



## **Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the 2022 Ward 7 Democrats Candidate Forum for candidates in the Democratic Primary for the **Mayor**. Below is a pre-Forum questionnaire that will give you the opportunity to expand on your position and goals in depth and afford our membership the opportunity to truly understand your positions.

Please respond no later than 11:59pm on Friday, February 22, 2022. **Timely completion and submission of this questionnaire is a prerequisite to participate in the Candidate Forum.**

### **Candidate Information**

Your responses will be posted on the Ward 7 Dems webpage. Please also provide a headshot of the candidate.

Candidate Name: Robert White

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### **General Questions**

1. What makes you the right selection for the Democratic nomination for Mayor?

For the past few decades, our city has been on a single-minded pursuit of increasing wealth. In my lifetime, I have seen wealth brought into the city at an incredible rate, but I have not seen the problems we were told wealth would address solved. Instead, those problems - crime, housing, and education disparities - are at an all-time high. We have lacked a visionary plan for what to do with the wealth now that we have it. East of the River, we've seen very little meaningful progress and many residents feel abandoned and left behind. Our city is running on autopilot without a focused vision or goals. Government is doing the bare minimum and not solving any of the big, systemic problems facing our residents. Our agencies are running on fumes or staffed by political loyalists.

It is time we use the wealth and growth of our city to benefit all of our residents. DC has incredible potential but we need visionary leadership to achieve it. As mayor, I will recenter our people and make our government work for all our residents. I will set ambitious goals and

provide transparency so I can be held accountable. We don't need four more years of passive leadership. We need a visionary plan to take our city to the next level.

2. As Mayor, what steps would you take to ensure that you are able to meet the needs of the residents of Ward 7?

We need to work with Ward 7, for Ward 7. We cannot continue to dictate from on high what people need. We must recognize that what works for Wards 2 and 3 might not work for Ward 7. We need to listen to the community and provide what they tell us they need, not what looks flashy or helps corporate interests.

We also need to transform the priorities of our government. Right now, the parts of DC government that build wealth and economic development work well, while the agencies meant to help everyday people get ahead do not. Agencies like DCHA, DCRA, DCPS, and DOES face constant scandals, misuse of resources, and negligence because the mayor does not prioritize them. As your mayor, I will recalibrate our priorities to invest in and prioritize the policies and programs that help create justice and equality, especially in communities of color.

My plan to transform DC will begin with making sure our agencies are accessible and accountable to the people they serve. I will build a government rooted in transparency and integrity, not political patronage. We will recruit only the most dedicated public servants - not those with the most political connections. I will hold all of our agencies accountable to their missions and ensure they meet the highest standards. I will not be satisfied with a government that does the bare minimum for working families.

3. How would you better connect with communities that have lost faith in the ability of the government to solve problems?

Our first step needs to be rooting out cronyism and favoritism in our government. When our government operates as this administration has - appointing political loyalists and funneling deals to donors - people lose faith that the government is working for them. Across the government, I will bring in the best and brightest talent to help lead our government in a full transformation, and I will hold every agency director accountable.

We also need to address the basic operations that aren't flashy and don't make for good headlines but are absolutely fundamental to people's trust in government. The current administration has allowed basic government functions to go unaddressed leading to problems with nearly every agency. We have to come to be happy with the bare minimum from the government and are unsurprised when basic and necessary services, like unemployment insurance and vaccine distribution, are plagued with logistical issues. When basics like leaf clean-up and snow-plowing are neglected, people feel that the government doesn't care about them. We need to demand more. Government should work efficiently and reliably. To make this happen, we need an executive who expects and requires more.

## Education

1. Do you believe the per pupil formula is adequate? If so, why? If not, how would you modify the per pupil formula to ensure that all schools are sufficiently funded and facilitate equitable outcomes in communities in Ward 7 and Ward 8?

We need to increase funding for schools with significant numbers of at-risk students beyond the additional funding per pupil dictated by the UPSFF. We know that schools with larger populations of at-risk students require more resources. In order to ensure equity, not only equality, we need to provide additional funding beyond the UPSFF for these schools. We also need appropriate funding to be allocated to our schools every year, not just in election years when it makes for good politics.

However, fixing the problems in our schools is not just about how much money we spend. The mayor loves to talk about how much money she spends on schools, but we're not seeing the outcomes we should expect. We cannot continue touting success to cover up numbers going in the wrong direction. This year, enrollment in DC public schools dropped by hundreds. Only 40% of Black and Latino students in the lower elementary grades are reading on grade level. Spending money is not the same as fixing problems. We cannot be more focused on making our buildings look good than we are on making sure our kids can read. We need to determine where money is being wasted and ensure that we're not just spending money but educating ALL of our students.

2. What programs would you advance to improve the ability of the District to recruit and retain quality teachers?

We are experiencing a mass exodus of teachers, leaving us understaffed and incurring significant costs from low teacher retention. Despite our high salaries, teachers are leaving DC for neighboring suburbs where they will be paid less. We need to encourage DCPS graduates to become excited about returning to teaching. Teachers who come from our community are not only able to really understand the needs of students in DC but they are also proven to stay longer. We need to expand and make permanent pilot programs funded by the DC Council to provide debt-free "grow your own" pathways for DC high school students and paraprofessionals to become licensed DC teachers.

We also need to sufficiently train our teachers so they are not overwhelmed and thrown into situations they are not ready for. This includes implementing peer teaching and more robust pre-school training. Furthermore, we need to pair newer teachers with experienced teacher mentors who can help them navigate their first couple of years of teaching. Just as we differentiate learning for students, we need to have a diverse set of professional development options so all teachers can learn in the way that is best for them.

Teachers should not feel they have to decide between their mental health and teaching. School leadership needs to create supportive, collaborative cultures where teachers feel valued and trusted. This starts at the very top of DC schools. Too many teachers feel ignored or antagonized by the central office or feel they are unable to get the support they need. We need to model the behavior we want to see in our schools by treating teachers as the valued professionals they are and provide training for school leadership, especially principals, that imparts the same values.

We have heard that a major source of anxiety and thus retirements for teachers is the IMPACT system. Studies indicate that the IMPACT system is racist and disproportionately disadvantages teachers of color. For many students of color, having a teacher who looks like them can be incredibly impactful and we cannot afford to lose our Black and brown teachers. We will replace the IMPACT system with a more just and teacher-friendly alternative that focuses on educator growth rather than the current punitive approach.

We also know that onerous testing places unnecessary stress on both teachers and students. Excessive testing cuts into classroom hours, putting stress on teachers to make up for lost time and forces teachers to lose planning time to bureaucratic rabbit holes. We need to move away from excessive standardized testing and instead find holistic ways to measure student achievement. We need to listen to teacher feedback and include the voices of teachers in our planning.

We also need to ensure our teachers are able to feel fulfilled inside and outside of work. We know that many teachers feel they need to leave the profession when they become parents themselves because they struggle to balance the long hours with their responsibilities as parents. We need to find innovative solutions to improve teacher workloads and implement more flexible scheduling. We also know our city is incredibly expensive. We need to ensure that teachers are able to afford to live here and have a high quality of life. While that begins by ensuring teachers in both public school sectors are paid wages that allow them to live in the city, we also need to explore housing subsidies, student loan forgiveness, and other programs to incentivize teachers to live and work in the district.

3. Is Mayoral control of DCPS still the right approach to improving educational outcomes in underinvested communities? If so, why and upon what data do you rely to support this position? If not, what is the alternative and upon what data do you rely to support this position?

Everything has to be on the table when it comes to education and I will conduct a top-down review of our education system to determine what governance method best serves our students. I worry that focusing on rallying for or against mayoral control misses the mark. The most important thing is not who controls our schools, but rather who is going to identify what is not working and commit fully to fixing it. We have not made enough progress in the last 10 years building an education system that works for students of color. Our current system does not highlight our shortcomings and has shown to be too far removed from voters. I will do whatever it takes to get the best outcomes for students and that includes giving up any power necessary. What we know for sure is that our system as it currently exists lacks necessary accountability and transparency that we need to address, whether by ending mayoral control or through a different mechanism.

The Chancellor and State Superintendent for Education (OSSE) are Mayoral appointees, which means they cannot speak independently and they are not directly accountable to the voters. Under the status quo, OSSE has offered only rosy, and often misleading, assessments of the progress we have made, in order to serve political interests. Scandal after scandal, whether it is inflated graduation rates or undocumented suspensions, have made this abundantly clear. The

State Board of Education has very little authority and virtually no ability to secure access to key data to undertake its own evaluations of progress and make recommendations for change. The current arrangement is an invitation for political spin of claimed successes.

We need an independent State Superintendent who does not report to the mayor and who is empowered to give thorough and honest assessments of our schools. In addition, the State Board of Education needs to be able to hold our public schools accountable. We need to empower the Board of Education to be able to take action to hold OSSE accountable and address the concerns of their constituents. When people do not see the State Board of Education as being able to take action to support them, they feel disillusioned and are less likely to continue political engagement.

4. How could the Public Charter School System be improved?

Charters are a key part of our public school system and we need to ensure they receive as robust of oversight as DCPS. We need transparency and accountability when it comes to charter schools to ensure they are serving all of our students well. The Mayor appoints the Public Charter School Board members, but the Council has very little authority over it, so there is a gap in accountability for our public charter schools. We need more checks and balances and more investment from the executive when it comes to mandating transparency. Both DCPS and PCS have suffered for years from a lack of transparency as a result of the gap in accountability, and this has not been to the benefit of our students.

5. Are there any educational intervention programs you believe should be enhanced or expanded? Are there any that should be curtailed or terminated?

We need to ensure that every student is able to have their needs served by our schools. That's why I led the fight to try to save Washington Met, an alternative school that served students who had challenges succeeding in traditional schools, when students needed someone. We should be fighting for every single student to have the opportunity to graduate and be successful.

We know that what is standing in the way of too many kids succeeding in school are large systemic injustices such as housing instability and other consequences of poverty and trauma. We need to be able to rely on schools to provide equitable, trauma-informed wrap-around services for students so they are in a safe and healthy environment that is conducive to learning.

We need to expand the connected schools program in DC. Connected schools bring a full suite of wrap-around services and partner with community organizations to serve the full needs of children and communities. DC is far behind other cities in implementing this model. We currently only have 10 connected schools but we know the need is much greater. Piecemeal programs and small-scale investments are insufficient. We need to ramp up our commitment to ensure that we can meet the scale of the need.

We also need to expand mental health services from both the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) and community-based organizations. While community-based organizations are crucial to providing trauma-informed strategies, we cannot solely rely on them. We have underinvested in DBH services despite the fact that DBH providers are often more experienced and tend to have

less turnover, allowing them to really develop relationships with the school community. We need to expand their scope and ensure they are present in the schools that need the most support and stability. This is especially crucial as we know that the pandemic has had significant mental health impacts on our young people.

### Economic Development and Housing

1. Please outline your economic development strategy for Ward 7. How does your plan ensure that all residents at all income-levels will benefit from your strategy? What are the safeguards to ensure that your plan is truly equitable and inclusive for all Ward 7 residents?

Our economic development strategy for Ward 7 must be driven by listening to the Ward 7 community. The people in Ward 7 have incredible potential as entrepreneurs and the small business opportunities are profound. The government needs to be a partner for folks so they can realize their dreams of entrepreneurship and reach their full potential. We spend incredible resources recruiting businesses and corporations to come to the city, but we neglect helping the people who are already here get a foothold in our economy. Economic development does not have to come at the expense of our culture and people. We don't need to make Ward 7 feel like Wards 2 or 3, we need to use what makes Ward 7 special to ensure all people are able to benefit.

We need to center equity in our economic development strategy and ensure that people of color and other historically marginalized groups are able to benefit. I authored a bill to set aside medical marijuana licenses for local women and minority-owned businesses. We need to take creative approaches like this to ensure all people can join in our economic development. We need to work with Ward 7 to develop a fresh and ambitious vision and then transparently execute this plan.

2. Ward 7 hosts a disproportionately high percentage of vacant and dilapidated buildings and vacant lots. How would you address this issue without inadvertently depriving middle income families of a rare asset?

We know that crime tends to occur in places that have suffered physically from disinvestment and economic decline. Abandoned houses in particular provide easy opportunities for crime to occur. Studies have shown that when regular maintenance is performed, gun violence decreases. It is crucial to our public safety that we address the vacant and dilapidated buildings in Ward 7.

We need an inter-agency approach to ensuring housing providers and developers are building and maintaining safety measures in residences. We need to ensure agencies are keeping up with their compliance monitoring, are responsive to complaints or reports by residents, and are holding businesses, landlords, and property owners accountable for maintaining safety measures. We also need to take creative approaches to convert these properties into affordable and workforce housing and storefronts for local small businesses.

3. What are the three biggest challenges facing economic development in Ward 7? What is your strategy to eliminate/reduce these challenges to encourage an increase in economic

development activity in the Ward? How do you plan to incorporate the Ward's new boundaries into your economic development strategy?

The first challenge facing economic development in Ward 7 is the myth that businesses don't want to go to Ward 7 because there isn't sufficient disposable income. However, what we know in reality is that folks in Ward 7 are eager to support their community and keep their money local. We need to invest in starting local small businesses so Ward 7 residents are able to support their community and so we're not reliant on big businesses and corporations choosing to come into Ward 7. We need to mobilize the same resources we put into recruiting businesses to come to DC to the task of supporting small businesses and helping local entrepreneurs.

The second major challenge is the issue of transit equity. For many people west of the river, the difficulty of getting to Ward 7 prevents them from patronizing businesses, regardless of the opportunities. We need to improve the accessibility and reliability of public transit so getting in and out of Ward 7 is not so difficult. This will also incentivize more folks to settle down in Ward 7 because what is stopping them now is worries about a difficult commute. This will also help the residents already in Ward 7 who struggle to find employment because of transportation difficulties or who have to deal with a long commute.

Finally, as a former Ward 7 resident, I know that the lack of amenities is stopping many folks from enjoying all Ward 7 has to offer. We need a mayor who knows that a grocery store is not an amenity, it's a necessity. We need grocery stores and fundamental basics in Ward 7 but we also need to invest in amenities to encourage people to live in and visit Ward 7. Ward 7 has remarkable potential for green spaces, but we have not cultivated them as we should. The pandemic has made clear how desperately we need beautiful, outdoor recreational spaces. If we invest in all Ward 7 has to offer, we can make it a destination for all city residents.

4. Ward 7 has several business nodes: Minnesota and Benning Rd, Pennsylvania Ave to Southern Avenue, Benning Rd, and East Capitol Street, etc. How do you plan to maximize the potential of these nodes for the greatest community economic impact?

In order to maximize the potential of these nodes, we need to start with transit equity so that people from all across the city can patronize businesses. If businesses are not accessible, they will not be able to thrive. We need to explore the existing infrastructure to determine where we can supplement or redesign to ensure that these areas are serviced by public transportation. We also know that these commercial corridors have significant gaps that we need to fill. If we do so, more people will see Ward 7 as a destination. Just as with all our other economic development plans, we cannot set out with a goal of making Ward 7 look like Northwest. We need to retain Ward 7's character and people while increasing economic opportunities for residents.

5. The DC Housing Authority and its Board faced significant challenges in 2021. What changes, if any, are needed to sustain and increase affordable and public housing in DC? Are there any decisions on the allocation of affordable units that deserve closer scrutiny or to be revisited?

When it comes to staffing the DCHA board, and all agency leadership, we need to appoint the most dedicated, experienced, and competent people to positions. That means we need to end the current practice of appointing people based on political loyalties. We need a DCHA Board

composed of a diverse group of experts and a Mayor who doesn't see DCHA as an opportunity to get businesses for her political contributors. While developers should be at the table, we need advocates and community members there too - especially community members who have been directly impacted by housing insecurity or homelessness. With a diverse board focused solely on the mission of the agency and not distracted by politics, we will turn a corner in our service to public housing residents.

We need to maintain, expand and improve existing affordable and public housing. I was proud to lead the effort to increase the public housing maintenance fund to \$50 million. We need to invest in agencies like DCHA so they are able to do the basic maintenance work that has been neglected by the current administration because it doesn't get them the big headlines or make for good slogans. We also need to equitably distribute affordable housing throughout the city and ensure every ward is doing its part. Right now, Ward 7 is doing their part and we need other wards to step up to meet Ward 7's commitment.

As a Councilmember, I have introduced innovative approaches to housing, including pushing DC government to work with office building owners who own older, vacant office buildings to convert them into affordable housing. I also wrote and passed a bill to add unprecedented transparency to economic development projects by requiring public reporting of promises made on the front end of projects that get public money, and reporting of the outcomes on affordable units created, local jobs, and economic impact on the back end. As Chair of the Committee on Government Operations and Facilities, I am pushing agencies to formally identify unneeded District-owned properties so that we can examine whether the buildings or land can be used for housing. As mayor, I will continue working with experts to come up with creative solutions and will move rapidly to implement these crucial strategies.

### Transportation

1. Ward 7 residents and many residents east of the Anacostia River complain about inconsistent access to public transportation. These conditions have been intensified by WMATA's reduced service schedule over the last two years. How would you improve access to transportation for underserved communities during the pandemic? What steps would you take under normal circumstances to improve transportation equity?

Increasing the use of public transportation is crucial to meeting the environmental goals of our city and ensuring all people are able to access employment opportunities. We need to improve the reliability and accessibility of public transportation. This means working with communities to determine where it makes sense to implement bus-only lanes that will speed up the frequency and reliability of buses. We also need to continue to explore options such as rear boarding that speed up bus service. As the twice-elected Chair of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, I have strong relationships with our regional partners which I will lean on to increase investments in Metro and improve its reliability and functionality.

In office, I co-introduced the Metro For DC Act with Councilmember Charles Allen. The legislation incentivizes use of public transit while also establishing a fund to invest millions in expanding services to neighborhoods that have been historically left out of transit planning as



well as granting every D.C. resident a SmarTrip card balance of exactly \$100 on the first day of each calendar month. As Mayor, I will push for programs like these to expand access to public transit. I support this bill in the hope that it can take off a burden from working families who currently have to devote a significant portion of their budget to transportation and are struggling to get by.

2. What is your position on the potential expansion of the DC Streetcar along Benning Road? If you believe it is a net positive initiative, please explain the potential benefits. If you believe it is a net negative, please describe the potential risks.

We have spent an insane amount of money on the streetcar and it has not produced the results that were expected. We need to work with the community to determine what public transportation will meet their needs. Our tax dollars are better spent on investing in basics like buses to ensure transit equity for Ward 7 residents instead of funneling money into a flashy, but ultimately ineffective streetcar project. The streetcar is becoming just one more broken promise. We need to commit to the economic development of Ward 7 and that includes equitable transit but getting there needs to be based on finding out what communities need and following through.

### Public Safety

1. The District of Columbia is experiencing a general decline in crime, but a spike in murder. What would you identify as the core causes of this spike and what programmatic tools would you advance that could stop the increase and address the root causes?

People are dying needlessly in our streets from gun violence. These are mothers, fathers, friends, sisters, and brothers. Too often, children are dying from gun violence. We must treat this issue with the solemn sensitivity it deserves. The people who say that we need more police, and those who say we need to address the root causes of violence are asking for the same thing - to be safe in our city. Growing up in DC in the 80s and 90s, during the most violent period in our modern history, I know that more police is not a solution to crime because police respond to crime, they don't prevent crime.

Investing in the root causes of violence keeps people safer by actually reducing crime, and it is far more humane. We cannot continue the cycle of crime that comes from the over-incarceration of people of color. The punitive strategies we have been using for decades have not made us safer. People who have good jobs, safe housing, and the mental health resources they need generally do not commit a lot of violent crimes.

We need to invest in housing, education, and employment programs. We need to take a proactive approach to eliminate the conditions that lead to crime, such as unemployment, homelessness, mental health, and drug addiction. We also need to seriously expand our violence interruption efforts. We must professionalize, train and adequately compensate violence interrupters who are trusted community members and can help target the people most likely to become involved with violence get on a safer, more productive path.

Our police officers are also undeniably overworked and stretched too thin. The solution to this is not to keep pumping more and more taxpayer dollars into the police department. We have been doing this for years and we have not seen murders decrease. Our murder rates have followed national trends. Instead, we need to reduce the responsibilities of MPD officers by shifting the non-public safety responsibilities away from MPD so that they can focus on public safety. Mental health crises, noise complaints, and non-dangerous traffic violations are examples of issues currently in the MPD portfolio that do not need to be handled by police who are not trained or equipped to best respond to these situations. We need to establish alternatives to the police and ensure the appropriate responders have the resources they need to step into these roles.

2. What programs would you create or modify to reduce recidivism and reintegrate Returning Citizens into our communities?

One of my priorities in office has been to increase the services we provide to returning citizens. The District is home to more than 60,000 formerly incarcerated people, and if we want to improve public safety and see returning citizens establish a stable life for themselves and their families, we need to improve the level of services provided. This is personal to me as I saw my own brother struggle with the reentry process, despite having a stable family relationships and a strong support system. I am incredibly proud of the progress DC has made and I look forward to continuing to be a leader in this crucial work.

We must begin the process of engaging with incarcerated residents long before they come home and take proactive steps to ensure people are able to smoothly transition home. This will include making sure that incarcerated residents have access to effective vocational and life skills programs. It also will involve working with federal and local agencies to help returning citizens acquire government identification, benefits, and other government support as soon as they return to the community.

Once people are released, DC should increase the efficacy and funding of job training programs and incentivize employers to hire returning citizens. Against the objections of the Mayor, I significantly increased our programs serving returning citizens. In 2020, I restored the Paralegal Fellowship Initiative to get returning citizens trained and employed as paralegals. We need more programs like this one and greater collaboration with the Department of Employment Services and local employers. We need to expand public outreach and education on the District's Ban the Box legislation, and establish automatic expungement of decriminalized offenses and non-convictions to expedite the time in which records are eligible for expungement.

DC also needs to establish returning citizen liaison positions in District agencies and improve our case management system which connects returning citizens to available resources and services. These services need to include robust mental health support to counter the trauma that comes from incarceration and gun violence. To the extent possible, these programs should be run by returning citizens themselves. After hearing from returning citizens that a lack of government identification and transportation were barriers to their success, I pioneered programs to ensure returning citizens get government identification and a transportation subsidy when they return

home. When we center the voices of returning citizens, we learn where people get stuck and how to fix those issues.

Housing is crucial to successful reentry. Halfway houses help returning citizens reintegrate into communities and move towards stable lives, but since the closure of Hope Village, the District does not have a halfway house for men. As we design our system of reentry, we should ensure there are multiple halfway houses throughout the District- an effort that I have actively championed. Instead of having one large halfway house, several smaller ones throughout the District will help people stay close to their families and communities, and increase individualized attention for residents who need intense assistance as they navigate their first days home and start working through their plans for success. We also need more than just halfway housing. Returning citizens are coming home to an affordable housing crisis. This instability, if not addressed, can lead to recidivism. We need to create or set aside housing that is practical and sustainable for residents returning home.

Finally, I am incredibly proud to have sponsored first in the nation legislation to return voting rights to all incarcerated Washingtonians. This is an issue of civil rights and democracy, and also helps returning citizens retain their role as members of the community who have a say in District policy even while incarcerated. Our next step must be increasing awareness of this legislative change among incarcerated residents.

### Jobs and Employment

1. What programs or initiatives would you create or modify to increase the percentage of District employees that reside in the District of Columbia?

Far too many District employees want to reside in DC but feel that they can't for a number of reasons. We need to address these problems to incentivize District employees to move into the city. The first is our housing affordability crisis. Far too many DC employees cannot afford to live in our city. We need to expand our affordable and workforce housing to everyone who works in DC can afford to live here. We need to work with developers to incentivize them to build both affordable and workforce housing. This can not only include studio and single bedroom units designed for transient young people, but we need to ensure we have an adequate stock of affordable family-sized units so that DC employees are able to have families and raise children in the district.

We also need to ensure all students in DC can get a quality education. Studies show that over 40% of children born in DC leave the public school system before the start of high school to attend private schools or public schools elsewhere. Too many families are choosing to live in the suburbs to avoid sending their children to DCPS schools. This is unacceptable. Every DC school should be resourced so parents are excited to send their students there. We need to work better with communities to determine which special programs, such as Montessori, Bilingual programs, IB/AP, and vocational education are most appropriate to meet the needs and desires of families. All schools also need to equitably provide out-of-school time programs, whether this be enrichment programs, sports, educational programs, or the arts.

Finally, we need to address public safety in our city. Too many families feel scared to live in DC and are choosing to live outside of the city to feel safer. Solving the public safety crisis in our city will take a holistic approach. That is why I proposed a comprehensive, three-pronged strategy to bring down violent crime and increase public safety that focuses on investing in proven crime-prevention strategies, improving our responses to crime when it occurs, and helping our communities better recover from the impacts of crime.

2. The unemployment rate in Ward 7 is 14%. What programmatic tools would you create or modify to improve the ability of the District to return these residents to the workforce? Despite spending millions of dollars, we have not seen the outcomes from DOES that we should expect given the many millions of dollars we pour into the agency. Too many residents want to work and have participated in one DOES program or another, but remain unemployed. This cycle breaks the spirit of residents who are struggling and perpetuates the vast wealth disparity in our city. We need to evaluate where programs are failing and ensure that the money going to DOES produces the results we need. As mayor, I will conduct a thorough, data-driven investigation to determine which programs are producing results and eliminate programs that are not successful. In addition, I will implement evidence-based best practices from around the country to make sure all our residents, particularly residents of color, are able to get a foothold in our economy.

In addition, we have abandoned programs meant to prepare graduates for immediate employment after high school. We need to recommit to vocational education in a way that is unprecedented in DC so that students are able to enter the workforce directly after graduation. Students who know they have a profession they can rely on will be more motivated to stay out of trouble and less likely to rely on crime and violence. We also need to make sure our classes are adequately preparing students to pass licensure exams. Too many students are taking vocational classes and then having difficulty passing the corresponding exams. We need to analyze why this is happening and commit to improving and growing vocational education.