



### Attorney General Candidate Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the 2022 Ward 7 Democrats Candidate Forum for candidates in the Democratic Primary for the **Attorney General**. 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 provide a headshot of the candidate.

Candidate Name: Bruce V. Spiva

Candidate website: [spivafordcag.com](http://spivafordcag.com)

Candidate Twitter: @bspivadc

#### General Questions

1. What makes you the right choice for the Democratic nomination for Attorney General.

Over the past three decades, I have fought for everyday people and advocated for voting rights, civil rights, consumer protection, antitrust enforcement, housing justice, and criminal justice reform. I will stand up for the rights of all DC residents and help us emerge from the current public health, economic, and political crises as a better, stronger, and more just DC.

I have the experience and the passion to deliver results for the people of DC. The Attorney General's Office represents the people of the District of Columbia across areas critical to their lives: health, safety, work, family, and community. In nearly thirty years of law practice, I have tried cases and argued appeals in courtrooms here and all across the country, including arguing for voting rights in the United States Supreme Court last year. I have the management track record to lead and inspire an office of 700 professionals who are on the Attorney General's team. I founded and ran my own public interest law firm. I also led the DC office and was a member of the Executive Committee of a national law firm with over 1,200 lawyers.

I have also served the people of DC outside the courtroom. For decades, in Congress and in the streets, I have fought for local autonomy and statehood for DC, including as the Chair of the Board of DC Vote, and I will be the fiercest advocate for true democracy the people could ever

ask for. When former President Trump used tear gas against Black Lives Matter protesters in Lafayette Square, I filed a Supreme Court amicus brief on behalf of veterans of the Civil Rights movement who saw the same repressive and violent tactics they faced being used against a new generation of activists.

For nearly 30 years, the District of Columbia has been my home. My wife and I have raised our two sons here. I love DC. It would be my honor to serve as your next Attorney General and I truly believe I am the best candidate for the job.

2. An elected Attorney General is still relatively new to the District of Columbia. What steps would you take to continue the work of Mr. Racine in publicizing the office? What would you do differently?

In my experience, people listen only when they feel they are being heard. As Attorney General, I will leave no doubt in the minds of the people of DC that I am listening to them. That direct connection with me and the office will improve our work, continue to build the Office of Attorney General, and publicize the office as a direct result.

I'm the only candidate with the breadth of experience in public interest law, consumer protection law, and representing everyday people in their legal battles. That makes me uniquely qualified to take on fights for housing justice, wage theft, and criminal justice reform that speak to the concerns of the people of DC. I'll be able to expand the work of the current AG while continuing to publicize the office by being out in the community, working directly on the issues that the people of DC say are most important. Our work on these issues will help to publicize the office. In order to ensure I continue to work on the issues of most direct concern to DC residents, I commit to partnering with labor unions, community-based organizations, and directly with DC residents to learn about problems in the community.

I am the only candidate in the race who has been fighting for decades for DC Statehood and local autonomy. Although I well understand that all of our problems will not be solved when we achieve Statehood, every one of our problems is made worse by our total and complete disenfranchisement. For instance, we are short 18 judges in our local courts because the Senate has failed to act on their nominations. I support Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton's bill that would clear this logjam for our judges. The AG does not have the power to deliver Statehood, but he or she has a platform and a voice. I will be the fiercest advocate the people could ever ask for on this issue, and on all related issues of local autonomy.

3. What steps would you take to ensure that the Office of the Attorney General is adequately equipped to provide legal advice to the Executive branch and to meet the needs of the residents of Ward 7?

If elected Attorney General, I will prioritize providing for the legal needs of the residents who need it most, with a particular focus on residents of color and people living in poverty. As you are well aware, more than a quarter of Ward 7 residents are poor. The figures with respect to children are even more distressing, with more than 40% of Ward 7 children growing up in

poverty. Some of the most important work of the office is helping Ward 7 families navigate the all-too-complicated legal system, including helping survivors of domestic violence or victims of elder abuse get to safety, helping parents get the child support they need, and fighting against landlords that keep tenants in slum conditions. I will prioritize this work if I am elected Attorney General.

I also plan on attending every Ward 7 community forum I can. In my work as a lawyer, I have found that clients are the experts in their own cases. I will listen carefully to what Ward 7 residents have to say and, when representing them, make sure I reflect their concerns in my legal work. Likewise, I will prioritize the recruiting and training of talented and diverse lawyers and staff, including recruiting at historically predominantly Black law schools. I will work to establish special fellowship and intern programs to ensure the very best professionals from all backgrounds are representing District residents.

4. How would you as the Attorney General restore confidence in government with communities that have lost faith in the ability of the government to solve problems?

I would place a very high priority on restoring the trust and confidence in government. For far too long, DC residents have felt that the legal system is built for people of means. Far too many people rightfully have concluded that the government prioritizes the needs of the wealthy over the needs of people living in poverty. Indeed, there is an old adage in the criminal justice system that it is better to be rich, white, and guilty than it is to be poor, Black, and innocent. If elected Attorney General, I will do all I can to ensure equal access to justice to all DC residents, regardless of income, race, sexual identity, gender identity, neighborhood, age, or disability status.

I am the only candidate in the race with both the vision and the experience to have the credibility on this issue from Day One in office. In my housing justice work, I fought and obtained compensation for Black, Asian, and Latino residents of Columbia Heights who had been pushed out of their housing by developers and the District under the guise of “housing code enforcement,” but in reality to make room for high-end condos and apartments. On the issue of wage theft, I will aggressively go after unscrupulous businesses who are short-changing or misclassifying their workers. I founded and managed my own law firm in the District where I represented groups of consumers harmed by unfair, fraudulent, or anticompetitive practices.

When we ask DC residents to have faith in the ability of the government to solve problems, we need to show them reason for that faith. I understand that and, as the only candidate in the race who knows how to lead big cases against well-funded opponents and achieve results for District residents, I am prepared to deliver for DC.

### Economic Development and Housing

1. Ward 7 hosts a disproportionately high percentage of vacant and dilapidated buildings and vacant lots. Do you believe the Office of the Attorney General can use its powers to address this issue? Is it possible to do so without inadvertently depriving middle income families of a rare asset?

Yes, OAG must play a role. I would work in coordination with other District agencies to ensure that owners have a fair chance to address conditions at their properties, using grants and other programs that can provide help where appropriate and available. Some owners may prefer to sell their properties and should be given that opportunity before fines and liens build up and take whatever equity remains. Where those options fail, the District should enforce the law for the benefit of the community overall. Vacant and dilapidated buildings contribute to infestation and other health and safety problems and they also bring down the value of other neighboring properties.

While single-family homes and small rental buildings can be a source of generational wealth and small business development for communities of color, I would take a tougher approach to large multi-family rental properties that have fallen into disrepair. Far too many tenants are forced to live in unsafe conditions, contributing to asthma and other health problems. OAG should work in collaboration with DCRA to uncover poor housing conditions and enforce the law against slum landlords.

In addressing these issues, it is important for OAG and other government agencies to adopt a community-based approach. By partnering with community-based organizations, maintaining a presence and connection in all wards, and hearing directly from residents, we can be more responsive to the unique needs of different neighborhoods and communities.

### 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 can the Attorney General do to stop the increase and address the root causes?

Unmet economic and social needs lie at the root of DC's spike in violent crime. Those economic and social needs that previously went underfunded or under-resourced have only become more so during the COVID-19 pandemic. I firmly believe that we must address the root causes of crime not just punish offenders.

For example, drug addiction and mental illness can lead to crime, but without adequate drug and mental health treatment, we are only creating a revolving door by punishing crimes committed to feed an addiction or as a result of mental illness. In addition, for far too long our criminal justice system has tried to solve every problem with the same tool of incarceration. I believe that addiction and mental illness belong, to the greatest extent possible, in our behavioral health system and not in our jails.

When it comes to our young people, I believe that every effort must be made to provide alternatives to the juvenile and criminal justice systems for non-violent crimes. Even for those young people who commit serious crimes that demand accountability, we must always remember these are young people who we ultimately want to get back on the right track. No life is dispensable and this is particularly true of our youth.

These issues are complex and do not lend themselves to simple solutions, which is why I have already consulted, and will continue to consult as Attorney General, with renowned experts in the field about approaches to crime and criminal justice that pair appropriate accountability for serious crimes with comprehensive solutions that help to prevent crime from happening in the first place. I also believe in policies that help formerly incarcerated people become productive citizens less likely to re-offend once they finish their sentences.

As Attorney General, criminal justice reform will be a top priority for my office. The DC Attorney General's Office does not have jurisdiction over adult felonies, and that too must change as a matter of local autonomy and as a prerequisite to comprehensive reform. You can read my full plan to address our criminal justice system here:

<https://www.spivafordcag.com/issues#issue6>

2. How do you plan to work cooperatively with the Chief of Police and the Executive?

In my conversations with activists, voters, and elected officials across DC, many have said that the District has the resources to address many of our issues, including the recent spike in violent crime – what we lack is coordination between the various departments in DC government. As Attorney General, one of my top priorities will be to increase that coordination between my office and the rest of the DC government. As far as possible, I would seek to reduce the tension between the OAG and the Mayor's office and the Chief and create a partnership to address crime through comprehensive solutions that address underlying social and economic needs that drive crime. That does not mean we will always see eye-to-eye, but should result in better focused efforts that lead to better results.

3. Do you believe that the Attorney General should have a proactive role in expungement and sealing of records for residents of the District of Columbia? If so, describe that role. If not, explain why not.

As Attorney General, I will seek to hold people who commit crimes accountable. But, that also means that once an individual has served their sentence and successfully completed supervision, they have earned a record clearance so their record is not a hindrance to housing, employment, and educational opportunities. I will seek to expand record expungement for all eligible people who have served their sentence and successfully completed supervision and to simplify the process for eligible individuals. I would also sponsor community clinics to help individuals find out if they are eligible and apply for record-sealing, modeled after the community clinics currently in place to help tenants and landlords apply for the federal rental assistance program, STAY DC. No one should be defined by their one worst act, and if they do their part by taking responsibility and serving their sentence, then we should do our part to enable their successful reentry into society, which in turn will make them less likely to re-offend.

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

Along with my efforts to expand record expungement, which is critical in helping people return as productive members of society, I will take measurable steps to reduce recidivism and reintegrate formerly incarcerated people into the community. I will advocate for increased access to wrap around services, such as housing and employment support and counseling, mental health and drug and alcohol treatment. This will prevent first time and repeat crimes that may be fueled by addiction and mental illness. As many of these services are provided by other agencies, this will require cooperation and coordination among my office and other agencies. I will also direct my office to divert low-level offenders who have committed non-violent crimes into those drug, alcohol and mental health programs when drugs and mental illness are the root cause of the non-violent crime.

### Jobs and Employment

#### 1. What is your strategy to combat wage theft?

Unfortunately, some employers seek to avoid paying fair wages, overtime, and/or health and other benefits to their employees either by ignoring legal requirements entirely, or by attempting to circumvent the fair labor laws by, for example, improperly categorizing employees as management or as independent contractors. These practices first and foremost harm workers, particularly low-wage workers struggling to survive in our high-cost community. Some unscrupulous companies prey particularly on immigrant workers who may fear complaining to the authorities about such violations. These practices also harm honest businesses that pay their workers fair and lawful wages and benefits, because they often get underbid for contracts by firms that are cheating their workers and therefore can underbid for jobs knowing that they will achieve “savings” by unlawfully underpaying their workers. That’s dead wrong for their workers and for their honest competitors and must be stopped.

I have represented labor unions, and as a plaintiffs’ class action lawyer and civil rights lawyer, I took on unscrupulous businesses. It is in my DNA to take on the tough fights as a lawyer on behalf of working people, and I will consistently do so as the DC Attorney General.

I will listen to labor unions and other workers’ rights organizations, as well as those honest businesses being undercut by such practices, to learn about where these abuses are occurring and investigate and act to punish and deter wrongdoing.

#### 2. What is your strategy to proactively attack employment discrimination?

Employment discrimination is, too often, perpetrated time and time again by repeat offenders. This makes the issue entrenched – but it also provides clear targets for the office of Attorney General. I would partner with civil rights organizations to learn of systemic instances of employment discrimination and go after such businesses. I also would ensure that OAG is out in the community, providing outreach so that employees know about their rights and how to file individual complaints through the Office of Human Rights.

I have seen the insidious effects of employment discrimination on members of my own family. I have represented labor unions, and as a plaintiffs’ class action lawyer and civil rights lawyer, I

took on unscrupulous businesses. I have the experience and passion to take on the tough fights as a lawyer on behalf of working people, and I will consistently do so as the DC Attorney General.