



### **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.



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## General Questions

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

As a fourth generation Native Washingtonian, my family and I have been District Residents for almost 80 years. Unfortunately, some of the issues that ailed the generations before me still exist today, on top of issues that have been recently brought to the light. These issues hinder the current generation from excelling and existing in the city that they were born and raised in. We've seen tremendous financial and developmental growth in our city, but at the same time we've seen a reduction in government services, government agency efficiency, affordable housing, public safety, public health service access and educational oversight.

After graduating from a top DC Public High school, I went onto graduate college and returned to the District to become an educator. I returned to the District to make a change. I spent almost a decade in the classroom helping to educate some of the cities best and brightest students. My education experience in Wards 4,5 and 8 allowed me a firsthand account of not only the educational, but the socioeconomic inequities our residents face on a daily basis. Our city has grown, but at whose expense? As mayor, I will continue to be the agent of change that leads by example. I will establish and increase accountability. I will establish and increase intentional and substantial forms of communication. Likewise, I will fight to keep residents within the District at all cost. Furthermore, I strongly believe that by doing so, we can restore the trust that District residents have in their leadership and government.

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

I am a firm believer of the saying "it takes a village." In order to ensure that I am able to meet the needs of Ward 7 residents, I need to communicate with its families, residents, leaders, council members and other genuinely vested constituents. By opening this line of communication, I will be able to hear from the people that legislation, resources and funding affect directly. The current administration had promised to pour into Ward 7, but unfortunately, some of those promises have been empty or delayed until this upcoming election cycle. Residents have complained about public safety, public health, affordable housing, education, employment and food security (just to name a few) for multiple Mayoral terms. Today, residents are still complaining about the lack of response and sense of urgency to those very issues ailing the community.

My steps would be simple and based around Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Needs. Currently, the communities needs are based on deficiencies, which come from a lack or deprivation of said needs. The longer these needs are not met, the stronger the motivation to fulfil such needs will become. For example, the longer a young person goes to an under resourced school, the more prone to being at risk they become. The longer a parent goes unemployed, the more prone to poverty their family becomes. When these results are coupled or grouped, you create an environment where the community is too busy attempting to analyze the root causes of their ailments instead of flourishing. By addressing these basic needs via my initiatives, we will be able to build thriving communities in Ward 7 that will address every resident's need and bring a sense of stability to the communities economic ecosystem.

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

My campaign mantra is “ACT Right.” ACT stands for Accountability, Communication and Trust. As stated previously, when our government or elected officials lack accountability and communication, the people lose trust. Our communities begin to distrust our elected officials and the government agencies that are meant to serve them. The only way to restore trust is by action. Being present in the community for not only the negatives, but for the positives send a strong message to residents. Patronizing businesses within a community, sends a strong message to its residents. Being visible builds trust, as people will know that you truly care about their wellbeing. By being present, communicating with members of the community, I will be able to enact legislation that will benefit the community. I will be able to advocate for the community in regard to their needs. The government agencies that align with the needs of the residents will be able to serve them at higher efficiencies because of the direct input collected from residents. All in all, as a result, these agencies will become more accessible to the residents in need of their direct services.

### 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?

I do not believe the per pupil formula is adequate. We need to increase funding for schools that educate our at-risk youth. We need to increase funding for schools that are in areas or communities that have at-risk indicators. While in the classroom, I spent time educating in Wards 4,5 and 8. Although all of these wards have very different demographics, one thing remained constant across the city: lack of resources for our at-risk youth. We are constantly reminded about the millions of dollars that go into the Public School System. However, the lack of execution and facilitation has always remained a constant negative point. I give credit where credit is due. For Fiscal Year 2023, the mayor has increased the UPSFF by 5.9% to more than 2.1 billion to serve 98,860 students in both DC Public and Public Charter Schools. But Under Mayoral Control, the mayor, who lacks educational and pedagogical experience, has essentially bounced around from initiative to initiative based on what seems to be popular at the time in other parts of the country. Anyone with educational background or knowledge knows that positive routines and habits are built by consistency. I am not positive that the mayor is capable of using the initially budgeted \$36 million Recovery Fund to provide additional support and stability adequately.

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

Only 2 percent of the Teachers in America are black males. Many students are losing the one thing that often times motivates them to want to do better: Representation. My first Black male teacher was not until Middle school and event then, they were far and few in between. The Pandemic has pushed us to a point where we will lose teachers at the end of this year, including many teachers of color. During my time as an educator, I quickly realized that there is no program that can prepare you for what you will see in an urban classroom. DCPS lacks the basic onboarding skills that prepare teachers for their individualized school environments. Instead, teachers are often times thrown into volatile environments, which have been historically underperforming. Often times, the administration and educators all know the root causes, but lack the autonomy to fully tackle these issues.

We need to train our teachers methodically and specifically for their school buildings. A teacher who starts their career at Shepard Elementary is going to have a completely different experience and career longevity than a teacher who is teaching at Smothers Elementary. By investing in the onboarding process, we can essentially revamp the way that teachers are interviewed, hired, trained and retained. I would be in support of initiatives involving hiring bonuses for qualified teachers, who wish to teach in Title 1 or underperforming schools. I strongly believe that with a sensible and efficient onboarding system in place, we will be able to recruit or retain the best teachers and successfully train anyone to teach in our district.

Also, in order to attract and maintain our teachers, we need to make sure that their lives are not made more complicated by their professions. By dispatching mental health resources, expanded healthcare plans and pathways to affordable housing, I believe that we can make the lives of our teachers much better. By doing so, we will be able to attract, train and retain qualified teachers.

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?

Mayoral Control was established in 2007 and has been in place since then. We have made progress under mayoral control, but I believe that educational gains would have been made alongside technological advances and the introduction of technological resources. I am not in support of complete Mayoral control for quite a few reasons. The mayor lacks educational knowledge and pedagogy, which means that they are dependent upon the data that is presented to them to make executive decisions. This is a very bad recipe for disaster, as we've seen OSSE and the DCPS Chancellor misrepresent data. We've seen OSSE falsely accuse families of violating tuition rules, DCPS cut budgets based on inadequate data or falsehoods, Schools falsify graduation records or achievements and sweep student attendance issues under the rug. Both of these positions are appointed by the mayor, which means that they do not have the freedom to speak independently and are free of voter accountability, strengthening the mayoral control.

I am in favor of establishing a checks and balances system. At this time, it is difficult to explicitly state how this new model would look. However, I strongly believe that the State Board of Education needs to be able to participate in this model as well as a newly independent agency OSSE, parents, students, educators and constituents alike. I

am also in favor of allowing DCPS employees to run for the State Board of Education, which would widely and immediately impact our schools. I believe that at this time, there is no sense of accountability as it pertains to the DC Public School System under mayoral control, and it needs to be established.

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

While in the classroom, many of my parents would always ask, “Is a Public Charter School a Better Option?” I would always be faced with the task of speaking truthfully, but not downplaying the school I was teaching at. Throughout these honest conversations with parents and other educators, I came to the realization of one thing: the goal is to provide our children with an education that allows them to achieve their wildest dreams. However, the Public Charter schools lack transparency and accountability. Once again, the mayor appoints the Public Charter School Board, but there is little that can be done to hold them accountable for their actions. They receive public funding, but are not subject to all the same measures that DCPS is subject to. In order to improve the Public Charter School system, we need to increase oversight and accountability, which at this time starts with the mayor. I would also like to point out that DC Public Charter employees are eligible to run for the State Board of Education, but not their DC Public School counterparts. This provides an example of the lack of equity, transparency, accountability and fairness ailing the education system.

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

Proper educational intervention starts at home. The meaning behind this statement is that if a child’s basic needs are not met at home, then their school life is deeply affected. I’ve taught under housed, unhoused (I do not use the word “homeless” due to its negative connotations), low income and foster students. The common denominator was that their home situation impacted their educational progression.

We should expand the “Connected School” model, which has allowed DCPS to open 10 schools up for community based resources. Community members are able to come in for employment opportunities, educational resources, mental health services and much more. These schools serve as a buffer against socioeconomic shortcomings in their communities, but we will require more than just 10 schools. Currently, only 3 of those schools are in Ward 7(Sousa Middle School, Kelly Miller Middle School and Eliot-Hine Middle School.).

I am also a big proponent of the arts and believe that so many children would benefit from participating in the arts. I believe we should expand the budgets for schools to ensure that every school not only has ALL special subject teachers, but that they also have librarians and adequate after school programs relevant to their interest. As a young child, I participated in after school activities, such as music, acting, theater, poetry, gardening, choir, bike club, chess, etc. Now more than ever, these programs are necessary for our children to succeed and find joy in activities outside their academic responsibilities.

### 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?

Any economic development in Ward 7 will be based around basic human needs. For example, bringing more businesses and human services to Ward 7 is essential to developing or shaping its economic revitalization. The community has spoken via various mediums and outlets about their lack of access to goods and services. Ward 7 is considered a food desert due to its lack of appropriate grocer options. One way to help spearhead economic development is to not only bring grocers to the Ward, but bring affordable grocer options to meet the needs of varying residents.

Ward 7 needs better and more adequate access to public health services. There is no hospital in Ward 7 and residents are left with limited healthcare options to address their many health needs. In particular, about one third of the residential population of Ward 7 is over the age of 45, which is when most people's priorities shift towards prioritizing healthcare. Today, the life expectancy gap between black people and their white counterparts still persist. This gap is made worse when there is a lack of public health services in our communities. By providing our residents with appropriate healthcare, we can make an impact on strengthening the economy as people live longer and healthier lifestyles.

Building better businesses in our communities is also essential to economic growth and development. Grants have been historically used to spur economic growth, but without true pathways to business ownership, we oftentimes see random businesses pop up without any regard to the community aesthetic. Large development projects are built and beneath or amongst them are businesses that often hold little economic value to the community, such as fast food franchises or smaller general stores. By surveying the community and figuring out what their basic needs are and what they would like to see, only then we will be able to build better businesses that are more valued within the community.

The last option to spur economic growth and development would be to build more affordable housing. The housing crisis in the district is getting worse, and it seems as if no one is advocating for our residents. As mayor, I plan to make sure that we are no longer displacing our residents and including them in the decision-making process.

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 need to make sure that housing and property compliance is being monitored as well as followed by landlords, owners and developers currently in possession of properties. These properties can be redeveloped or repurposed to house residents via affordable housing, create storefronts, open small community based businesses or simply converted for other purposes

designated by the communities input. I strongly believe that by following these measures, we can decrease the crime rate, increase resident satisfaction, employment as well as other rates pertinent to the communities positive growth and development.

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 three biggest challenges facing economic development in Ward 7 currently are transit access, business development and the lack of appropriate use of land.

There is currently limited transportation access throughout Ward 7. Ride-share drivers often believe the negative myths about EOTR in Wards 7 and 8. When added with the lack of accessibility to Metro, we limit residents to travelling by car or other exhaustive means that are not sustainable for their everyday lives. By adding more Metro bus routes, DC Circulator lines or even completing the DC street car line (with a well-designed, least invasive and communicably amicable plan) as promised, we will be able to provide residents with more ways to traverse their community, ward and city.

In terms of business development, people often times believe that there is a lack of business due to other factors. These factors range from excessive loitering, crime, lack of disposable income and even general disinterest. All of these are factors that could affect businesses. However, how will we know if we have not attempted to supply the residents with business options? I am a firm believer that "if you build it, people will come." By focusing our attention and resources onto smaller micro-grants for businesses, I believe that we can empower the residents by catering to their wants and needs.

The lack of appropriate use of land and dilapidated properties in Ward 7 has proved to be problematic within the community. With underdeveloped or undeveloped spaces, we potentially allow crime, poverty and loitering to grow. As these buildings are left unattended and poorly maintained, these areas can potentially attract crime and illegal activity. Some of these buildings have residents in them, yet they are not treated fairly or given the resources they need to improve their livelihoods. By reallocating these spaces and turning them into options like open air farmers markets, green spaces where residents can plant or grow and rehabilitating these spaces for mixed-use commercial/residential spaces, I strongly believe that we can push economic growth in Ward 7.

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?

All of these business nodes have one thing in common: transportation to or from them is not as accessible to residents as other business nodes across the city. In order to spur economic growth and maximize the potential of these areas, we must ensure that people can get to them. By increasing the foot traffic as well as the day-to-day pedestrian

or commuter traffic, we will be able to take advantage of more economic opportunities. Some of these areas are also in need of rehabilitation to the sidewalks, streetlights, paved streets, parking meters, parking spaces and other aspects that affect accessibility of transportation to and from the areas.

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?

The DC Housing Authority and its Board would benefit residents by taking a look at some issues mentioned below:

1. Rehabilitation and Renovation of Public Housing Units that are in desperate need of rehabilitation. Some of these buildings have not been fully rehabilitated or renovated in many years.
2. Making sure that families within the system are provided with pathway programs so that families can phase out of public housing with all the necessary resources, such as job skills, education skills and family skills.
3. Increased oversight so that agency leaders are held accountable for their actions, decisions or lack thereof. Clear communication and transparency is necessary to ensure that the agency is functioning at a high level.

### 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?

I am an advocate for Transportation Stipends for District Residents. All Residents, especially those who live in areas underserved by WMATA, should be given stipends so that they can access transportation without it exhausting their financial resources. By providing residents with transportation stipends, we also help speed up the WMATA bus onboarding process, which would benefit decongesting traffic in areas that we are looking to increase pedestrian and foot traffic.

The district already has the Circulator bus, which could help close the transportation gap EOTR and beyond. Many of the residents would benefit from having an extra bus line (especially if free) to travel throughout their communities. This would increase consumer spending and essentially boost the economy as people are able to traverse freely throughout Ward 7.



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.

The potential expansion of the DC Streetcar along Benning Road comes with positives and negatives. The negatives are based around the concerns of cost, potential traffic congestion, loitering and mechanical issues that we have already seen with the initial H street line. However, I believe that the positives outweigh the negatives. The potential expansion could bring economic benefits to Ward 7. More people would be able to access the businesses in the area. Residents would also benefit from having another mode of transportation connecting them with other areas of the city. Seeing as the DC Streetcar is electric, it is an environmentally friendly option that aligns with the growing push to help sustain our environment.

### 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?

The decline in crime, yet rise in murders, most likely can be attributed to a combination of things. There is no one reason or factor that is leading to an increase in murders in the Nation's Capitol. The New York Times recently published an article that spoke to rising murders in the United States as a whole. Many other cities are currently experiencing the same increases in violent crimes and murders. The article attributed five reasons to the rise.

1. The Pandemic - stressors such as unemployment, isolation and uncertainty about the future in regard to finances, housing and wellbeing.
2. More guns being in circulation - the sale of legal firearms exceeded predictions by 3 million, reaching the highest levels in June 2020 and spiked again in January 2021.
3. Changes in police behavior-Due to heightened scrutiny, police officers may have pulled back from doing their jobs. Also, with the police killings of people of color, people are less likely to call the police.
4. Decline in policing/ Decline in witnesses
5. General anomie - As the increase in murders occurs, other antisocial behavior has also risen, such as reckless driving, aggression from airline passengers and disruptive conduct in schools or public places.

Although, these factors may not all be accurate for the District, they do carry some truth. I strongly believe that in order to curb this increase and reverse its effects, we must invest in our Communities. We must continue to create jobs, employ residents, keep our promises in regard to education and create safe spaces for residents to voice their concerns. Often times a person will not speak or comment, if they feel that their voice is not being heard. They will remain silent as

they believe it “makes no difference.” In order to reach our communities, we must push resources into them. We cannot simply throw money at the issue, but we have to effectively execute.

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

Returning citizens have difficult times with quite a few areas in their lives. Securing Housing, Employment, Mental Health resources, Health Insurance, Adequate Food and Clothing are all the battles they face. Reentry Houses or “Halfway houses” are essential to reducing recidivism and reintegrating returning residents back into society. The District lacks reentry housing or halfway houses, but when newer facilities are proposed to be built, there is often a large pushback from the community due to the placement or logistics of these facilities.

By working collectively with the community and returning residents, we can make sure that we meet everyone’s need. Not only is housing an issue, but simple aspects are frequently overlooked, such as education, mental health resources, etc. Programs that are geared towards educational advancement, vocational education, civil engagement and other important areas should be expanded upon. One program that I would seek to emulate is the PIVOT program sponsored by Georgetown University, which takes returning residents and supplies them with the opportunities to receive a certificate from the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown. This program partners with business owners and other entrepreneurs to teach them the fundamentals of owning and operating their own business or entrepreneurial endeavors. They also provided work experience in the form of an internship. It is very plausible to emulate this program at the University of District of Columbia.

### 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?

In order to increase the percentage of District employees that reside in the District, it is imperative to create housing opportunities that are reasonable and affordable for them. To further highlight and explain what this scenario looks like, let’s use District educators, who are DC Govt. Employees classified as ET-15. For the record, I’m a proponent of teachers residing in the neighborhood that they teach in. I truly believe that there are a plethora of benefits when this occurs. By offering District Educators housing incentives in the form of home purchasing and housing assistance, we can increase the number of District employees who actually reside in the District. This model could be repeated across different agencies, which happen to be placed all over the city. (i.e. DMV, DC Fire EMS, DCHA, DOES, OCTO, DC Tax and Revenue, DC ORCA)

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?

The pandemic highlighted a major flaw within the Department of Employment Services. When the pandemic hit, DOES became backlogged with claims, which was a great opportunity to hire and train people who wanted to work. This was an opportune time to employ residents to handle the overwhelming phones. But most importantly, it showed us that the system in place is not currently efficient, working or compatible with our current residents. In order to fix this, we need to make sure that DOES is working efficiently to not only process claims, but return our residents to the workforce. This looks different per individual resident, but would consist of training, job preparation, interview prep, clothing assistance, networking events, job fairs and much more. We must also bring back educational programs within the schools. Many residents remember Vocational education and how it prepared students for employment directly after high school. Whether it was auto shop, shoe making, electric work, welding, HVAC, construction, etc. it allowed students to graduate high school with skills that they could use. I've spoken about reopening the Spingarn High as a Vocation and Academic Center in order to educate, train and produce more residents ready for the workforce.