

My name is Yilin (Ellen) Zhang and I am a Democratic Candidate for DC Council Ward 2. I am a first generation Asian American, and transplant from Michigan. I came to the DC area 10 years ago. DC is my home and where I want to raise a family. I have spent the last decade working in the health care industry, and have published research and worked in the public and private sectors. I am running for DC Council because I believe everyone should have a voice that is heard in our democracy, and that a Councilmember's only priority is the community she serves.

My team and I have been running our Campaign these last seven-and-a-half months. We qualified for DC Fair Elections in December 2019, we are only taking small dollar donations from individuals, and no corporate donations and no money or resources from PACs. We are committed to running a grassroots, people- powered campaign.

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DC Young Democrats 2020
Candidate Questionnaire

***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?

My name is Yilin (Ellen) Zhang, and I am running for DC Council Ward 2. I am running because I strongly believe everyone should have an equal voice in our democracy, and a voice that is heard.

When elected, my three my priority areas of focus are finding long-term solutions for our homeless residents; finding real relief for our local, small

businesses; improving access to health care for residents across all DC; addressing education inequality; and continuing to fight for DC Statehood.

Our Campaign team has created informational videos on:

- How to request your mail-in ballot for the DC Primary Election.

<https://youtu.be/UWzmrw4Enlc> –

Addressing our homelessness
crisis.

<https://www.facebook.com/yilinforward2/videos/262588444786869/>

Budg et

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

We need to take a close look at the budget and see where there may be duplication of efforts and/or areas where we can improve on processes to gain efficiencies. The pandemic has highlighted the need to build a resilient infrastructure to support our residents and families, and especially our most vulnerable.

I am committed to continuing the fight for DC Statehood. DC received \$750 M less in COVID-19 federal relief funds because it is not a state. DC residents pay

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the most in federal taxes per capita, and we have a larger population than two states. We need voting representation in Congress.

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?

Our homeless residents need stable housing – and coordinated, continued access to wraparound services. This includes health care access, mental and behavioral health support, and substance abuse treatment. Most importantly these services need to be managed continuously through case managers. This is a long-term investment.

Additionally, we need support for our local and small businesses, and work to make sure our local residents have employment that pay a living wage. DC was short changed \$750 M in federal COVID-19 relief funding because it is not a state. Many small businesses, and especially our restaurants that are now only offering take-out/delivery, operate on very thin margins. Many have already closed. Even after we reopen our economy, some businesses may not survive past this year, and more individuals will lose their jobs permanently.

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?

The economic impact of COVID-19 will continue even after we reopen our economy and community. We need to assess where there may be duplication of processes or programs, and these would be the areas

where we first save before making budget cuts.

Tax increases need to be targeted; we need to be careful so that they not negatively impact our most vulnerable residents and small business owners.

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***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?

It is critical to continuously improve the reliability and affordability of public transportation.

Our transportation options are also continuously changing, and we need to ensure there is a strong infrastructure to support all modes of transportation. This means bike lanes where appropriate to accommodate our bicyclists, and also for individuals riding scooters. With respect to the Metro, we need expanded hours so that it is more accommodating to individuals who need to work long hours. DC's service industry is the third-highest revenue generator, and individuals working in the service industry may need to work late hours. Additionally, we need to continuously provide convenient bus options.

1. Do you support increased protections for pedestrians, such as those within the Vision Zero Enhancement Omnibus Amendment Act, which would reduce speed limits, ban right turns on red, and increase investments in sidewalks? What else would you do to increase pedestrian safety?

Yes, we need to increase protections for pedestrians. We should revisit and update our Pedestrian Master Plan, and collaborate across committees and organizations that are and have been working on this concern. Some cities have a Pedestrian Safety Office; this is something we can explore or have someone designated as the primary representative to collaborate across the community and field concerns. This office or individual should also be closely linked with the DC Office of Disability Rights.

Finally, in addition to traveling by foot, with more than 700,000 residents in DC, and approximately 80,000 in Ward 2, some residents are using multiple

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transportation options, and some are using one option due to financial and/or physical barriers. In recent years, we have also seen technological changes in how people travel. We will continue to see changes, and we need proactive policy measures in place to ensure residents' safety and access to not just transportation options, but affordable public transportation options. To help do this, we need to set the appropriate budget, continually work with the appropriate District agencies to ensure

an adequate review of all modes of transportation and the parties impacted, and strengthen our transportation infrastructure.

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?

We need to strive to make sure all neighborhoods can be a “15-minute neighborhood”. Attracting more quality and affordable grocery stores also means taking a holistic approach - investing in education equality, access to quality health care, paying a living wage to residents, and supporting our small businesses.

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?

We must work together to find real, long-term solutions for our homeless residents. The individuals I have spoken with do not want to go to shelters, for a number of reasons – not safe, not clean, not able to stay with a partner if they do not have children, not able to bring pets. Our homeless residents need not only stable housing, but also streamlined wraparound services. They need access to streamlined behavioral and mental health care, substance abuse resources, and long-term employment opportunities with upward mobility. This requires continuous, coordinated care through case managers.

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

The Mayor has committed to 36,000 units, with one-third affordable. We need future housing units to be truly affordable, below the 80 percent and especially between the 30 percent to 50 percent area median incomes (AMIs). We also need to assess where there can be more starter homes, so that families can afford to stay in DC. Additionally, DC has a significant number of vacant units for a number of reasons. We should assess how we can repurpose these units, where appropriate, to affordable housing.

In addition to affordable housing, we need to have a plan to enhance access to public transportation, quality schools, affordable child care services, and hospitals and health care clinics near all homes, especially affordable housing units.

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?

We need to take a holistic approach and recognize that we must invest in every neighborhood in DC. When elected, I will not only represent Ward 2 on the DC Council, but also work with members of the Council to create legislation for DC. I'm committed to promoting access to affordable and quality housing, quality education, and developing neighborhoods so that small businesses will thrive and local residents have more employment opportunities.

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

The most important is that as we revitalize, we do not displace current residents. Post-revitalization, we need to continue to support the neighborhood appropriately.

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***Educatio
n***

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

Equitable funding for all schools is critical. This requires follow-through and ongoing oversight.

I believe we need to do more to:

- Address high teacher turnover and lower number of residents who are going into the teaching profession.
- Facilitate the linkage between public schools and our community. This includes linking public schools with the resources of local universities, such as George Washington University, Howard University, Georgetown University, American University, and the University of the District of Columbia.

- Promote diversity and intercultural understanding among students. We need to ensure that there is respect for all individuals, regardless of culture, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and background.

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

It should be considered on a case-by-case basis, as we need to look at the needs of the community close to the school property. This may include the need for more public parks for our community to enjoy and gather; need for a quality public school; need for programming for students and their families; need to repurpose to provide affordable rent for residents and/or small businesses.

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

We need to transparently allocate funds and resources to schools across DC. This

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requires follow-through and ongoing oversight. This is critical as families that may benefit from Special Education are often forced to leave the school district if schools in their area do not provide adequate support.

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?

Teachers need access to the resources they need to be successful. It has been found that underperforming schools tend to have higher teacher turnover. Our teachers must also feel safe and supported. Teachers should not be put in positions that they are not equipped to handle; they should be assigned to the appropriate positions they were trained to teach. Our teachers may also benefit from ongoing investment in their education through reimbursed trainings, support in working with parents, and more resources to provide to our students. Approximately 30 percent of students attending DC public schools do not have access to Internet or computers at home. Our teachers, students, and families need a holistic approach in order for all stakeholders to be successful in the long-term.

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.

The highest percentage of arrests in DC is related to robbery and theft. Building a safe environment will take time, and will require a comprehensive public health approach centered on:

Making DC more livable and affordable. We need more deeply affordable homes, especially below the 50 percent area median income level.

Expanding access to quality health care across DC, especially in Wards 7 and 8, where there are limited resources and the majority of homicides occur. Expanding access to quality

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schools. Diversifying our economy and attract more industries, and collaborate with schools to build educational programs. Putting the right measures in place on gun control. Working closely with the DC MPD, community, and community organizations.

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

Returning citizens should have access to case managers who can support them continuously in finding employment, pursuing educational opportunities, and reconnecting with their families. It may be a long-term process, but it's important to provide the long-term support especially as the challenges many of our returning citizens faced prior to being incarcerated will still exist when they return to their communities. Discussed in the response to Question 15, the highest percentage of arrests in DC is related to robbery and theft. Building a safe and equitable environment will take time, and will require a comprehensive public health approach.

***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?

It is critical to me that we ensure DC has a diverse population and economy, and is a place that supports local and small businesses, and

minority- and woman-owned business enterprises. We need processes or programs where small business owners can learn about contract opportunities more efficiently and have the time to apply.

***Government
Accountability***

18. Do you believe that the current DC Council represents the interests of the broad

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public? If not, what segments of the public are underrepresented?

Our immigrant communities, minority communities, single parents, small business owners, tipped workers, undocumented workers, incarcerated individuals and returning citizens, our homeless residents, and families with school-age children are underrepresented.

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

No matter what the issue is, I believe and am committed to transparency, accessibility, and accountability.

Transparency - Maintain an open line with communication with community leaders, advocates, and non-profit organizations.

Accessibility - Collaborate and build relationships with the appropriate

agencies, in addition to oversight. Relationships, trust, and commitment to the community is what gets things done. Provide efficient and reliable constituent services for all, and maintain an open line of communication.

Accountability - Ensure that our laws are proactive. It is important to continuously identify gaps in current legislation and potential unintended consequences.

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 a DC Fair Elections participant. We qualified for DC Fair Elections in December 2019. As a participant, I only take small donations from individuals up to \$50 per person. I am not taking any corporate donations, and I am not taking any money or resources from PACs.

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The DC Fair Elections program was put in place to support more candidates, who might not have otherwise, run for public office.

I believe that participating in DC Fair Elections is important and sends a critical message about one's commitment to getting small dollar donations from DC 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?

Implement ranked choice voting. This allows voters to vote for candidates by ranking their preference for first, second, third, etc. It does not allow a candidate to win with less than the majority, or less than 50 percent of the vote. This is critical in local elections like DC, where the winner of the Democratic Primary generally dictates the winner of the General Election, and is especially critical where there are multiple candidates.

Achieve DC Statehood. We need voting representation in Congress. DC Council should not overturn voter-approved ballot initiatives. This includes Initiative 77, which would have incrementally increased the minimum wage for tipped workers to equal that of non-tipped workers.

Lower the voting age to
16.

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?

What does this
mean?

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23. (Ward 4 Candidates Only) Councilmembers often have to strike a balance between supporting the mayor's priorities and providing independent representation for their constituents. How does your vision for Ward 4 differ from Mayor Bowser?

24. (Ward 7 Candidates Only) Do you support extending the streetcar on H Street east to Benning Road Metro? How would you work to ensure that projects like this provide connections with the rest of the city while limiting displacement among current Ward 7 residents?

25. (Ward 8 Candidates Only) Given Ward 8 still exists within a food desert, with a lack of healthcare facilities, what are your plans to bring sustainable services and retail partners to the community moving forward?

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