



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: City Council Member At Large

Candidate's Name: Monica Palacio

Current Occupation: Civil Rights Lawyer

Party: Independent

Campaign Contact Information (Address, Phone, Fax, Email, Website):

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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?

As the first Latina running for City Council, a civil rights lawyer, an advocate, and a government executive who has devoted her career to public service in the District, I will continue to be a champion for our city. I am a proud Latina and social entrepreneur. As a leader in the fields of social equity, coalition building, systems change, and access to justice, I have worked side-by-side to make positive change with DC leaders and service providers. I am determined to tear down barriers between neighbors and institutions so together we can preserve and protect what we love about our city. I bring a vision for a DC that supports economic growth while honoring the values as a city: respect, inclusion, equity, and accountability for all our residents.

My priorities are to:

1. *Housing: Prevent evictions and in the long-term create more affordable housing and reduce displacement of Black and Brown families*
2. *Education: Invest in schools that need greater resources to meet the needs of students and families during COVID and to address long-term racial equity goals*
3. *Public Safety: transform law enforcement so Black and Brown people, immigrants and particularly African-heritage residents are safe at the hands of the police.*



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4. *Economic Recovery: support DC workers and businesses devastated by COVID*

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 am in full support of an Office of Caribbean Affairs. As a Latina, an immigrant and the daughter of an Afro-Colombian father, I know first hand the importance of representation. As the former Director of the Office of Human Rights, I have witnessed the impact offices like the Office of Latinx Affairs and the Office of African Affairs make for our communities. These offices cater to the challenges that immigrants face in our city. We need more than the Mayor's Advisory Commission on Caribbean Community Affairs. We need to fund an office that will advocate for issues important to the Caribbean community, that will provide resources to families, business owners and community members and that will provide funding for programs and services.

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

During my six years at the Office of Human Rights, I actively worked with many community members of the Caribbean-American community. I was able to work with community leaders, government agencies and non-profit organizations to understand the concerns and issues facing the Caribbean 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?

In my 30 years of experience supporting workers, small businesses and families, I plan to provide long-term assistance through grants and loans to help small businesses survive extended closures and adapt and reinvent services, ensure that grants and loans are timely and accessible to businesses and neighborhoods most in need, and deliver safety net services that help all workers have a place to love, keep food on the table and pay their bills.

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?



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For over 30 years, I dedicated my career to supporting vulnerable populations such as youth exposed to violence, immigrant communities, women, LGBTQ communities, faith minority groups and many others. The voluntary surrender of firearms, and other destructive devices is a great program in the District that must continue to reach more community members.

I have asserted and continue to assert that now is the time to reevaluate whether we are making the right investments in public safety and in oversight of our law enforcement agencies. The principles of ending mass incarceration and ending police brutality will be central to my leadership in the area of public safety and in the oversight of our law enforcement agencies.

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

Now more than ever, we must build a city that provides affordable and high quality healthcare. Not only do we need to work on improving the services we already have available for our residents, but we need to work on creating a system that is more effective and more accessible to Washingtonians. We need to continue our plans of providing better care and have accessible hospitals, clinics and pharmacies south of the river for underserved and vulnerable communities. These communities need our help now more than ever and health is a human right that we should all have in the District and beyond.

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?

As an immigrant, I am devoted to creating a city that is safe and that allows our immigrant communities to thrive. During my time at OHR, I actively supported DC to be a sanctuary city during Vincent Gray's term and also under our current Mayor, Muriel Bowser.

For the last 30 years, I have worked with several government agencies and nonprofits to bring services for our immigrant communities. I fought to ensure all immigrants in the city had greater access to government services through the Language Access program. I coordinated weekly immigrant's rights response teams to address concerns that ICE and local law enforcement agencies were involved in threatening and/or arresting immigrant residents. At OHR, I prepared reliable information regarding the public charge policy so that agencies like Mary's Center, La Clinica Del Pueblo, and Whitman Walker, had legal resources for immigrants that were afraid to apply for public benefits under the Trump administration. Lastly, I worked closely with MOLA,



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MOAA, and MOAPIA, in workshops and presentations for communities who needed help with signing power of attorney and wanted to access the immigrant justice legal services grants.

I am committed to make better opportunities for our DREAMers, like channeling access to higher education and reviewing policies and practices of state colleges, like the University of the District of Columbia, so that DREAMers are not turned away due to legal status. We need to make long term investments in training and educating our teachers, counselors and social workers in DCPS, Public Charter Schools and Feeder Schools, to be able to give our DREAMer students the best guidance and information about post secondary education available to them. I am also committed to continuing supporting adult education programs, like Carlos Rosario Public Charter, which is a home for education and support for many DREAMers and students with TPS status.

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 am in full support of the Debt Buying Limitation Amendment Act. During my time at OHR, I witnessed over and over again the way workers are constantly intimidated by their employers due to various reasons that violated their human rights. I believe that we must extend that protection to our business owners who are constantly harassed by debt buyers and collectors. We know that these debt buyers and collectors target the elderly, veterans, communities of color, women and immigrants. These are all extremely vulnerable communities and our council must pass this act to protect our business owners who are already going through hardship due to COVID.

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?

We must continue to prioritize investing in our children and specifically, our children of color. Lack of high-quality early childhood education for children in low-income families is a big contributor to racial and economic inequities throughout the city. As a mother, I have also spent a lot of time maneuvering the different school systems in the District. I know the ways in which the school system often fails our children-particularly Black and Brown children who are low income.



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I do not believe this is the right moment to overhaul school policy-making and leadership in the District. Parents, students, teachers and school leaders are already facing daunting challenges as we face this ongoing public health emergency and challenges our families are also facing immeasurable economic hardships. We must use the resources we have on hand to prevent housing insecurity, food insecurity and support for students who will be learning online for the first of the 2020-2021 school years. On the whole, I believe our DC schools have made significant progress over the last 15 years and at the same time we cannot ignore the tragic reality that we have much work to do in order to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable students and students for whom we have not closed the achievement gap.

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?

We must do more to meet the needs of seniors who are home-bound, facing health crises and are more isolated than ever during the COVID-19 crisis. The District's population of people over 65 has increased from 62,392 in 2005 to 79,016 in 2016, or a 27 percent increase in 11 years according to the DC Policy Center. We need to dedicate funding to make seniors living in their own homes safer; we must fund additional home health care visits, meal distribution and accessible telehealth systems for seniors that are home-bound. Seniors must be included and prioritized in terms of rent assistance and eviction prevention programs. We need to support home healthcare workers and prevent any cross contamination during the COVID-19 crisis. Over the next ten years, the District's population will continue aging and we must increase investments in all the systems I have listed above.

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

I am running for a seat on DC City Council At-Large because I am tired of seeing people being crushed. Crushed by lack of health, police brutality, lack of equitable education, unemployment, food access and lack of opportunity. I am tired of seeing the human rights of entire communities being crushed, of immigrants being an afterthought and during this pandemic, I have grown tired of waiting for our government to do something about it. COVID-19 has made clear all the ways our system is broken. As an experienced government worker, I have seen how the system fails our communities. I know injustice personally. I am a civil rights attorney, a single mother, and an immigrant. I know how to catch it, stop it, fix it, and remove it. I wake up every day thinking of how I am going to fix this broken system and fight back. And fighting back keeps me going. Fighting back motivates me to be a force of change for our communities. I am determined,



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qualified and committed to fixing our system and standing up for our communities. Together, we can really make DC a home for us all.