

Queens Community Group Candidate Questionnaire

With input from: 5Boro Defenders, VOCAL-NY ACTION FUND, New Queens Democrats

Please complete the following questionnaire and reply with your responses via email by December 31st. Candidates who respond with a completed questionnaire will be invited to a formal candidate interview with some of the above groups (and other Queens-based community groups) that will be scheduled for the first half of January.

Goals

1. Why do you want to run for Queens County District Attorney?

I am running for Queens County District Attorney because I am frustrated and infuriated by the system within which we operate. But even more importantly, I am hopeful and full of the relentless fight that so often defines public defenders. As Larry Krasner said, "I don't wish to be a compassionate prosecutor. I want to be a public defender in power." But it is not enough to quote Krasner, claim to be a progressive champion, and adopt his policies. I am running to implement even more radical, necessary change in Queens. I am running because I believe that District Attorneys must innately understand the generational trauma and historical systems of oppression that have been disproportionately enacted on black and brown, LGBTQIA+, immigrant, low-income, and other disenfranchised communities. Failing to truly understand that history will result in well-meaning but otherwise immaterial progressive policies that continue to be biased along racial and class lines. This is dangerous, because many will erroneously think our system has become more equitable and just, when in fact, it has not. I do not believe in incremental change. We can only be successful with wide-reaching, innovative reform. I want to ensure that Queens is home to the most progressive, justice-oriented District Attorney in the country, and I believe I am the best person to bring real reform to the office.

2. What is the central message of your campaign?

When a DA gets on the record in court, they give their appearance. They say "Assistant District Attorney so and so *for the People*." My central message is redefining what "for the people" means. That definition can only come from listening to people who are directly impacted. As District Attorney, I would commit myself each day to stabilizing individual lives and strengthening all communities. This means refusing to settle for inadequate reforms that many career legislators and politicians think are sufficient. It means rejecting "reform" that does not, in practice, achieve the outcomes our communities need and deserve.

3. What will distinguish you from other candidates?

What distinguishes me from other candidates in the field is my intimate connection, both professional and personal, to the communities the District Attorney's office is meant to serve. I am not embedded in Queens politics or the Queens County judicial machine. On a personal level, my family history and life experiences mirror, in many ways, those in the communities I

have worked with, represented, and advocated alongside. My parents grew up in the Woodside housing projects and did not speak English. My father took on many household responsibilities, and my mother became a provider and caregiver at a very young age. After my grandmother left my grandfather -- a physically and emotionally abusive man who struggled with alcoholism -- my mother dropped out of high school to help support her family. Once her own children were grown, my grandmother went on to foster youth in the community. She adopted two children who are close in age to me, and through the years, our family has grown in size. My family history informs who I am and how I see and navigate the world. I am a proud queer Latina born and raised in Richmond Hill, Queens who has had the privilege of accessing higher education and pursuing a career in law. I am also an individual with a trauma history of my own. My father struggled with alcohol abuse my entire childhood and well into my adulthood. I was parentified at an early age and had varying exposure to intimate partner violence, substance abuse, mental health issues, and criminal justice system contacts, whether it be personally, or through my family, friends, and neighbors.

What I describe is a lineage of trauma. Trauma is not experienced in a vacuum. To truly be understood, one must acknowledge and accept that trauma is generational in nature. It is cyclical. Those who harm or inflict trauma are almost always survivors of trauma themselves, which is why we each must create space for compassion and understanding toward one another. It would be easy for me to view my grandfather as just an abuser. While I never condoned what he put his wife and children through, I loved him deeply. When my mother finally decided to let him back into our lives and allow him to have a relationship with his grandkids, I had the opportunity to experience a funny, patient, loving man. The abusive husband and the loving abuelo -- both characterizations can be equally true. However, today's criminal justice system fails to account for such complexity. The current system does not look at a man like my grandfather -- a dirt poor kid from Puerto Rico and a purple heart recipient from his service during the Korean war who self-medicated with alcohol -- and ask, "How have we failed him and how can we now support him?" I always ask that question. That is what sets me apart from the other candidates in this race.

My unique professional experiences have brought me to the front lines of important legal battles. I have worked on and litigated hundreds of criminal cases throughout my career, from turnstile jumps to homicides. I am there, with my client, from the first time they appear before a judge to a final plea or verdict. But my role is not limited to legal arguments and courtroom appearances. I sit with my clients' families in their homes. I investigate their cases in the field, talk to their neighbors, and walk their streets. I help them with whatever it is that is most important to them, including accessing healthcare and mental health services, safely treating substance abuse, obtaining housing, navigating the immigration system, researching education or job-training opportunities, or securing employment. When I learn and research a policy, I do not simply see an abstract generalization of the intended impact. Instead, I see it through my client's eyes. I see what the policy in action means in the life of an individual navigating the system, as well as those closest to them. Surprisingly (or unsurprisingly, for those personally impacted and those who bear witness), intended impact and actual consequences are often quite different. The Queens District Attorney should be someone who not only has the ability to

propose reform policy, but also intimately understands how the implementation of such policies will impact communities.

4. What do you believe the mission of the DA's office should be and how do you intend to make that mission a reality?

The mission of the DA's office should be to achieve justice and strengthen communities. Strengthening communities involves stabilizing not just individual lives, but entire neighborhoods. It involves pursuing community-based solutions, rather than enacting punitive punishment that drives mass incarceration. Achieving justice includes righting historical wrongs and breaking the cycle of oppression that has historically marginalized communities. In an effort to achieve this mission, I would enact many reforms including the use of my prosecutorial discretion to thoughtfully and ethically prosecute those who oppress and target at-risk communities, including landlords who unlawfully evict, phony immigration lawyers who defraud immigrants, and those who take advantage of the elderly, among others.

Background

1. How long have you been practicing law?

I am in my 7th year of practicing law.

2. Where have you been employed?

I am a career public defender. I started my career at The Legal Aid Society in the Manhattan Criminal Defense Practice. After three years, I then began working at New York County Defender Services (NYCDS). I am currently employed at NYCDS. Throughout law school, I held a number of internships and externships with public interest organizations. At CONNECT, Inc. I helped undocumented survivors of domestic violence petition for VAWAs (Violence Against Women Act) and U-Visas with the goal of adjusting their immigration status. At Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, I conducted client intakes and provided assistance with various housing, healthcare, and benefits issues. In one of Legal Aid's civil offices, my responsibilities were vast. I updated a pro se manual that we could give to folks that, due to a lack of resources, we unfortunately had to turn away. I managed my own caseload, representing clients at social security and disability (SSI/SSD) hearings before Administrative Law Judges, at Fair Hearings to get government benefits reinstated, and drafted appeals to unfavorable and unfair decisions. I was assigned to the Queens DA's office for a semester conducting research, writing motions, observing in court and observing the culture of both the Queens DA's office and the Queens County judiciary.

3. What volunteer, advocacy, organizing, etc., activities have you engaged in beyond employment?

During college, I worked on Barack Obama's presidential campaign and was responsible for building and leading a team to register new voters in Pennsylvania. I have also organized and given Know Your Rights trainings to schools and community members throughout my career. Additionally, as a member of Amplify Her, a local, progressive political organization, I helped design the organization's policy platform, provided feedback on candidate questionnaire answers, and canvassed for endorsed candidates. Public defense experience is also community organizing in its own right. As public defenders, we organize and pack courtrooms to make

statements and demand attention. We stage walk-outs and protest outside courthouses. Further, throughout my personal and professional life, I have used my knowledge as an attorney to amplify the work of existing social justice movements and would continue to make that a priority as Queens DA.

Logistics

1. How much money will you need to successfully compete in this race? What is your plan to raise it?

I believe I will need \$250,000 to successfully compete in this race. My campaign is grassroots and will be people-powered. I will not be accepting corporate donations.

2. What endorsements do you have from elected officials, political organizations, unions and community leaders?

I have the endorsement of Suraj Patel, former congressional candidate for NY-12. As my campaign grows, I hope to secure the endorsement of other local community leaders who recognize how broken our system is, and acknowledge the need to strip the Queens DA's office down to its studs and start over. Every day, I have conversations with Queens residents, community-based organizations, and other public defenders, and it is their support and endorsement I most value.

3. What community organizations, networks, and individuals do you expect to draw on for support?"

I intend to draw support from a number of social justice oriented community and advocacy organizations, especially those who do the important work around ending mass incarceration and those who work directly with formerly incarcerated people and their families. These include, but certainly are not limited to, VOCAL-NY's Civil Rights Union, Alliance of Families for Justice, Urban Justice Center of NYC, Make the Road NY, Vera Institute, Black Lives Matter, Brennan Center for Justice, the Brooklyn Community Bail Fund, Sylvia Rivera Law Project, Bronx Freedom Fund, NYC Democratic Socialists of America's Racial Justice Working Group, Fortune Society, the Katal Center, Decarceration Project, Releasing Aging People in Prison Campaign, Citizens Against Recidivism, Inc., the New York Immigration Coalition, and the New York Progressive Action Network.

I would also seek to draw support from legal defense organizations and practitioners including, but not limited to, 5Boro Defenders, the NYC Public Defender offices, including the Legal Aid Society, Bronx Defenders, and the Neighborhood Defender Services of Harlem, practicing and retired public defenders.

I also plan to draw on other reform-minded District Attorneys and their teams across the country, including Larry Krasner in Philadelphia and newly-elected Rachel Rollins in Boston.

Prosecutorial Practice

Please explain your position beyond just “yes” or “no”

- Currently the Queens DA is the only DA office in the five boroughs that engages in a pre-indictment waiver policy. At arraignment, a person charged with a crime must waive their right to 180.80 release in order to engage in plea bargaining. If a person accused of a crime does not waive this right, the DA’s office will not plea bargain off the top count post-indictment. Will you commit to abolishing the Queens DA waiver policy on day one? [Y/N]

Yes, I am committed to abolishing this practice on day one. It is unconscionable that the current policy is essentially forcing individuals to barter their liberty in exchange for the evidence against them and the potential for a plea deal on a case that is likely to have been overcharged to begin with. The policy as it stands is designed to keep the accused in the dark about the evidence against them and to coerce pleas.

- The Queens DA uses “Quinn Sheets” (named after DA Executive Jim Quinn) at arraignment when making offers. These sheets are printouts of a person’s sealed convictions. Based on these sheets, the DA will decline to dismiss or offer violations on negotiated pleas at arraignments and future court appearances. Will you commit to no longer using information in sealed records at arraignment and other court dates for plea bargaining purposes? [Y/N]

Yes, I commit to no longer using information in sealed records, period. It is, quite frankly, an unethical and unlawful practice. There is one way that is appropriate to get sealed records: through an unsealing order signed by a judge after the requisite showing under the law. Beyond that, cases are sealed for a reason--so that they are not used to inform, affect, or color decisions in subsequent matters. I would implement and install a firewall in the shared system so that ADAs could not physically access these records, requiring them to petition the judge for an unsealing order where appropriate.

- There currently is no stipulated discovery agreement in Queens for misdemeanor cases. Will you commit to a open file discovery system or discovery by stipulation as is currently practiced in Brooklyn and Staten Island on day one? [Y/N]

Yes, I commit to an open file discovery system on day one. This commitment would extend beyond misdemeanors to felonies, as well. Evidence should be turned over at the earliest practicable time, which can have the added benefit of speeding up the resolution of cases. When required, my office would follow procedures for the minority of cases where public safety concerns or concerns for witnesses require protective measures.

- How would your office treat cases where the defendant is eligible for Mental Health, Alcohol, Veterans Treatment Court, and Drug and Diversion Court?

Alternatives to incarceration and diversion should be the rule, not the exception. However, too often District Attorney offices look for reasons to disqualify the accused from participation in diversion. I would not require individuals being screened for diversion to take a plea *before* the screening process begins, as is the case in Queens. ATIs should also match the needs of the client. Over-supervision will be avoided as it can have a deleterious effect that leads to lower success rates. I would also overhaul the structure of ATIs: many function as additional financial burdens, and too often take a paternalistic, dismissive, “one size fits all” approach. I would reform the use of ATIs to address the real reasons for unlawful behavior: i.e. poverty, mental health, substance abuse, and trauma.

- Will your office decline to prosecute so-called quality of life offenses including, but not limited to the following types of crime:
 - Marijuana
 - Theft of Services
 - Unlicensed Massage parlors
 - Airport Taxi (1220B)
 - Unlicensed driving and other minor driving offenses
 - Turnstile jumping
 - Petit Larceny/Shoplifting for amounts under \$250
 - Trespassing

- What other charges would your office decline to prosecute?

Yes, I will decline to prosecute the above mentioned offenses. Additionally, I will decline to prosecute:

- Trespassing
 - Disorderly conduct
 - Resisting arrest
 - “Bump up” burglary in the third degree felonies (I would charge them as petit larceny misdemeanors)
 - Possession of gravity knives
 - “Bump up” felony gravity knife cases
 - Loitering
 - Drug possession
 - Welfare fraud
 - Prostitution
- Will your office investigate the NYPD’s Vice Unit and/or call for an investigation into the practices of vice and publicize what undercover officers may and may not do when conducting a prostitution arrest?

As District Attorney, my office will be vocal about its disavowal of NYPD operations that are essentially entrapment. We should not spend our resources creating crime and actively seeking out more people to arrest, particularly when those who are targeted are disproportionately black, brown, and low-income people. Much like drug operations with undercover officers pretending to be dope sick in front of a methadone clinic to coerce sales, these are unethical and unacceptable practices. My office will, instead, favor harm reduction approaches that support safe spaces for sex workers and will decline to prosecute related offenses.

- How will your office handle cases where a survivor of domestic violence is the defendant and the criminal conduct alleged is related to acts of survival or self-defense?

As District Attorney, I would handle these cases in the same manner as I have as a public defender. The Queens DA office must center trauma-informed practice in every stage of a case: prosecutors must understand trauma histories and how trauma can manifest and inform actions when introduced to different stimuli. What for one person who hasn't experienced trauma seems an overreaction is a life or death experience for someone else who has. We should be diverting survivors to services to help empower them, help break cycles, and further stabilize their lives.

I represented a young woman who stabbed her partner in the abdomen with a pair of scissors, after he cornered her and lifted his fist to hit her. She was charged with an attempted assault in the first degree and related charges. Failing to consider her trauma history could lead one to conclude that she overreacted. But, my client grew up watching men physically assault her mother. Her partner was controlling, isolated her from her friends and family, and became physically abusive. He kept a gun under his mattress. When he cornered her in her bedroom, she went into survival mode. In court, I advocated for her participation in a program called STEPS to End Family Violence. There, she received trauma-informed and anti-oppressive clinical, advocacy, and support services. After a year, we were able to work out a plea to a violation. Just as significant, she maintains contact with her counselor and has developed tools allowing her to pursue and nurture more healthy intimate partner relationships. She went on to finish school, and she works full-time, while saving to open her own small business.

My office will also commit to dismantling the structural oppression that exists around domestic violence and its intersection with the criminal justice system. That includes survivors who are defendants, as well as those who are complainants in criminal cases. We need to end the long-standing tradition of treating POC who are survivors differently than their white counterparts. Trauma survivors are pushed around and bullied by law enforcement and DAs. They feel they are not being listened to and are re-traumatized because they are questioned in a manner that directly triggers their trauma. Put simply, they enter yet another power and control dynamic, where the power imbalance is immediately clear. As District Attorney, I would work to end that power imbalance and share power with impacted communities, empowering them to develop policies and practices that I would put into use.

- What is your position on prosecuting sex workers? Will you decline to prosecute sex work-related offenses, unlicensed massage charges and automatically vacate prostitution records for sex workers and trafficking survivors?

The difference between the two lies in the element of force or coercion introduced by a third party. Right now, prosecutors treat all sex workers as though they are trafficked. That is a demeaning, traumatizing, and ineffective approach. While I would continue to prosecute trafficking cases, I would not prosecute or criminalize sex workers. I would also decline to prosecute prostitution cases. Additionally, I would not prosecute individuals who engage in sex work in rental units, and would work with partners to explore a safer sex work housing model. Here in New York City, we deny access of public housing to sex workers and yet fail to provide them with meaningful supportive housing options where they can continue their work, forcing the population to live in poverty and engage in unsafe practices. As DA, my office's policies would seek to support the de-stigmatization of sex work. In fact, studies have shown that the decriminalization of sex work protects against trafficking. That is because the criminalization of sex work provides opportunities for increased violence, increased vulnerability, and undermines a person's ability to seek help from healthcare providers or the police.

- Probation/parole questions
 - Will your office extend non-criminal offers that will not automatically lead to a violation of probation or parole where such offers would generally be made for non-probationers/parolees? [Y/N]

Yes, my office will seek to avoid triggering automatic (or what we call "per se") violations of supervision. We will not look at cases in a vacuum and will take all collateral consequences into consideration. That may very well result in probationers and parolees getting what is seemingly even more favorable offers than those not under supervision. Practically speaking, by extending a violation offer to a probationer or a parolee all we are doing is putting discretion back with the Department of Probation or Parole.

- Will your office decline to file Declaration of Delinquency notices on cases unless/until a person is convicted of a crime? [Y/N]

Yes, my office would decline to file DODs. An arrest is merely an accusation and should not be used as proof a person was in non-compliance for an earlier conditional discharge. Additionally, I would not file DODs upon knowledge of a failure to comply with a conditional discharge. Every effort should be made to help a person successfully rehabilitate.

- Will your office be willing to offer pleas that have less deleterious effects on a person's immigration status?

Yes. As District Attorney, my office will not just be willing, but wholeheartedly committed to extending offers that do not put a person's immigration status in jeopardy. We will also work with defense counsel and the courts to minimize an individual's risk of exposure to ICE (for example, when ICE officers are waiting outside the courthouse) through consenting to excuse folks from court appearances and accepting pleas by affidavit.

- Will you request release on recognizance to the limits the law currently allows? [Y/N]
 - Please explain any exceptions you would make and why you would make them. (Refer to specific statutorily defined criminal categories if possible and answer in terms of actual legal application wherever possible)

- For the exceptions you have defined above, what sort of bail will you request and why?

Yes, my office will request release on recognizance (ROR) to the limits the law currently allows, which is the vast majority of cases. Yet DAs consistently ask for bail and judges regularly set bail looking to factors not enumerated in the statute, such as dangerousness. I will not commit to drawing lines in the penal law to sort out which statutorily defined criminal categories would be exceptions because those categories are inherently flawed.

The rule should be ROR. CJA recently reported that the Queens DA asked for bail or remand at an average of 27% of continuing cases at arraignment. I will not make categorical rules for which charges under the penal law warrant setting bail. Engaging in this practice is antithetical to the presumption of innocence, automatically assumes guilt, and discriminates against the poor. Instead, I will facilitate the use of non-monetary alternatives including check-ins with the court, setting curfews, using technology such as email and text to send frequent reminders to the accused about upcoming court dates, monitoring where possible and necessary, and providing the accused with other pretrial services. It should be noted that they need to be used with care and caution to ensure we are not replacing our racist and classist bail system with just another racist and classist system (e.g risk assessment tools that reinforce racial disparity, or electronic monitoring that essentially amounts to imprisonment).

- Will your office stop the practice of pre-arraignment CBQ interviews? [Y/N]

Yes, this is a deceptive and coercive practice. In these interrogations, DAs use strongly coercive language. They tell the accused that it is their last chance to admit to a crime “or else”. It is also a practice that disproportionately affects black, brown, and low-income communities. When someone who is arrested has the resources to immediately retain private counsel, they are protected from being exposed to this practice because their private attorney can ensure their client is not questioned. Those who cannot afford attorneys are not assigned one until their criminal court arraignment, after a CBQ interview. In my opinion, the result is a violation of the person’s constitutional rights. This CBQ practice circumvents a person’s constitutionally protected indelible right to counsel.

- What is your position on prosecuting protestors?

Protests are the life blood of civil right movements. We can pinpoint moments in time where a protest has served as the catalyst for some of the most important changes in our society. The criminalization of protests is antithetical to our free speech values. I would decline to prosecute protestors, with the exception of protestors whose actions rise to the level of inciting violence and causing injury to others.

- Real estate corruption and the affordable housing crisis in this city go hand in hand. What is your vision for the role the DA's office should play in this problem, and what specific actions would you take as first steps to get there?

NYC tenants face an uphill battle every day. Real estate developers take advantage of (weak) government-created rules and get away with building the fewest number of affordable housing

units at the highest prices allowable under the law. Landlords and building owners allow for deplorable conditions to exist, putting our communities in real danger, and often times it's in an effort to rid themselves of existing tenants because they want higher-paying tenants in their place. It is a crisis.

Housing is key in stabilizing and strengthening our communities. The DA's office has a clear role in this crisis.

My office would announce early on that it would vigorously pursue criminal conduct by real estate developers and building owners alike. The Queens DA's office has historically been creative in their charging and prosecuting of marginalized communities. This is an area where that creativity can be put to good use. Tenant harassment, threats, and purposely creating unsafe conditions should be charged under the penal law to the extent possible. My office would seek to pursue charges of reckless endangerment, endangering the welfare of a child, schemes to defraud, among other charges.

As I view stable housing as a public safety issue, I believe the DA's office can and should also advocate for stronger tenant protections in the legislature. I would also meet and collaborate with tenant organizations such as NY Communities for Change and TenantsPAC to understand their vision of the DA's role in the housing crisis that affects us all.

- Crimes in the workplace like wage theft, harassment, and the intimidation of labor organizers often go unpunished. What do you think the DA's role should be in preventing those crimes, and what specific actions would you take as first steps to get there?

New York City has a rich labor history where vulnerable communities, including newly arrived immigrants, rose up against greedy capitalist employers to demand protections afforded to us today. It is not enough that violations of workers' rights and the right to organize against unfair labor practices largely falls under the purview of NY Labor Law. The DA has a role to play in preventing workplace crimes such as wage theft, harassment, and intimidation of labor organizers. When an employer is not paying minimum wage, is not paying over-time, or is misclassifying workers, many think the matter should be handled in civil court by filing a lawsuit, or by government agencies such as the Department of Labor. We can change the conversation around how employers are held accountable by considering these violations (often affecting our already-vulnerable immigrant population) criminal. I would prosecute these cases to the extent the law currently allows. My office would charge wage theft and incidents of harassment and intimidation under penal law statutes such as grand larceny, schemes to defraud, and menacing.

An additional step to take in preventing these workplace crimes is to refocus and reallocate the office's existing resources. The Queens DA's office is one of the participants in New York

State's new wage theft initiative, which focuses on combating wage theft in the construction industry. While this initiative is spearheaded by New York State, I would expand this office's participation in the initiative by widening the scope to industries beyond construction. In addition to using prosecutorial power, another important step the DA's office can take in preventing crime that often goes unpunished is supporting stronger legislation and being publicly vocal about the issues the office will prioritize.

Legislative Advocacy

Even though the District Attorney has no direct power to change the laws they are tasked with enforcing, they can still use their platform to advocate for laws that align with their vision and objectives

- What is your position on closing Rikers Island? Which of your initiatives would have the great impact on reducing the incarcerated population? Do you support the City's plan to open 4 new jails that contain a total of 5000+ beds?

Rikers must be closed, but the city's current timeline is not expedient enough. There is no reason why Rikers cannot be closed in less than 10 years. No single initiative would have the greatest impact on reducing the incarcerated population. Ending cash bail, declining to prosecute a number of offenses, turning over Discovery immediately, and focusing on alternatives to incarceration will all result in reducing the incarcerated populations and reducing it quickly. The sad truth is that, while a step in the right direction, New York City will not be entirely de-carcerated by simply abolishing cash bail.

Significantly smaller, better equipped community based jails next to court houses will, at the very least, allow the accused meaningful access to their attorney and their support systems while we continue to fight to transform our criminal justice system.

- Would you commit to publishing a public plan for reducing the portion of the pre-trial population in NYC jails that comes from cases initiated in Queens?

Yes. These types of disclosures are one of many ways to hold the DA's office accountable.

- Do you support the creation of an Elected Civilian Review Board that can hold police accountable for misconduct?

Yes, I am committed to supporting the creation of an Elected Civilian Review Board (ECRB) to hold police accountable for misconduct. The Civilian Complaint Review Board as it exists now in New York City is a watered-down attempt at holding police accountable. It continually fails to keep violent and harmful officers off of the force. An ECRB that is afforded *real* power should be built by and for the communities most affected by police misconduct.

- Will you advocate for laws to reform the bail system? What legislative changes would you request and why?

Yes. I would request codification of the following: ending cash bail, requiring that judges impose the least restrictive release conditions, implementing prompt automatic bail reviews, and using

assessment tools free from discrimination. These reforms are necessary to dismantle our current system of mass incarceration.

OFFICE CULTURE

Reform will take more than just changing the rules. A criminal justice reform oriented District Attorney will face resistance from NYPD, elected officials and senior and junior staff within your own office.

- Will you commit to removing ADAs who do not share your policy values and mission?

Yes. For true, substantial reform, everyone in the office must be on board to carry out these policies, and they must be committed to a renewed mission. This is true for bureau chiefs and line ADAs. I would commit to an evaluation process for existing staff and a hiring process that ensures Queens ADAs will effectuate the vast and necessary changes I would bring to the office. Additionally, I would welcome the community to hold my office and its employees accountable. I would invite groups like Court Watch to be another set of eyes and ears. Such a partnership would provide an extra mechanism for ensuring we employ ADAs who follow our policies and hold our office accountable to the change we promise.

- A well known progressive DA has been quoted as saying he sees the DA as “a public defender with power.” Do you agree or disagree? Explain

I absolutely agree with Larry Krasner’s characterization of this role, which redefines what “for the people” really means. Public defenders bring a holistic approach to the justice system, focusing on individuals, families, communities, and collateral consequences. As a public defender, I do not simply analyze how many contacts with the criminal justice a defendant has had. Rather, I go much deeper into their familial history and history of trauma and oppression to fully understand their experiences, hardships, and opportunities. I would, without a doubt, bring my experience as a public defender to the Queens DA’s office. We should encourage more public defenders to run for DA races, and provide them with the necessary tools and resources to successfully win. To quote another progressive (Ayanna Pressley), those closest to the pain should be closest to power.

- Will you commit to establishing an independent wrongful conviction unit to review prior convictions in Queens County?

Yes. My wrongful conviction unit would not be limited to reviewing claims of actual innocence in felony cases, and I would extend its authority to review cases where there may have been violations of due process, corrupt police practices, reliance on bad science/forensic methods, and excessive sentences. In an effort to expand resources, I would partner with local law schools. This unit would also keep data that could later be used to identify the origin of these problems and inform new policies to prevent these wrongful convictions from occurring in the first place.

- What will your office do about nepotism between the Queens DA's office and the Queens Judiciary? Will your office continue to employ District Attorneys who have parents, grandparents, godparents or any relative sitting on the bench in Queens County Criminal Court?
 - **If yes**, will you commit to establishing firm firewalls to ensure that these attorneys are not practicing in front of relatives or close family friends?
 - **If yes**, will you publish a disclosure form on at least an annual basis that describes all potential conflicts between your ADAs and other actors in the system in Queens?

I am committed to rooting out nepotism within the Queens DA's office and the Queens Judiciary. I would not continue to employ DAs who have relatives sitting on the bench in Queens Criminal Court, as I view that as a clear conflict of interest and ethical violation. Given that I am not embedded in Queens County politics, nor in the Queens District Attorney's office, I will work to ensure that the office is an independent entity, not influenced by long-standing corrupt relationships or partnerships.

- How will your office ensure that its racial and ethnic composition reflects the borough it represents, including at the executive level? Will your office commit to requiring 80% of its District Attorneys to live in Queens by 2020?

Diverse representation is a key component to my campaign and will continue to be a key component of the Queens District Attorney's office once I am elected. I can proudly say my campaign team includes diverse representation with people of color, women, and LGBTQIA+ folks. In hiring, I plan to recruit from public defender organizations and law schools in New York City, giving a special focus to CUNY Law School, while conducting outreach to Queens residents, LGBTQIA+ attorneys, and Black and Latinx attorneys. I will not only commit to requiring that 80 percent of District Attorneys live in Queens by 2020, but I will also commit to recruiting those who have been directly impacted by the criminal justice system: people who have been incarcerated, who have criminal records, or who have family members who have had contact with the criminal justice system.

- Will your office commit to implicit bias trainings and ongoing professional development for all employees in areas of diversity, inclusion, and equity?

Yes, my office will commit to conducting implicit bias training and providing ongoing professional development opportunities. The implicit bias training will not be limited to race, but will also address all the "-isms". I would also work to ensure that the trainings are not standalone, but part of a larger commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the District Attorney's Office. Additionally, I would hold employees accountable for violating the internal and external diversity, equity, and inclusion expectations set by the office.

- What will your office's policy be for when employees are accused of ethical violations or misconduct?

I will have an independent unit in place to investigate ethical violations and misconduct. Those found to have committed violations will be reported to the state Bar and swiftly terminated.

- What role do you expect to play in the State District Attorney's Association? Do you have stances on the positions taken by the State District Attorneys Association that are relevant to this race?

I would withdraw immediately. These associations tend to have regressive, racist, and classist "tough on crime" mentalities. In March 2018, the New York District Attorneys Association released a position statement indicating that bail reform legislation in Albany was going "too far" and had not been "fully vetted". In my opinion, that particular proposed legislation did not go far enough. We need to close Rikers, end cash bail, pass Kalief's law, and implement true discovery reform, and I would not want to be a member of any association that does not share these goals.

- The NYPD union will loudly object to any progressive reforms this coalition seeks to introduce. How do you intend to deal with inevitable pushback from a police union?

The pushback to progressive reforms is inevitable, not just from the NYPD unions, but from some lawmakers and some Queens residents. Progressive reforms throughout history have had to withstand opposition. We stand up tall, dig our heels in, and brace ourselves for the pushback. We also use attacks against us as an opportunity to start conversations with the opposition. These conversations can be a calculated tool in having our message heard by more people. The NYPD unions will inevitably release statements opposing my proposed reforms. I plan to respond directly to NYPD criticism, combatting fear mongering with data driven research. Should the NYPD union criticism rise to the level of unlawful actions such as engaging unlawful arrests, my office will hold them accountable to the fullest extent of the law.

ACCOUNTABILITY

To truly change the office, voters and organizers need to know whether the changes they demand are actually put into action

- Will you commit to making all policies of your office publicly available?

Yes, transparency is an essential tool for accountability. Transparency helps build and repair trust, and I cannot imagine running an office where the policies were not available to the communities most directly impacted by said policies. I will also implement systems that ensure the work of the Queens DA is clearly apparent and easily understood by all members of the community, ensuring that our office is accessible to everyone.

- Will you commit to working with impacted community groups in policy-making?

Yes, I will commit to working with impacted community groups in policy-making. The voices of those who are directly impacted should be at the forefront of policy-making discussions. I will

not only work with these groups, but I commit to meeting them where they hold their community meetings. The community groups I would work with on the fundamental issues and changes that would shape the DA's office would include the families of incarcerated individuals, housing project tenants, and others impacted daily by the effects of a racist and classist criminal justice system.

- Will you hire a person, or team, to do data analysis for the office and produce public reports on things such as case dispositions and racial bias?

A large office like the Queens DA would likely need a team of data scientists to engage in the critical tracking of trends. The data should be shared not just with DA offices around the city, but with defense and community organizations as part of a larger collaborative effort to achieve equity and justice. Data is extremely important to keep the NYPD and District Attorneys accountable, and I intend on having a team in place to do both. As DA, my office's data team will track each case that the office declines to prosecute (which will likely be a large number) by race, ethnic origin, the charge, and the reason my office chooses not to prosecute. I will publish that data and use it to advance legislative reform on the state and local level, particularly to show the NYPD and out-of-borough DAs that it should decline to arrest low-level offenses and that the state should repeal certain laws that are used to target marginalized groups.

From day one, I will have a data team analyze the work of DAs over the past year. I will have the team look through every attorney's resolved cases: the amount of time the cases were kept open, the race and ethnic origin of the people charged, and how many times a person was kept incarcerated while the case was pending. I will have the team determine which attorneys' practices have been demonstrated to have been driven by bias. Those individuals will be terminated.

- What will your community affairs team look like?

My community affairs team will be diverse and representative of the Queens community. I would like to have formerly incarcerated folks on the DA's community affairs team, as well as lifelong community members, organizers, criminal justice advocates, and radical reformers. The community affairs team, and the information they gather, would help shape my office's practices, and would ensure that our work is centered on community needs.

- Will you commit to doing quarterly town halls where the public can ask you questions about the office's direction?

Absolutely. Given my background as a public defender and organizer, I am committed to making the DA's office responsive and accountable to Queens residents. I am interested in meeting communities where they are and making town halls truly open: hosting town halls in diverse locations that are easily accessible for those with disabilities, providing metro cards, meals, and childcare services, and offering translation services.