

**Caribbean-American Political Action Committee (C-PAC)  
District of Columbia – 2020 Candidate Questionnaire**

*Please return the completed form via email to [cpac.dmv@gmail.com](mailto:cpac.dmv@gmail.com) by 11:59 p.m. on Thursday, March 5, 2020. Responses will be shared with C-PAC's membership.*

**Office Sought:** At-Large Councilmember, Democrat

**Candidate's Name:** Robert White

**Current Occupation:** Councilmember, At-Large

**Party:** Democrat

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**1. What specific actions will you take to improve the well-being of your constituents and improve District services and access for all residents?**

During my first term on the Council, I've tried to make sure that I craft legislation that gets to the root of the issues, and not create band-aid solutions that won't help residents 5, 10 years from now. One of the roots that I want to continue working on, especially if re-elected, is our housing crisis. Our current status not only makes it difficult for families to afford to stay in DC or people to rise out of homelessness, but it affects our public safety - if people can't afford to pay rent, they are more inclined to commit crimes; it affects what our residents feel empowered to pursue, becoming an entrepreneur may be too risky; becoming a homeowner seems out of reach.

So I hope to be able to work with experts, advocates, developers, and residents to see how we can move the affordable housing conversation from asking for a minimum percentage of affordable housing units to prioritizing affordability.

**2. During recent legislative sessions, the D.C. Council advanced B23-0201, a bill to establish a District of Columbia Office of Caribbean Affairs (OCA), which is a long-standing priority of the Caribbean-American Community. Please explain your position on this legislation and whether you will support efforts to staff and fund the proposed office?**

I was one of 4 Councilmembers to co-introduce this legislation. I think too many of us know too well, what it feels like to not feel represented or heard by our government, and so I do believe that establishing groups, and giving them the authority to speak on behalf of their community is a powerful and necessary tool in our democracy.

**3. What initiatives did you lead or support that impact Washington, D.C.'s Caribbean-American community?**

While I want to be sure that my work on the Council has been and will be inclusive of our diverse communities, so my work is not typically specific to one. One area of my work that may impact Caribbean American residents a bit more directly would be the small business support that I have advocated for and crafted policy around.

I also recognize that many Caribbean American residents may have mixed-status families, and so I have supported Council policies that maintain our sanctuary city status and protect our immigrant community.

However, I am looking forward to having a future Office of Caribbean Affairs so that we can hear more about particularly important priorities for the community.

**4. Are you familiar with the status and impact of Caribbean-American owned businesses in your community and throughout Washington, D.C.? How will you support the viability and competitiveness of the City's small, minority, veteran, women, and especially Caribbean-owned businesses? In addition, how will you improve procurement and contract opportunities for these businesses?**

I patronize Caribbean American businesses and often assist with constituent services related issues - anywhere from assisting through the licensing process to concerns with their leases. In my first year as Chair of the Committee on Facilities of Procurement, I introduced the Small Business Procurement Reform Omnibus Act, which will close loopholes in the Certified Business Enterprise program, prevent outside companies from claiming to be DC companies, and push our government to give more contracts to DC small businesses, and ensure faster payment for subcontractors on District government projects,

Prior to that, I introduced the Micro-Business Startup Fee Relief Act, which will encourage and support small start-up businesses by reducing fees and taxes by 75% for companies earning less than \$100,000 a year.

If re-elected, these are two bills that I want to prioritize getting over the finish line and see become laws. We can't just hope that our local, small and minority businesses will succeed on their own - we have to use all the tools at our disposal to level the playing field and give them the support they need to succeed.

**5. There are increased concerns regarding violence – especially gun violence – in many parts of the District. What are your proposals to address and stem violence with 21<sup>st</sup> century tools and policies?**

In the last budget cycle, I transferred \$625,000 out of my committee and into the Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety to help fund the Cure The Streets program within the Office of the Attorney General, which hires and trains violent interrupters to help keep their community safe.

In studying public safety models, I have never seen a case or jurisdiction where an increase in policing resulted in decreased crime. It often leads to more arrests of people of color, and people stuck in the criminal justice system. However, we do know that people with educational opportunities, stable housing, and community supports, aren't often inclined to commit violent crimes. It has become clear that crime in the District is a symptom of education inequity, housing insecurity, and inadequate community engagement. In order to decrease crime, we have to make bigger investments to the core issues

So we need to continue funding programs like Cure the Streets, and simultaneously tackling the deeper issues of education, housing, and community. In my letter to the Mayor last month, I requested that we work together to invest and cure the symptoms that are causing crime.

**6. How do you propose increasing access to safe, quality, affordable mental and physical health care and services throughout the District of Columbia?**

I think that we have to start in our schools. Our children do not have mental health counselors in their schools. I'm particularly concerned about our students who are from low-income households, who often have tough home lives and have adult responsibilities. We've seen students come to testify before the education committee to ask for later school start times because they can't get to school on time after dropping their younger siblings off at school and taking two buses to get to their own or they can't participate in extra-curricular activities because they have to get home to help their family.

This is a budgeting issue, not a policy issue. We need to invest in our students - their personal well-being, not just the buildings that report to every day.

In terms of health care, I have been a vocal supporter of Howard University Hospital and I've been advocating for a new hospital to open east of the river so that our ward 7 and 8 residents have access to health care services. Of course, I recognized a new hospital may take some time, so I also introduced the Perinatal Health Worker Training Access Act, which establishes a grant program to expand perinatal health worker training programs, providing women living in Wards 5, 7, and 8 with greater access to high-quality care during their pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum. From 2014 to 2016, almost 75% of the mothers in the District who died of complications from pregnancy, labor, or childbirth were African-American. This is unacceptable. We can mitigate this disparity with high-quality, culturally responsive support to women throughout pregnancy and after birth.

**7. Unfortunately, the challenges and concerns facing immigrants are increasing at an alarming rate. Do you support comprehensive immigration reform? How do you propose addressing the challenges facing DREAMers, the administration’s suspension of temporary protective status for many D.C. residents, and the constant threats facing sanctuary cities?**

Yes, I support comprehensive immigration reform. In 2017, along with my Council colleagues, I co-introduced the “Sense of the Council in Support of Legislative Action to Protect Dreamers Resolution of 2017”. We have all seen attacks in the undocumented community rise in the last few years, and while we may not be able to introduce policy to override federal mandates or orders, we can continue to stay true to our commitment of being a sanctuary city. We have community organizations here in the District that are able to help our immigrant community in the ways where the federal government has restricted us, and I believe we should continue to fund and support them and their work.

**8. There is growing attention and distress about the significant increase in lawsuits filed against District residents by debt collectors over the last few years. What is your position on the Debt Buying Limitation Amendment Act, which is pending before the D.C. Council’s Committee on Business and Economic Development and the Council’s Committee of the Whole?**

I support the Debt Buying Limitation Amendment Act and hope that there is a hearing scheduled on the matter so that we can learn more, and find the best solution to this growing problem. Our residents should not feel threatened or be wrongfully harassed by collectors.

**9. What concrete steps will you take to improve the District of Columbia’s Public School system – including facilities and equipment, teacher treatment, relationships with parents, as well as education standards and test scores in all wards of the City?**

In my capacity as Chair over the Committee on Facilities and Procurement, it’s been a priority of mine to ensure that the Department of General Services is able to complete maintenance and repair work orders with more sense of urgency when it comes to schools. I have also been actively working, as a member of the Committee on Education, to increase oversight and demand accountability from our education agencies. No one wants to sit in a classroom with no heat for 8 hours or sit by broken windows; our kids miss out on learning and the ability to focus when adults do not act immediately.

For the last few years, I’ve been able to connect with EmpowerEd, an organization that helps educators learn how to advocate for their schools and students and a few other teacher-led groups. It has been particularly helpful to hear directly from the teachers that are in classrooms every day what supports they need, rather than a high-level administrator. They see the barriers that families may face, and why some can’t get involved or aren’t as engaged. We need more people at the table sharing their insights.

**10. In Washington, D.C., many seniors seek to age in their homes and/or communities. What efforts will you take to improve service accessibility, support for families, and the quality of programs offered to the City's senior citizens?**

This past year, I made it my goal to visit as many senior homes, wellness centers, and residences as I could, stopping in for lunch or social hours. I knew that to really get feedback on what they need from me and our government, I needed to meet them where they are. The two issues that constantly came up were housing options and fear of isolation. And so those visits inspired my recent introduction of the Golden Girls bill, which establishes within the Department of Housing and Community Development a Senior Co-Living Program to provide financial assistance to support senior homeowners to rent spare rooms to other senior residents. Senior citizen homeowners would receive \$300 a month as an incentive for them to rent rooms at low cost to other seniors. It would also waive rental fees and give homeowners a stipend of \$2,500 to make home modifications. I heard fromIf re-elected, I would continue to look for

**11. What priority issues inspired your candidacy for political office?**

When I ran for office the first time, it was because I was watching my hometown change around me; my family members were getting displaced, businesses that I grew up around were closing, and people were getting left behind.

I knew that I could and should use the skills I learned from becoming a lawyer, working on Capitol Hill for Congresswoman Norton, and working for Attorney General Karl Racine, to help my community be a part of the prosperity that was seen around us but not with or for us.

As I run for re-election, I wish I could say that I found new reasons to run this time, but we are still in the fight for equity and inclusion, and I am asking for residents for their vote again so that we can finish what we have started.