



# The Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

1015 18th Street, N.W., Suite 200, Washington, D.C., 20036 | 202-349-1498  
| [www.CaribbeanPac.org](http://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](mailto:cpac.dmv@gmail.com) by 11:59 p.m. on Thursday, September 24, 2020. Responses will be shared with C-PAC’s membership.

**Office Sought:** DC City Council At-large Seat

**Candidate’s Name:** Jeanne Lewis

**Current Occupation:** Vice President/Chief Engagement Officer at the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy

**Party:** Independent

**Campaign contact information (Address, Phone, Fax, Email, Website):**

349 Kentucky Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20003

615-275-9770

[info@jeannelewisatlarge.com](mailto:info@jeannelewisatlarge.com)

<https://www.jeannelewisatlarge.com>

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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?**

- Improve language access
- Work with the mayor to include more services in our 311 hotline dispatch
- Partner with ward constituent services offices to have staff from At-Large office present

**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 fully support the creation and funding of a DC Office of Caribbean Affairs. By providing the Caribbean community this resource, we are able to amplify their voices in the DC community and government.

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

I participated in the DC Initiative on Racial Equity which successfully lobbied to pass the REACH Act, which was fully funded in the FY21 budget. The REACH Act will work to accomplish the following:



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- Establishes the Office of Racial Equity, led by the District's new Chief Equity Officer:
- Creates a new Racial Equity Impact Assessment for Council legislation
- Trains all DC government employees on racial equity
- Creates a Racial Equity Tool to ensure the District government is accountable.
- Establishes a Commission to advance racial equity into the future

**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?**

One innovative method is to create a mini-bond program, which can raise revenue that will be earmarked to support pre-existing businesses in their conversion to cooperative models, as well as newly developed co-ops. These bonds will allow everyday citizens to invest in the economic sustainability of their communities without the risk of other types of investments. Funding from these initiatives will also be used to support traditional small businesses in D.C. that are owned by Washingtonians.

This type of initiative can help move capital to small businesses, largely minority owned, who were left out of the federal stimulus programs. Also I would work through DCRA to move PPE to businesses that exist outside of a BID or Main Street Association to get businesses open and back to work safely.

**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?**

I support reducing the budget and police force size of the MPD and reinvesting that money into community resources. Crime in the District needs to be looked at through a public health and community-focused approach. We need both immediate and long-term solutions. Often, we know and/or have solutions that work, but we need full implementation or expansion to see results. No Murders DC is a coalition of DC residents working to not just reduce homicides in the district, but create a murder-free city. In 2008, the DC government released "The District of Columbia's Comprehensive Homicide Elimination Strategy Task Force Report." It was compiled and written by community based organization representatives, individuals, and government agency representatives. The high rates of homicide in our city are the consequence of underlying and interrelated factors such as unemployment, poverty, marginalizing underserved populations, substance abuse and mental



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health problems, truancy, issues in our education and vocational training policies, family violence, decades of trauma, lack of support for returning citizens. To get to zero homicides, we must fix the broken systems that lead to violence. I strongly believe in the power and prioritization of prevention strategies in the face of violence. In the 2008 report, they concluded that “the strategy for elimination of homicide includes enhancement of programs and criminal justice response in eight areas: family strengthening, education and training, neighborhood and community care, mental health and substance abuse, community services, law enforcement, witness protection, and victim services.” My platform and vision for DC rests on these core ideas, providing a strong foundation of support within our communities, expanding mental health care and treatment, increasing opportunities for reentering citizens, and equitable development that gives DC residents the ability to flourish.

In 2013, No Murders DC requested there be a task force created to update the 2008 Comprehensive Homicide Elimination Strategy Task Force Report. Due to their advocacy work, the Council passed the Law 22-4241 that created a task force comprising of 20 members from government agencies, nonprofits, businesses, educational institutions, victim services and social services organizations, religious organizations, mental and behavioral health organizations, organized labor, criminal justice reform organization, and advisory neighborhood commissions to develop a report on successful violence prevention and intervention strategies. The council needs to ensure completion of that report and follow its recommendations.

In addition to preventative measures, I believe reform within our criminal justice system is needed as well as increased use of current initiatives that have been working. I would expand DC’s Cure the Streets Program. This program addresses violence as a disease, something that can be interrupted, treated, and stopped from spreading. It employs people that are credible within their community to help de-escalate violent situations. In other cities where this has been implemented, there has been a 20-60% reduction in shootings and killings. Additionally, the treatment of individuals that are involved in the criminal justice system needs to be addressed to reduce recidivism and further violence.

The Alternatives to the Court Experience (ACE) Diversion Program aims to treat juvenile justice in a way that provides the best outcome for the entire community and young people. ACE coordinators evaluate individuals once they enter the program and use this evaluation to develop a customized program of services such as therapy, mentoring, tutoring, mental health treatment, school support, and recreation. Since the program began, 75% of the participants did not recidivate, 88% showed improved scores on a behavioral and mental health assessment, and 62% of the participants had improved school attendance. Beyond the juvenile justice system, I strongly support increasing the use of restorative justice programs, which have demonstrated results of better rehabilitation, lower recidivism rates, and lower costs.



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

With the closing of Providence Hospital we removed a major resource. We need to expand access to medical services and providers especially in lower-income areas of the city. Additionally, we need to develop a viable plan to fund the Birth to Three program. This legislation provides a comprehensive system of support for healthy development and growth of children. It has yet to be fully funded, and as Councilwoman, I would work to ensure it is. Going further, these services need extra resources to ensure all communities have access to them, such as culture-centered care and other languages offered.

The Affordable Care Act has greatly increased insurance coverage within the District, and this enrollment must be further pushed to all insured in the city. This will require increased outreach from the government as well as resources to help understand the insurance marketplace.

We need to improve the social determinants of health if we truly want to improve the health of our city, especially in marginalized communities. This also includes improving transportation infrastructure to existing healthcare facilities.

Mental health care also needs to be expanded throughout the DCPS system. Schools are often where kids in the District spend a majority of their time, and if we increase the amount of mental health professionals for teachers, faculty, and students, we increase the chance of catching and addressing any mental health concerns.

### **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 support comprehensive immigration reform, and if elected, I will work with federal lawmakers to propose and execute solutions. Congress needs to address DREAMers with a legislative solution so that their fate is not constantly up in the air in the courts. I believe DREAMers should be granted citizenship, and I will voice that opinion to the federal government.

I fully support DC staying a sanctuary city. Furthermore, I believe the regulations need to be strengthened. There are certain loopholes that allow immigrants to be unlawfully deported. With so many federal workers in DC that are not obligated to follow these regulations, it puts immigrant communities at risk. The Council needs to continue and expand the emergency legislation that limits DC Jail and law enforcement interaction with ICE.



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- 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 fully support the Debt Buying Limitation Amendment Act. Debt buying is often a predatory practice, disproportionately harming people of color, people with disabilities, seniors, and veterans. By passing this bill, we will be protecting the most vulnerable consumers and holding these third-party companies more accountable.

- 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?**

Every child deserves to attend an excellent school no matter which ward they live in. DC must provide "Real School Choice" by increasing support to struggling neighborhood public schools, greater oversight of public charter schools, and priority for at-risk children in the My School DC Lottery. There are several steps we can take to accomplish this.

1. Create a uniform public budget that allows us to compare each school's total budget (including public funding and private donations) and engage families in decision-making regarding future budget decisions. It is particularly important that we get this information at the building-level for all traditional, selective, and public charter schools in order to understand how to make our system more equitable.
2. Conduct a needs assessment to determine the real cost of supporting and educating all of our children. Use that information to alter the weights in our UPPFF to match funding to the particular needs of each school (regardless of enrollment).
3. Provide more extensive school-based mental health supports, community centers, and recreation opportunities in every part of the District, as well as targeted violence prevention programs to assure all children a safe experience in school.
4. Strengthen our internet infrastructure and provide computers, internet access, and support for using technology from their homes to every student.
5. Develop a viable plan to fund the Birth to Three program to ensure healthier birth outcomes and support the growth, development, and well-being of our youngest residents.



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As an At-Large member on the DC Council, I will begin this important work by initiating conversations with community stakeholders across the city to determine the pain points that students, teachers and parents feel as a result of inequity in funding and resources. This lived experience should drive priorities in our budget and legislation. Educational success is not only tied to our education budget. Housing, transportation and other infrastructure contribute to academic success. As a Councilwoman I will take a comprehensive intersectional approach to improving equity in DC Schools through all the committees of the Council.

As Councilwoman, I would solicit a review of best practices in other jurisdictions who have increased equity in their education systems through the budget process. But our student's success should start with a vision of what we want them to experience and how we will measure success. This can be followed by an assessment of the real cost of creating that vision for equity, and determine how much it will cost. The Council's role is then to find revenue to create that vision.

Regardless of a student's income level, race or neighborhood, every student can learn. As Councilwoman I commit to amending our budget allocations to address the needs of all students so they can be successful.

Yet, I believe one of the top issues facing public education in DC is the income inequality across our city and how that corresponds to disparities in achievement. This is a symptom of systemic racism in the city. We see how economic divides mirror the gaps in testing and achievement and, as a result, a translation into lower ratings for schools in poor communities and in Black and Brown communities. Educational success is not only connected to a school building, but the surrounding environment. Our platform champions sustainable housing and equitable development throughout the city to help prepare students for learning.

Another problem we need to address is the extremely high turnover rate of DCPS teachers. Teachers seem to be leaving due to their experience with evaluation systems and a broad lack of support and resources within schools. These two factors are related. Evaluation should be primarily tied to the success of effectively educating students. Yet, teachers need resources and support to be successful. The Council can ensure that funding for schools includes professional development and mental health support for teachers, as well as resources to address trauma and violence that impacts students. Additional support around virtual learning and reintegration after the COVID 19 pandemic are now requirements for both students and teachers.

### **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?**

More than 80,000 people in the District live in rent controlled apartments, making this tool one of the largest sources of long-term affordable housing in the city. However, significant loopholes, especially voluntary agreements, can disadvantage seniors looking to downsize later in life. I support the Reclaim Rent Control coalition's platform, which would correct these issues.





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A specific opportunity to create housing for seniors is on Reservation 13 in Hill East, where some parcels have entered into the surplus process. I agree with the Washington Interfaith Network's proposal that any new housing development allocates  $\frac{1}{3}$  of units to those with incomes 30% AMI and below,  $\frac{1}{3}$  to 60% and below, with the remaining  $\frac{1}{3}$  to market rate buyers. I propose that we reserve some of the housing at all three levels for seniors, and that the development include some of the support services that seniors need.

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

### **Sustainable Housing**

Address the serious housing crisis that impacts people of all income levels across all eight wards by fully-funding the network of housing and homelessness programs and supporting cooperative housing and homeownership opportunities for residents-not developers.

### **Excellent Schools**

Every child deserves to attend an excellent school—no matter which ward they live in. That's why we must increase funding to support our most vulnerable children, use school buildings to provide wrap-around services for families, and re-imagine education to ensure that both our traditional public schools and charter schools offer a high quality education to every child.

### **Equitable Development**

As DC continues to grow and attract more businesses and neighbors each year, we need to shift our focus toward investing in the people, small business, entrepreneurs, and anchor institutions Washingtonians already cherish. We must strengthen initiatives to hire local DC residents, invest in micro businesses, and develop a workforce that is ready for the future.

### **Healthcare**

Access to healthcare must be our priority as we battle the COVID19 pandemic. As we build new hospitals, we must also prioritize sexual and reproductive health and strengthen DC's overall maternal health infrastructure. Develop a viable plan to fund the Birth to Three program to ensure healthier birth outcomes and support the growth, development, and well-being of our youngest residents.

### **Community Safety**



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It's time to reimagine community safety in our community and our schools. As we work to defund the police we must refund health programs and equitable development and invest in policing alternatives like mental health programs, violence interruption programs, and youth preventative activities.