

Patrick Kennedy, 28, is a community leader running for Ward 2 councilmember who brings nearly a decade's worth of experience in his campaign, yet would still be the youngest councilmember ever elected. He was first elected as an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner while an undergraduate student at George Washington University, defeating a five-term incumbent who questioned the ability of young people to represent their communities, and has been unanimously selected as the ANC's chair five times, starting at the age of 22.

Kennedy's accomplishments include working to save a key public school from closure, successfully gaining better transit service, bringing together neighbors to support safer streets, and obtaining more affordable housing in Ward 2. He is trusted and endorsed by most of the elected officials in the ward, LGBTQ leader Ruby Corado, the Sierra Club, Greater Greater Washington, and various labor groups, among others. He has experience working intergenerationally, having served on the board of St. Mary's Court, a HUD-sponsored senior housing facility. He also has an arrest record: having once been arrested for civil disobedience in support of D.C. statehood with other college students, when he was 20 years old. As a tested leader with broad support, Kennedy is the candidate best positioned to bridge divides and put together a winning coalition to move Ward 2 past scandal and into a new era, as reflected in all publicly-released polls of the Ward 2 race.

Introductory Questions

1. What office are you seeking, and why did you decide to run for that office? If (re) elected, what are your priority areas of focus?

I'm running for the Ward 2 seat in the June 2nd Democratic primary and June 16th special election.

With nearly a decade of experience as a community leader in Ward 2, I am proud to be known as a bridge builder. I am proud of the relationships I have built with people in every community in the ward. Most important, I am proud of the way in which we have fought together to build stronger schools, safer streets, and support some of our most vulnerable citizens.

When Francis-Stevens School was facing closure, I worked with parents, teachers, and neighbors in support of a plan to increase neighborhood attendance rates and merge with School Without Walls High School. The result: A complete turnaround, with rising test scores and a wait list of more than 800.

I want to see that same success story on the eastern end of the ward. I will work to establish a programmatically strong DCPS middle school option in or near the eastern part of the ward and

work to generate buy-in from feeder elementaries, with the long-term vision of keeping Ward 2 families in DCPS all the way up to Grade 12 at Cardozo High School. We need a strong, by-right, shared public school pathway from Birth to Grade 12. A new, high-quality middle school is critical to securing a critical mass of family buy-in to support this vision.

When street changes were being considered in Foggy Bottom and Dupont Circle, I worked with neighbors, cyclists, and advocates to develop a compromise so that a Protected Bike Lane may safely move people across the ward. Transportation is my biggest passion, and as the next councilmember, I will look at transportation through an equity lens and focus on creating free bus-to-rail transfers on Metro and high-quality late night transit service so that our service workers are assured that they can get home easily and reliably after their shifts. Such changes will also assist commuters and those frequenting restaurants and nightlife.

As a renter who pays half of my income on rent, I know how hard it is to afford to stay in this ward. I've fought for more affordable housing in the Comprehensive Plan, and on the Council, I will work to expand rent-controlled buildings, increase housing supply, aid our neighbors experiencing homelessness, and provide tax relief to housing-stressed, longtime homeowners – some of whom have been here for decades and their families for generations, but who struggle to keep up with a tax burden out-of-proportion to what they can afford to pay.

The common theme to my approach to governing: Inclusivity. I have fought with and for the people of Ward 2 on the neighborhood level, and I'm prepared to take that work to the next level on the Council.

Budget

2. Do you consider the District's total current budget to be too large, too small, or about right? Please explain.

Under optimal circumstances, our budget should be larger. It should grow each year, faster than the rate of inflation, so that we can offer improved services to address inequities for our most disadvantaged residents and improve the quality of life for all residents.

Achieving this means growing revenues beyond expenses, and the most durable way to do that is to boost tax receipts by creating the conditions for residents and businesses to thrive. We can look at targeted revenue enhancements in certain cases, but over the past decade the District has been able to both simultaneously lower taxes for most residents and businesses (by adopting the most progressive tax structure in the country) and invest more in services because the city as a whole prospered.

We need to continue on that positive track, and the way to do it is by continuing the virtuous cycle of lifting people out of poverty and making it easier for residents to start and grow their businesses, thereby driving more tax revenue that can be used to further uplift the least among us. It is more important than ever to operate in this mindset given the enormous economic and

financial setback that COVID-19 has brought up.

Before the crisis, the District was in a good position...but for us to ascend to the next level we must bear in mind that it's not enough to be prosperous, we have to affirmatively adopt policies and programs to ensure that that prosperity is inclusive and that the returns generated are re-invested in things that level the playing field.

3. With unemployment, homelessness, and general economic distress at high levels, do you envision increasing safety net spending in future budgets? If so, which areas would you seek to expand?

I absolutely think that we need to increase safety net spending, particularly for people experiencing homelessness. When I spoke above about reinvesting the dividends of our prosperity in things that uplift the least among us, we have to recognize that one aspect of our prosperity that has not been shared is the rise in property values across the city. That has driven up the cost of housing, which in turn has left more and more people unable to afford a home here...resulting in many more people living on our streets.

We need to invest more in permanent supportive housing, rent supplements, and improving our shelter system...and we need to be proactive in addressing our housing affordability crisis by putting D.C. government resources behind the preservation of existing affordable housing units. Waiting for displacement to take place, and then trying to put the horse back in the barn by shoehorning units into new development via inclusionary zoning or financing them at three times the cost of preservation is not a sustainable, sole solution.

4. With the COVID-19 outbreak causing an economic downturn and stress on state and local budgets, would you support raising taxes to maintain current spending levels? If so, how should new revenue sources be targeted?

Revenue enhancements should certainly be on the table as part of the mix for how we cover the overall deficit, but we cannot sustainably raise taxes to cover all of our budget shortfall, given its size and the likely multi-year nature of lower revenue estimates. We will have to look at responsible use of our reserves and targeted spending reductions.

Looking at taxes in particular, we ought to consider only those that actually bear relation to people's ability to pay. A tax increase that makes it harder for a small business or a struggling resident to pay their bills in the aftermath of COVID is counterproductive. I also think we should be looking at a surtax of a defined duration, to keep faith with our residents that we're asking more of them based on true, immediate financial need.

There will have to be deferments or cuts in our capital budget, where the shortfall is estimated at close to \$1.5 billion, for sure. That presents an opportunity to wring waste out of our

procurement process and prioritize, especially in transportation and schools modernization spending, cost-savings that have long been left on the table in the face of massive budget overruns.

As far as the operational side of things is concerned, we need to prioritize spending on services responsive to the public health crisis, and those that serve vulnerable residents. Long-term priorities that will alleviate disparities - such as fully funding Birth to Three and establishing a new hospital at St. Elizabeths - should be held harmless and we ought to retain the financial ability to supplement the federal government's relief efforts and serve small businesses and residents that are ineligible or otherwise ill-served by existing options. We need to make sure that we're doing everything we can to create the conditions for recovery, for both residents and businesses.

Transportation, Housing and Infrastructure

5. More than a third of DC residents do not own cars and automobile traffic significantly contributes to climate change. If elected, how will you work to improve public transportation in the District?

In this race, I am proud to be endorsed by the [Sierra Club](#) and [Greater Greater Washington](#), in part because of my commitment to and accomplishments on transportation issues. I have never owned a car, and use transit and bike for most trips, so in addition to having a deep policy grounding on this issue, I live it too.

Transportation access and affordability is key to opportunity and accessing jobs, education, and training. We need to make our transportation more efficient, affordable, and reliable.

That starts with improving our bus service: running buses more frequently outside of rush hours, implementing dedicated bus lanes to create faster and more reliable trips, and working to simplify Metro's fare and route structures to make transit intuitive and more cost-effective for riders.

Just as important as running more frequent service is running more reliable service. Advertising and budgeting for buses to arrive on a route every five minutes doesn't do any good if the real wait time ends up being 15-20 minutes before three or four buses show up in quick succession, bunched due to traffic congestion. For more people to feel comfortable relying on bus service, they need to know not only that they won't have to wait unduly long for a bus to arrive, but that their travel time will be reasonably short and predictable.

We need to treat bus service like it's an integral, interconnected part of the region's transit network rather than an inferior complement to the rail system. I am passionate about

eliminating the transfer penalty between bus and rail service, something I have [written about](#) in the past. The transfer penalty can often double the cost of commuting for low-income users, many of whom ride bus routes that were truncated at rail stations as the Metro system expanded. The inclusion of free bus rides in monthly SelectPasses starting in July was a positive down payment on making our fare structure more equitable, but we need to follow the lead of New York, Chicago, and systems in many other peer cities and allow riders to transfer freely between buses and Metrorail.

It is also imperative that we implement Vision Zero with more urgency and more teeth.

I am proud to have supported many Vision Zero efforts already and have supported every Vision Zero initiative before our ANC. I want to continue to be a vocal transportation advocate on the Council, using the bully pulpit and the budget process to advance stalled priorities like the 9th Street Protected Bike Lane. I understand that transportation issues can be contentious but having committee members with relationships with community leaders can help us advance localized infrastructure decisions that have District-wide impact.

6. Other global cities are working to increase nearby access to amenities for all residents. For example, Paris recently announced a plan to become a “15-minute city” with grocery stores and other destinations located within a short walk of every home. What will you do to eliminate food deserts and improve local options throughout the District?

One thing we can do in the short-term is improve bus service, which in Wards 7 and 8 in particular is a lifeline for residents to be able to access existing grocery stores and other services. When you’re carrying a load of groceries, waiting 30 minutes for a bus or having to transfer and wait 30 minutes for a bus twice or more times doesn’t quite cut it. We should also look to expand the number of existing vendors where ProducePlus vouchers can be used, and look to induce a more rich selection of fruits, vegetables, and other perishable food items in stores like CVS...even if they aren’t quite full-service grocers and or don’t aspire to be. Medium-term, the District should look at stepping in where market failures like this exist. The town of Baldwin, Florida did [precisely this](#) when its sole grocery store closed; the town just opened a market on its own. A District-subsidized grocer or co-op with a break-even mandate is worth investigating.

Long-term, the District has good existing incentives for supermarkets to locate in food deserts, but it’s important that it continue efforts to proactively lure grocery chains as part of developments slated to take place. While food deserts tend to lack an abundance of disposable income, increased density and/or improved access via transportation options can often serve as inducements to make the market fundamentals work for a private grocer. Therefore centering grocery stores as anchors for more dense, transit-oriented, and mixed-income developments is a viable goal to push for.

7. As of 2019, there were 6,500 people in the District experiencing homelessness and

the economic impact of COVID-19 will place a strain on thousands more. How do you plan on decreasing homelessness in a sustainable way?

Homelessness as a societal issue is rooted in our increasingly unaffordable housing stock, so part of how we address the crisis alluded to in this question also bears on whether we adequately address the housing crisis. I go into that further below.

For those that have fallen through into homelessness, we need to do a couple of different things:

1. Increase investment in Permanent Supportive Housing. For individuals with underlying mental health or substance abuse challenges, we must do a better job of providing wraparound services to help individuals address any challenges they face and help place them on a long-term pathway to potential success.
2. Targeting affordable housing programs, rent supplements, and vouchers to provide long-term forms of assistance to those experiencing homelessness or those who are low-income, who will not feasibly be served by market conditions.
3. Make a sustained, capital commitment to not just replace but expand the number of units in our public housing inventory, by increasing density on existing sites and guaranteeing existing residents a meaningful right to return using Build First principles.
4. Improve our shelter system by reducing barriers to entry, creating smaller individual shelters, and making more shelters pet-friendly and co-ed. Too many of our existing shelters are perceived as unsafe or unwelcoming. We need to make them more safe and accessible. The District's commitment to addressing family homelessness via a system of dispersed shelters opened to replace dilapidated D.C. General has resulted in a reduction of 40% of families without shelter. We need to double down on that with a similar commitment to housing single or childless adults.

8. If (re) elected, what will you do to create and protect affordable housing for both home-buyers and renters?

There isn't a silver bullet to the issue of affordable housing, but I believe we can make targeted investments to help address these needs:

Strategies may include:

1. Finalize a plan to repair the District's public housing stock, put substantial public investment into that plan, and look for redevelopment opportunities in the D.C. Housing Authority inventory that will allow us to grow the number of public housing units for low-income residents in a mixed-income environment, while at the same time ensuring a meaningful right of return and a minimization of disruption to existing tenants through Build

First principles. 2. Leverage public-private partnerships like the Housing Preservation Fund concept to lay out public dollars as seed money with a private sector match, thereby increasing the number of affordable units we're delivering or preserving on an annual basis. 3. Set spending targets for the District's Housing Production Trust fund by ward in order to further affirmative housing goals and better spread affordable housing units across the city, rather than concentrate affordable housing on the District's East End. 4. Establish a binding policy for future dispositions of District-owned land to require winning bidders to produce deeply affordable housing units (i.e., for those making less than 50% and optimally for those who make around 30% of the Market Family Income) on the land they acquire, or subsidize the creation of an equivalent number of units in close proximity. 5. Conduct better oversight of the HPTF and establish more firm criteria for awards in order to ensure that financing flows to projects with the highest merit and not, as a recent Auditor's report suggested, to projects that produce an inferior return on taxpayer investment.

For those with lower incomes especially, we can employ these strategies:

1. Enhance rent control strategically. 2. Focus on preserving existing affordable housing units with the same degree of vigor that we spend on creating new ones. It costs three times as much to build a new unit of affordable housing as it does to preserve an existing one via a long-term covenant. Optimally, we should be doing both but I think in terms of value for investment we should be dedicating a lot more resources relatively to preservation, particularly in neighborhoods that we know are in line to experience enhanced gentrification and displacement pressures.

9. Revitalization in DC has created an increase in commercial and residential development. Though this revitalization is beneficial to the District, certain areas are not experiencing it at the same rate as other neighborhoods. What are your plans to ensure that all of DC benefits from periods of economic growth?

I don't believe that the District has done an adequate job of promoting dispersed, equitable development. All too often, I think that we have leverage as a government that we don't utilize in negotiation. The entrance of Walmart into the District, for instance, was a case where they signalled a willingness to open up stores on the east side of the city in exchange for the ability to open stores west of North Capitol Street and the city not passing the Large Retailer Accountability Act. We obtained no firm commitments from them, however, and after they opened their stores in more development-rich parts of the District they reneged on their stated intention to open two stores east of the Anacostia River and a third at Bladensburg Road and New York Avenue.

It's also not right that District-subsidized affordable housing projects overwhelmingly concentrate on the eastern side of the city, while at the same time we often relieve developers of their obligation to provide affordable units in the central or western parts of the city.

Pursuing affirmatively fair housing objectives means mandating not just the production of affordable units, but the production of such units across the city...and more insistence on mixed-income communities on the eastern side of the city, which community leaders there desire.

One thing that the District has done well, which I would like to see them do to an even greater extent, is relocate government offices to areas east of the Anacostia River. It can do this either by building on land that it owns or agreeing to lease office space in order to make it feasible for private developments to move forward. This encourages other uses to cluster around those offices, because a daytime population of government workers with decent-paying jobs can support many surrounding businesses and some workers will choose to live close by. That ensures a solid middle class population, and creates a virtuous cycle.

This is a successful approach that has been employed in the District for years, most notably at the Reeves Center -- which was completed in 1986 at 14th and U and helped revitalize the surrounding neighborhoods.

10. Which recently revitalized DC neighborhood would you suggest as the best model for the city as a whole, and why?

This is an interesting question, really probably one of the most interesting questions I've seen on a questionnaire or been asked over the course of the campaign.

I'm not sure that the revitalization of any neighborhood has been perfect or even outstanding, as far as balancing the sometimes-dueling objectives of maximizing prosperity and ensuring equity for residents. I wish that the District had done a much more aggressive job land-banking in center city neighborhoods like Shaw to preserve or create additional affordable housing units in advance of the predictable development boom that took place there.

Nonetheless, I think there was a lot that went right in the Shaw neighborhood. Churches, in particular, played a strong role in developing affordable housing there along with nonprofits like MANNA. As a result, the neighborhood has been able to maintain a demographic mix that mirrors the city as a whole more than almost any other community...although like the city as a whole, I think we've struggled to bridge divides. People who live alongside one another don't always socialize together, patronize the same restaurants/bars, and attend the same institutions or houses of worship.

That's why it's important to invest in things that do bring people together. I feel very strongly about that given my background as a community leader. The best examples of that in Shaw are the new Giant at the O Street Market, the renovated Kennedy Rec Center, and the (relatively) new Shaw Library. That's one of the reasons that I think the inability of the District to follow through on its commitment thus far to build a new Shaw Middle School is so disappointing: I find that our schools, in particular, are places where diversity can flourish and

people are pulled together.

Education

11. Do you think reform in the DC public schools is headed in the right direction? Explain your answer.

I believe that we are headed in the right direction; there is real progress that has been achieved in practically every demographic group over the past decade-and-a-half, as reflected in NAEP scores and other measures of student achievement. Relative to other major urban districts and certainly the period prior to this, we're better off than we were.

That said, the achievement gap has persisted and in some areas widened...so we need to do a much better job of embracing solutions that center equity first if we're to make additional, meaningful progress from here. That starts by making an affirmative commitment to early childhood education by fully funding Birth-to-3. Much of the achievement gap is baked in based on the difference in schooling/reading that kids experience before they even enter public schools, because the early years are the most important for cognitive development.

To that end, I'm really proud of our work at the neighborhood level to preserve the Stevens School building at 21st and L for educational use, and it will open in the fall as the District's first early childhood education center -- serving infants and toddlers as well as PreK-3 and PreK-4 classrooms. Just as importantly, it is the first D.C. school to implement an at-risk preference for lottery admissions, privileging families from disadvantaged backgrounds. With a successful pilot program at Stevens, I'd like to extend that at-risk preference citywide when the District conducts its next review of DCPS boundaries and feeder patterns in a couple of years, as part of a larger overall look at attendance policies.

I also think that there should be better coordination between the charter and traditional public school sectors. I reject the framing that you can't have two successful systems operate side-by-side, giving families a public school choice that works best for their children. There are many families in Ward 2, for instance, with one child in a DCPS school and another in a charter school. Many children have attended schools in both sectors. We need to recognize and encourage sharing of best practices and information between sectors, and plan much more constructively around facilities across the District.

For DCPS, one of my top priorities is creating a strong by-right K-12 pathway for residents in this ward, which is a particular issue on the eastern (Logan Circle/Shaw) end at the middle school level and at the high school level for everyone east of the Park. We need to create a well-programmed, new Shaw Middle School with curricular alignment to feeder elementary

schools in order to ensure that families stay in the ward and have a quality option to stay in DCPS through the middle grades. We also need to work around a common vision for the high school years as well, at Cardozo and Dunbar High Schools.

12. How do you suggest that we repurpose school properties that have been closed over the past few years?

One of the things that we don't do well as a city is plan, or follow through on our plans. It takes us a long time to come up with new or revised elements to documents like the Comprehensive Plan or moveDC, and often by the time the revision is complete the plan is thrown out or otherwise not followed (sometimes due to a change in priorities and political leadership, sometimes because it's no longer ripe).

In the case of schools, the Master Facilities Plan that was submitted to the Council last year was inadequate. It was more like a compendium of data on demographic trends that lacked any sort of follow-through as far as laying out an actual plan for the siting of new schools or the use of existing buildings. There are a lot of government properties sitting vacant right now, some of which are derelict (like the former Spingarn High School), that could be given over to another use -- some other government function like a library or police/fire station, park, or affordable housing development or even a charter school. But we don't do anything with any of them, and they just sit unused for years.

The last thing I want to see is another round of DCPS school closures. I think at a certain point this becomes a vicious cycle. As an alternative, I think it's worth exploring in schools that continue to be under-enrolled whether the school can co-locate with a charter or other tenant that needs space. The charter can pay rent, which the Council can legislate to stay with the host DCPS school's budget, thereby improving the resources that the DCPS school has to boost student achievement..and it would be more affordable for the charter operator as well, lessening the amount of public money that just goes straight to a landlord and doesn't bear any direct benefit for classroom functions.

13. How will you ensure equitable Special Education allocations across the city?

The Council passed legislation several years ago that gave a boost in the Uniform Per Pupil Student Funding Formula for at-risk students. Unfortunately, while the original intent was for those dollars to follow the students and be used at the discretion of school principals, in practice DCPS has retained the ability to pool that money and distribute it to schools at their discretion. School budgeting remains very opaque, and it's often not clear that the money gets where it needs to go.

Fixing and enhancing school budgeting, therefore, is an important first step that should be taken. Beyond that, DCPS and OSSE need to be a much more collaborative partner to families of special needs students, who often must go through an arduous process to get

adequate IEPs for their children. In many cases, far more than in most other jurisdictions, the process ends up in mediated dispute resolution and/or litigation. For families of means, that's difficult enough, but for those that can't afford to pay attorneys or advocates to help them through the process they often must settle for substandard accommodations for their kids. On top of this, many parents complain that their students' IEPs aren't followed.

It's not constructive for families and LEAs to have an adversarial relationship when the foundation of their relationship should be collaboration for what's in the best interests of the child. In some respects, the existing dynamic reflects a desire on the part of the District government to be parsimonious with resources, but often the disputes and litigation end up costing more time, money and effort than could be saved. It's an unhealthy, counterproductive dynamic for all concerned.

Finally, the District flat-out has to do a much better job at building capacity in DCPS to educate special needs students. The system is barely functioning at a level above that which resulted in the city being under a 40-year consent decree from the court system. It should work more deeply with private partners like Ivymount on professional development, and work to locate more special education functions in the District to reduce the stress and expense of transporting students long distances outside of the city.

14. What accountability measures can you put into place to ensure that schools are staffed appropriately? What significant, unique policies would you put into place that would drastically increase the support and retention of teachers and administrators in DCPS?

I think that the District ought to benchmark the staffing and funding ratios outlined in the [2013 adequacy study](#) and make a sustained commitment to increasing funding levels beyond inflation until we have closed the gap toward funding at the levels outlined in the study. Progress might be uneven; there might be some years (like the current one, wherein we face a massive budget shortfall) where we can't make as much progress, but we should set a time-based goal for when we aim to have funding levels met and work incrementally to ensure that we meet that goal.

Teacher and principal retention is a huge problem facing the system. DCPS needs to do a better job supporting them professionally. Most principals, especially inexperienced ones, are afraid to take risks because they don't have multi-year contracts and feel that they will be put out to pasture at the first sign of trouble, or if results don't come quickly enough.

We need to give proven, experienced principals a greater degree of autonomy and work to cultivate new ones. Students benefit from stable school leadership. And as with teachers, improving morale and offering robust mentorship programs is a promising option. Most new teachers face an extraordinarily difficult and intimidating entry into the profession, and many get burned out of teaching entirely or decamp to other districts that are perceived as lower-stress. We need to invest in their professional development and open up a conversation around

teacher evaluation standards (which the chancellor has indicated a willingness to do) so that a greater sense of support and fairness is fostered.

Criminal Justice

15. Describe one aspect of an effective safety plan that would lower crime rates in DC without infringing on the constitutional rights of DC residents.

I fully support the NEAR Act, and I believe that the Council should provide thorough oversight to ensure that the administration and MPD are complying with the law. Ensuring the success of the NEAR Act and that OAG's Cure the Streets Program are fully funded are two ways that we can prioritize a public health approach to violence prevention.

In order to fully fund the NEAR Act, I would encourage District efforts to apply for funds, grants, and resources from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services at the US Department of Justice. Otherwise, funds from the Office of the Deputy Mayor of Public Safety and Justice and the Public Safety and Justice cluster should be available to fully fund the NEAR Act – through reprogramming if necessary and coordinating our public safety agencies to meet the spirit of the NEAR Act.

To that end, the District needs to think about whether certain functions presently performed by MPD are better housed under ONSE. It is important to promote accountability and oversight within the spirit of the NEAR Act while ensuring that the resources devoted to implementation aren't squandered on duplicative bureaucracies engaged in turf battles.

On the Council, I will push for a Council-led performance plan and performance accountability report to increase transparency and information reporting regarding the NEAR Act. This would include stop and frisk data, the number of violence interrupters, and the number of social workers employed in the field.

16. How would improve reentry programs for returning citizens to ensure they are connected to gainful employment, education, and their families?

We need to address the root causes of recidivism, which are linked to a lack of opportunity. The federal Bureau of Prisons' unwillingness to provide returning citizens with the resources they need to successfully re-enter society is a major obstacle to that end. We need to emphasize a collaborative working relationship among CSOSA, DOC, and the federal BOP with the end goal of better preparing those who are incarcerated and those recently released for employment opportunities. Ultimately, over the medium to long term, the District should

assume more direct responsibility over corrections functions.

We've already done a lot of constructive things to try and give returning citizens a fair shake on release, such as the Ban the Box initiative to prevent employment discrimination, but too many who have been justice-involved still can't obtain jobs because of a skills or experience deficit. The inability to obtain meaningful employment feeds a feeling of hopelessness, which fuels the cycle of recidivism.

Another issue fueling the high rate of recidivism which is unique to our jurisdiction is the sense of alienation that District residents in the BOP system face because many are housed in facilities inconvenient to (and often quite far away from) friends and family. It is often prohibitively expensive for many to visit loved ones who are in the federal prison system, and for those that don't have access to a car it is especially difficult since most facilities aren't accessible any other way.

To reduce the sense of alienation that many in the system feel toward society at-large, then, it is important that we facilitate the ability for them to maintain relationships and links to people who ground them in a sense of community. So I would like to expand, for instance, initiatives such as the Family Reunification Program, which allowed DC residents to reunite with families at Hazelton Facilities in West Virginia in 2017.

In order to fight mass incarceration, it is important that we help divert people away from the criminal justice system in the first place. I strongly support OAG's diversion efforts like the Restorative Justice Program, Alternative to Court Experience, and truancy support, which have shown promising results. As councilmember, I will work to ensure that restorative justice opportunities are expanded and that we divert more offenders who pose no threat to public safety from incarceration to rehabilitation and support networks.

We also need to focus not just on prevention and policing, but also on not meting out excessive punishments. For this reason, I support efforts toward criminal justice reform and further initiatives to decriminalize minor, nonviolent offenses.

Wages and Labor

17. What initiatives would you propose to ensure that minority- and woman-owned business enterprises are able to compete for projects, particularly District construction and development?

I think too often the existing well-intentioned Certified Business Enterprise programs function not to give new, historically-disadvantaged entrants a leg-up but rather to protect the

incumbency of certain large firms in government contracting, often without value to the taxpayer. Setting ever-higher ratios of the amount of work that should be awarded in government contracts or in publicly-subsidized developments doesn't do much good if the same small group of firms get the work via dubious pass-throughs and misleading subcontracting practices. For capital-intensive areas of work in particular, it's often not possible for new entrants to invest in equipment and staffing to compete with established firms for work that they can't count on getting.

I think there needs to be a rigorous audit of the CBE program, with a greater emphasis on verifying the credentials of existing CBE firms and ensuring more rigorous, periodic recertification. In turn, we need to offer meaningful work opportunities for the many legitimate CBEs that are on the books. I can't tell you the number of CBE owners I've talked to who feel that the District has not supported them, either by connecting them to work opportunities in their area of certification or by providing them with useful resources to help them grow their business. We need to foster and support quality, legitimate CBEs, not neglect the program to the point where phony ones are elevated to the same level as deserving businesses.

As a four-year employee of a District-based, small, minority- and woman-owned business that does terrific work on merit for D.C., federal and private clients, I can't express how much it upsets me when fraudulent or politically-connected firms get work that they don't deserve, at inflated cost to the taxpayer and often with poor results to show for it.

Government Accountability

18. Do you believe that the current DC Council represents the interests of the broad public? If not, what segments of the public are underrepresented?

Undocumented immigrants, disabled people, and trans people - especially trans women of color - are often left out of discussions when it comes to public policy. These groups have traditionally been under-represented in government and may fear the police. As Councilmember, I will ensure the perspectives of all District residents are well-considered in the development and passage of legislation. I also support the Racial Equity Achieves Results (REAR) Act and requiring that Council legislation be subject to a racial impact analysis, so that we can eliminate disparities that are so deeply ingrained in the District.

Additionally, it's important that when we conceive of and fund programs with good intentions, that they be structured in a way that is actually sensitive to the needs of the communities that they are intended to reach.

Having talked extensively with leaders in LGBTQ organizations especially, it's apparent that there is a lack of empathy and cultural competency with those administering government or

“mainstream” non-profit programs. We need to be empowering voices and organizations in marginalized communities and responding to problems they identify, with solutions that they have ownership of.

The trap for elected officials is being overly responsive to the loudest voices rather than the neediest. I am proud to have a diverse set of supporters and advisers that I intend to rely on throughout my time in office so that I can stay grounded outside the Wilson Building, and remain in touch with the needs of those in the broader D.C. community.

19. How will you demonstrate accessibility and responsiveness to your constituents?

I am proud to have the support of half the Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners in the ward, the current and former Ward 2 members of the State Board of Education, and many other community association board members, condo board presidents, HSA leaders, and other civically active residents. Having a strong working relationship with community leaders based on trust built up over the years is critically important for a ward councilmember, because commissioners and civic leaders have a good pulse on what is happening on a grassroots, block-by-block level. This is crucial for identifying issues as they arise and responding accordingly.

Moreover, the support I have received from community leaders is indicative of my eight-year track record of listening to every constituent, including those with whom I disagree, and working together to forge consensus on tough issues.

I also believe that we need to bring Council hearings out of the Wilson Building and into the community more often, so that more people will be able to provide feedback and testify. For this reason I support more field hearings, and more hearings held on evenings and weekends.

I love serving my community, I found my calling in doing so, and the personalized, hyperlocal nature of ward-level representation is what attracts me to this role.

20. This is the first campaign cycle conducted with the Fair Elections Program, which provides public financing for candidates who adhere to small-dollar contribution limits. Do you believe that a candidate who is not participating in this program can adequately represent the views of all residents of the District?

I am proud to be the first candidate in the District’s history to declare my candidacy under the Fair Elections Program. I think campaigns should be focused on the people you seek to represent, not outside influences that attempt to garner a disproportionate amount of the candidate’s time and attention. Because of Fair Elections, we have spent more time focused on neighbors and the issues that matter to them, rather than chasing dollars. Our campaign is

proud to have the most Ward 2 donors of any candidate. As someone who pays more than half of my income on rent, I can personally attest it has allowed us to run the grassroots campaign focused on the needs of residents.

21. Other suggested campaign reforms include ranked-choice voting and lowering the voting age to 16. What changes would you support to ensure that our elections truly represent the will of the people?

I support both lowering the voting age to 16 and ranked choice voting. I think the District ought to additionally consider the merits of conducting full vote-by-mail elections, and move affirmatively toward adopting that model for all special elections (including ANC special elections, which are often decided by fewer than two dozen people who show up to one meeting, on one night, to elect someone who will represent 2,000 people).

Ward-Specific Questions

22. (Ward 2 Candidates Only) Will you commit to supporting the winner of the Democratic primary in the June 16 special election and/or the general election in November? Why or why not?

Yes, unless the winner of the June 2nd primary is Jack Evans. I believe it is critically important that Ward 2's new councilmember be able to get to work as quickly as possible to aid in COVID-19 recovery efforts, establish seniority, build a staff, and ensure that constituents' voices are heard in the budget process and other legislative matters.