crimes contained in the code are largely carried out by the Metropolitan Police Department. With the above limitations, what changes would you make to reduce the high number of D.C. residents who are charged, convicted, and imprisoned each year?

[I would like to see DC commit to fully implementing the NEAR Act, not merely passing it and celebrating as though the job is done. Addressing the underlying root causes of crime rather than focusing on incarceration is the best way to immediately reduce the number of residents who are interacting with our criminal justice system. I would also commit to fully funding health, housing, educational and job training services so they meet the needs of our community, which is something our DC Council has not been willing to do.]

3. The "Fare Evasion Decriminalization Act of 2017" would replace criminal penalties for fare evasion in the District with a civil fine. Do you support this bill and would you support the decriminalization of other low-level offenses like eating on the Metro? Why or why not?

[Yes. These offenses and the enforcement thereof disproportionately impacts persons of color and low-income residents who can least afford to engage with our criminal justice system, and whose lives will be most greatly harmed due to such interactions and potential penalties, which often limit future work and educational opportunities.

A few days ago, a troubling [video](#) was released showing police at the Ft. Totten Metro Station using excessive force during an arrest of a woman who allegedly committed fare evasion. On so many levels, this video is disturbing and serves an indictment on our police and criminal code for low-level offenses. Beyond that, this video is a glaring example of the power imbalance between law enforcement and our most vulnerable neighbors.]

4. Do you support reforming D.C. sentencing guidelines to reduce recommended sentencing ranges for certain crimes in the District?

[Yes.]

5. How would you address sentencing disparities that lead to black and Latino offenders facing significantly greater odds of incarceration than similarly situated white offenders?

[The best way to quickly eliminate sentencing disparities is to keep people out of our criminal justice system in the first place. We should start by increasing funding and focus on programs that prevent crime before it starts, such as educational, health,

housing and job training assistance. If we support our vulnerable communities, they are less likely to find themselves interacting with our criminal justice system. We must also take a comprehensive look at our laws to identify areas where we are disproportionately arresting persons of color and ensure that there is no implicit bias in our law enforcement and judicial systems. Lastly, we must expand access to public defender services to ensure that the quality of legal representation an accused individual receives does not vary based on whether they can afford to pay an attorney.]

6. Do you support the removal of mandatory minimums? Why or why not?

[Yes. I believe mandatory minimums are inherently discriminatory, often times because the underlying sentencing guidelines are inherently discriminatory. I do not believe mandatory minimums achieve our shared goals of rehabilitation and reducing recidivism.]