



The Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

1015 18th Street, N.W., Suite 200, Washington, D.C., 20036 | 202-349-1498 | www.CaribbeanPac.org

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 by 11:59 p.m. on Thursday, August 27, 2020. Responses will be shared with C-PAC’s membership.

Office Sought: DC Council, At-Large

Candidate’s Name: Christina Henderson

Current Occupation: Policy Advisor – US Senate

Party: Independent

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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?

I am running to serve on the DC Council because I believe we need more leaders who are focused on policies to make DC work for everyone. Even though we are facing an uncertain economic outlook due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, I am committed to fighting for a more equitable DC and I believe the frontline of that fight is in the DC budget. I would champion increasing funding to stabilize our fragile childcare market. Childcare is not just an education issue; it is a workforce issue that is critical to our economy. These businesses are hurting and the market is on the verge of collapse. I would push for DC to invest in affordable housing preservation – updating our rent control laws and modernizing our public housing stock. Additionally, I would be dogged in my oversight capacity to ensure that DC is continuously making progress towards meeting our affordable housing production targets and that this new production does not simply result in more studio and 1-bedroom units, which would make it near impossible for families to move into. As a Councilmember, I would be committed to equitable growth -- ensuring all neighborhoods have functioning infrastructure, safe and maintained green space, access to grocery stores in their neighborhood, and access to reliable public transportation and alternative methods of travel. I would also perform oversight in a manner that would elevate the needs of the citizens of the District of Columbia, and force the administration to address the disparities we see in DC in an equitable way. These are just some of the actions I will take as an At-Large Councilmember. Some of the most passionate work of my career I did while working for the DC Council and I am ready to get back to that work.



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- 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 support the creation of Office of Caribbean Affairs and will support efforts to staff and fund the office, if elected.

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

For five years, I had the pleasure and honor of serving residents of the District of Columbia – first at DC Public Schools and then at the DC Council. I was Councilmember David Grosso's first Legislative Director and I then directed the Council's Committee on Education, which has budget and performance oversight for all matters related to DC's public education system and libraries. At the Council, I crafted and helped advanced over 40 pieces of legislation on array of issues facing DC's Caribbean-American community, including student discipline, DCPS facilities, access to health care, and small businesses. Some work I am most proud of includes: legislation to ensure that workers cannot be discriminated against for their reproductive health decisions; legislation to prohibit the suspension and expulsion of pre-kindergarten students; legislation to ensure that all DCPS and public charter schools have access to a full-time nurse at school; legislation expanding at-risk funding to include students of pre-kindergarten age attending community based programs; legislation mandating training in all DCPS and public charter schools on suicide prevention; and legislation to transform the school modernization process to ensure that the Capital Improvement Plans have equity focused planning, aligns investments with student demand, upholds the values of community centered schools, and builds facilities to support quality educational programs. The global pandemic and ensuing economic fallout underscore DC's need for leaders who take a commonsense approach to policy making, embrace a collaborative working style, and possess a tireless commitment to equity. That is my kind of leadership.

- 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 live in Petworth in Ward 4 and am very familiar with the Caribbean-American owned businesses on Georgia Ave and Kennedy Street. As an At-Large Councilmember, I would do a small business tour to hear directly from Caribbean-American business owners about their challenges, priorities, and how DC government can better support them. COVID-19 has hit DC's



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small businesses hard. As an At-Large Councilmember, I would support increased investments in targeted microgrants for businesses, as well DC creating a local version of the Paycheck Protection Program to support small businesses until we're able to get to Phase 4 in the reopening plan. In the long-term, we need to double down in supporting local entrepreneurs who have solid plans and drive, but are lacking in the capital necessary to secure a location. Additionally, I think it is time for DC to revisit and update its Certified Business Enterprise program, so that the city is establishing clear targets for procurement and contract opportunities that reflect the business landscape in our city.

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 21st century tools and policies?

Even with the passage and implementation of the NEAR Act, we still have not seen a true shift from a reliance on law enforcement response to a community response to and prevention of violence. We need to look no further than the DC budget. For FY21, the Mayor proposed \$578 million operating budget for MPD. In contrast, the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE), whose whole mission is to foster community-based strategies to help prevent violence and increase public safety would only see \$6.7 million. That is approximately 0.8 percent of the MPD budget. As a Councilmember, I would look to building capacity in ONSE. They have seen impact with initiatives like their Pathways Program and we need to double down on their work and provide them with a budget that allows them to make significant subgrants to violence interrupter organizations. If elected, I would want to explore tying DC's ONSE and overall violence prevention funding to a percentage of the MPD budget. In the long-term, we have to deal with the societal conditions that lead to crime—lack of housing, limited access to jobs that pay a living wage, the need for community-based trauma services, and having safe places for young people to channel their energy. And listening to the needs of communities is a first step – that's why I support the Ivy City community's fight to have more community and open space at the old Crummell School redevelopment site. DC is rapidly changing and a tale of two cities. And the more we box people in, building spaces around them which they don't believe they are welcome or can afford, we are creating hot spots for future unrest.

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

Improving access to health care, especially maternal care and mental health care, in DC is a priority issue for me. DC has the highest maternal mortality rate in the country -- a rate double the national average -- and yet there is not a full-service hospital east of North Capitol Street providing obstetrics care. This is putting the health of mothers and children at risk, and has led to longer wait times and overcrowding at other area hospitals. I experienced this first-hand when I was in labor with my daughter and had to be routed to a new hospital due to space constraints.



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I'm glad that the Council has finally approved the legislation for constructing a new hospital on the St. Elizabeth's campus, but as a Councilmember I'd like for DC to be a bit more innovative. For example, what would it look like for DC to partner with a non-profit to open a birthing center in Ward 7 or 8 that provides a range of healthcare services for families, including prenatal care and the option to give birth not in a hospital setting.

In terms of mental health care, as a Councilmember I would push for DC to expand its school-based mental health program. Even now there is still a stigma in certain communities about seeking mental care, and I believe one way to reserve that is to start with young people. Additionally, it is also imperative DC government expand the Health Professional Loan Repayment program to incentivize more behavioral health specialists, general practitioners and pediatricians to locate in DC. Right now, it's very difficult to find a behavioral health specialist that is accepting new patients and that takes insurance. This must change.

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?

I believe the United States needs comprehensive immigration reform that includes pathways to citizenship especially for DREAMers, their family members, and long-time Temporary Protective Status recipients. That reform also needs to tackle our broken process for asylum-seekers, refugees, and those in need of critical medical care. Furthermore, I strongly believe that if DC is going to call itself a sanctuary city, our policies and practices should be aligned with that meaning. I support the Sanctuary Values Amendment Act of 2019 which limits DC government's cooperation with federal immigration agencies in several ways including information sharing, holding individuals in custody after they would have otherwise been released, and limiting access to DC facilities. The legislation would also prohibit DC government officials from inquiring about immigration status of individuals in custody. I was pleased to see that the Council quickly passed this bill on an emergency and temporary basis last Fall, but the legislation expires in October 2020. I anticipate that the Council will not let that legislation lapse, but it's only a first step. If DC is to truly detangle itself from cooperation with federal immigration agencies, we must revisit the intergovernmental agreement DC has with the US Marshals Service to house federal inmates at the DC Department of Corrections. Due to this agreement, there are a number of inmates in DC facilities that do not have the protections that the emergency and temporary legislation affords. As a Councilmember, I would push to ensure that information about this agreement, including the financial implications, are made public and if feasible, that we pull back. I also am committed to continued oversight on this issue. Many of us did not know that the DC Department of Corrections was providing ICE with a 48-hour warning before releasing an inmate with an ICE detainer request until a local paper filed a



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Freedom of Information Act request and published their findings. Anecdotally, we know that some MPD officers also cooperate with ICE. Changing DC government policy is one thing, but as a Councilmember I will be also working to ensure that our policies and laws are being implemented by agencies with fidelity.

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 am glad that Councilmember Mary Cheh reintroduced the bill last year. Many debt buying companies have aggressive and predatory practices, frequently attempting to collect from either the wrong consumer or collect on a debt that was not owed. This legislation would provide greater safeguards for DC residents and hold these companies to a greater accountability.

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?

I have dedicated my career to creating better access to and equity in educational opportunity for students in DC and nationwide. As a DC Councilmember, my commitment to that effort would not stop. I envision every young person in the District of Columbia receiving a quality education regardless of where they live, what type of school they choose to attend, or if they have a physical or intellectual disability. A quality education that challenges them, gives them a greater sense of self, develops them into curious life-long learners, and helps them become good, productive global citizens. There are three areas that I would focus my attention to further improve DC schools. Funding: Despite the announced increase in funding for the FY21 DCPS local school budgets, many school communities are reporting that they will lose critical staff even though their enrollments will either stay steady or increase. In 2014, the Deputy Mayor for Education released an in-depth study of the city's UPSFF which was first implemented in 1996. The study team recommended an increase to the UPSFF after local educators came together to identify the resources required to meet the needs of students today. Six years later, we are still not close to the recommended levels. As a Councilmember, I would advocate for increased investments especially for things like school based mental health and after school funding. Equity in rigor and opportunities: Even after years of work on this, the instructional experience and extracurricular opportunities at our comprehensive high schools vary greatly depending on where the school is located. DCPS has spent a lot of time focusing on elementary schools, and we have seen enrollment increases there, but families are not staying and persisting through their neighborhood feeder patterns. As a Councilmember, I would push DCPS to invest more in their



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comprehensive high schools and curb opening any new specialty high schools until we see improvements with our comprehensive schools. Meaningful public engagement: I believe now more than ever that we must harness the power of our communities to outline and advocate for what they want to see from D.C.'s public education system in this next phase of progress. If want to sustain reforms and accelerate the pace of student achievement, the public has to be at the table. As a Councilmember, I would push for field hearings and providing non-traditional opportunities for folks to provide feedback on issues they care about. I will also commit to regular updates with the Ward Education Councils. I will always be willing to engage and have conversation, and even if we may disagree on an issue.

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?

Often times our conversations around housing and development in DC focuses on new production. While that is certainly important, as a Councilmember, one of the things I will focus on is preservation. How do we preserve affordable units and homes, and ensure that residents who have lived in DC for decades can afford to stay, raise their families, and retire with dignity. I support expanding our rent control policies so that more buildings are included and I also believe we need to update and modernize our public housing stock with a specific focus on preventing displacement. As residents continue to struggle with the economic impacts of COVID-19, I also believe the District needs to invest more in emergency rental assistance and longer-term mortgage assistance programs to help seniors and other residents weather this financial storm. Additionally, we need to invest in senior programming with the Department of Aging and the Department of Parks and Recreation. As a staffer at the DC Council, I worked to secure funding for the modernization of the Therapeutic Recreation Center in Ward 7, which provides adaptive programs and facilities for seniors and persons with disabilities. If I am elected, I will ensure that seniors voices are heard.

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

I am running for the DC Council because I believe we need a more equitable DC. DC is rapidly changing and a tale of two cities. We need more leaders who are focused in policies to make DC more equitable and sustainable for us all. We need to stabilize our childcare market, while improving quality and bringing down costs for families. We need to radically improve our delivery of health care, especially for Black and brown women in DC. We need to focus on affordable housing, not just new production, but also preservation. And we need to fight for safe streets for our young people, while ensuring their schools are welcoming environments for learning and success. There's so much to be done, and I'm ready to get to work on behalf of all DC residents. My life's work has been guided by the principle that your zip code should not



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determine your opportunity for success, and as a Councilmember I will fight each and every day to make that a reality.