



# 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](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: WARD 4 CITY COUNCIL**

**Candidate’s Name: MARLENA D. EDWARDS**

**Current Occupation: FOUNDER-METROPOLITAN ALLIANCE, INC. (CONSULTANT)**

**Party: DEMOCRAT**

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

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1. Please explain your plan or approach to improve agency responsiveness and the accessibility of services and staff to the District’s residents. What specific actions will you take to improve the wellbeing of your constituents?

*I am a passionate community activist, Marlena D. Edwards have been committed to social and economic improvement of the District of Columbia residents. I am a native Washington born to parents who were immigrants from Jamaica, West Indies. My father, who was a physician and a practicing Surgeon at Howard University, my mother who was a Nurse who worked at Georgetown University Hospital and my brother who is a prominent Employment Discrimination Attorney in our Washington, DC/Maryland region worked in public service and set an example for me to establish a life path of helping others.*

*When one is from an immigrant family, your family is “a stranger in a strange land” therefore, I learned that I have a duty to assist everyone in our community to the best of my ability, and particularly those who are poor disenfranchised or oppressed. My family and our broader community taught me the value of loyalty, community and after receiving me B.S. in Mass Communication from Towson University, I received my Master of Social Work degree from Howard University and have devoted over two decades of service to the residents of the District of Columbia; helping hundreds of families navigate the public social service system. I am the best qualified candidate for Ward 4 City Council. I am running for Ward 4 City Council and my plan to improve responsiveness across all District of Government, agency responsiveness and the accessibility of services and staff to the District’s residents is as follows: I plan to use my service as a member of numerous boards and committees that promote coalition building for National and District agency professionals as opposed to District Government Agency’s working in silos, I will work to create information technology hubs and improve interoperability of computer systems across all District of Columbia computer data systems in order to improve the capturing of critical resident data, improve the usage of automated computer systems*



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*throughout the District of Columbia and to ultimately improve service quality through ensuring the performance of all District of information technology.*

*It is my goal that there must be improve computer automated software designs for District of Columbia Staffers, improved interagency interoperability to reduce the duplication of information and effort in like agencies, thus giving the District of Columbia Government the ability to produce and provide world class services and programs to our residents.*

My above information technology plan must be implemented in tandem with is an adequate cyber security to safeguard all District of Columbia government computers and information systems. The District of Columbia Homeland Security 2019 annual report shows that there are severe deficiencies in the Governance of Cyber security and that there is a continued lack of understanding and prioritizing cyber security risk across District of Columbia systems. The District of Columbia, due to its being in the Nation's Capital needs to formulate a "Memorandum of Understanding" and/or contract with all Federal Government agencies to protect all District Government Computer and Cyberspace systems due to our proximity to Federal Government and risks of Cyber Security threats to all District of Columbia hardware and software intellectual assets.

*In relation to all other aspects of government necessary to improve the well-being of our constituents, I have the ability to be a transformative figure as Ward 4 Council member. I have devoted over two decades of service to the residents of the District of Columbia; helping hundreds of families navigate the public social service system, I have served as a member of numerous boards and committees that promote coalition building for National and District agency professionals, met regularly with Executive-level Directors and members of the City Council on issues related to community health, social/economic development and legislative policy and being a member of City Council will give me the ability to continue advocating for and providing resolutions for District Columbia residents, our cities immigrant populations and more specifically for regional members of our Caribbean-American community.*

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?

On, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019 the "Office of the Caribbean Affairs Establishment Act of 2019", B23-0201 was introduced by Councilmembers Todd, Gray, Cheh, R. White and Co-Sponsored by: Councilmembers McDuffie, Nadeau, Evans, Bonds and Grosso as proposed legislation to the Committee of the Whole. However, Jeffery DeWitt, Chief Financial Officer sent a draft fiscal impact analysis to Chairman Phil Mendelson on November



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25<sup>th</sup>, 2019 stating that the District of Columbia government did not have sufficient funds in the fiscal 2020 budget year to implement and sustain this program at a cost of \$985,000 through fiscal budget year 2023.

It is critical that the Office of Caribbean Affairs be established and funded to provide much needed services to our Caribbean community. However, it is my recommendation that this bill be modified through subtracting the cost of all office space costs, lobbying the Mayor of the District of Columbia for the use of existing free space in a District of Columbia owned building such as the Reeves Center then resubmitting this bill and new fiscal impact plan to the CFO's office for approval. If the District of Columbia CFO still does not provide funding for this bill then it is my recommendation that the Chairman Michael Yates and the Commission of the Mayor's Office of Caribbean Community Affairs present their next possible City Council hearing requesting that Office of Caribbean Affairs be combined and operated under the umbrella of their office with the provision of two full time employees to operate this program.

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

I support the expansion of an Immigrant Justice Legal Service Grant Program.

I support the return of the Caribbean Day Parade to the Georgia Avenue corridor so that this cultural event/program may be integrated back into our residential community, thus raising cultural awareness of our community.

I support the funding of Caribbean cultural and arts programs throughout the District of Columbia which will be funded by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

I have already worked with in my capacity as an Executive Committee of the Ward 4 Democratic with District of Columbia U.S. Representative Franklin Garcia, an immigrant for the Dominican Republic to co-present a resolution to allow DREAMers residing in our city to be given District of Columbia residency status so that they be given the same in-state tuition rate as other residents so that they may attend the University of the District of Columbia at an affordable tuition rate, thus giving DREAMers access to high education, upward economic mobility and greater financial opportunities for themselves and their families.

### 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 will work with the Commission of the Mayor's



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Office to improve storefront façade and small business funding to improve their viability and competitiveness. I will also push DSLBD to work with our Caribbean-owned business to improve contracting, procurement and partnering with larger contractors.

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?

Youth in our city are need of the expansion programs such as neighbor Boys and Girls Clubs, after school programs and mentoring programs. They also need the expansion of special needs, physical and behavioral health service providers in District Public and Charter school that can also be accessed by their siblings and immediate family members to address issues surrounding educational, physical health and trauma. Nurses and Social Workers sufficient with the student provider ratio should be placed as service providers at each school. There also needs to be an extension of community based counseling for all District residents. Community Policing is a critical component and foot patrols, officers on bicycles and police substations in crime prone areas of our city. All of the above recommendations need to be done through an interagency coordination meeting which also brings in the health care, judicial, education and legislative branches and agencies of our government to meet regularly and leadership is required by District leadership. I will work with the City Council to secure federal and or federal grant funding to address and reduce violence in our city.

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

I will push for the re-opening of public mental health center to make sure that mental and physical health care services are affordable and obtainable for our poor, uninsured and underserved city residents.

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 the revocation of President Trump's immigration reform policies which seek to cut off migration to the United States by Caribbean immigrants except for those who are highly-skilled. This is a discriminatory practice of natural selection which stops those migration of immigrants who participate in all sectors of the United States economy and for those pursuing may come to the United States and unskilled workers who may pursuit an American education and in turn make substantial contributions through their attainment of an American education and, thus contribute to our economy. (i.e. Caribbean immigrants have been often known to outperform their American counterparts in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and may get their start in the United States as a domestic worker to sustain themselves and once stabilized educated they contribute greatly to advances in STEM fields).

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resolution to allow DREAMers residing in our city to be given District of Columbia residency status so that be given the same in-state tuition rate as other residents so that they may attend the University of the District of Columbia at an affordable tuition rate, thus giving DREAMers access to high education, upward economic mobility and greater financial opportunities for themselves and their families.

I will continue make sure that our District of Columbia government upholds the 2011 executive order issued by Mayor Vincent Gray that made the District of Columbia a sanctuary city; that District of Columbia police are not allowed to pursue immigrants on behalf of the federal government; and that District Police Officers must never ask individuals whom they arrest their immigration status unless it is directly related to a criminal investigation.

8. 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 will vote to increase funding for District of Columbia Public Schools and prioritize the funding of existing DC Public Schools to strengthen then over the funding of new Charter Schools. I will advocate for the funding of state of the art computer and technology equipment for all District of Columbia teachers and all District of Columbia students with and emphasis on the provision of iPad's in lower grades and laptops for middle and high school students.

The District of Columbia Public School administrative office must hold its teachers to a high standard, but discontinue its adversarial and punitive relationship towards school teachers which punishes them for speaking out about their needs. Teachers should not be penalized for student academic performance or lower standardized test scores in areas of our city with lower academic performance and instead need to be able to request extra staffing i.e. teachers' aides. Mental health, special education service professionals in neighborhoods where there is a correlation between academic performance, and socio-economic factors such as poverty faced in these areas.

9. 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?

*A passionate community activist, I, Marlana D. Edwards have been committed to social and economic improvement. As a Master's level Social Work, I have devoted over two decades of service to the residents of the District of Columbia; helping hundreds of families navigate the public social service system. I have also served as a member of numerous boards and committees that promote coalition building for National and District agency professionals and has met regularly with Executive-level Directors and members of the City Council on issues related to community health, social/economic development and legislative policy.*

*As a Social Work professional, I have already worked for and with a coalition of groups such as the DC Department of Aging, The District of Columbia Office on Aging, The George Washington Law School Health Insurance Project with concentrated on assisting Seniors and the disabled with Medicare issue. I am familiar with resources and services required so that Seniors may age in their homes and/or communities and have*



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*personally worked for the DC Health Care Ombudsman and the DC Office of Health Care Finance the Health which provided guidance and facilitated Seniors obtaining Medicaid reimbursable services such as home health aide services, Metro Access public transportation for those who are wheel chair bound or with mobility issues. I also assisted with the provision of payment for adaptive and durable medical devices such as walker, motorized wheelchairs, etc. As part of my campaign promise is to continuing working with a work with the DC Department on Aging, the Department of Health Care Finance, AARP, Health Care Providers and all federal/local private agencies to improve the provision of funding, services and programs that will our Seniors to continue living in our community and age in place.*

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

Due to my 30 years of professional experience, I am the best qualified candidate to be on next Ward 4 City Council Member. I will be transformative legislator and will partner with the community to represent the issues of my constituents. My issues that inspired my candidacy for Ward 4 Council seat is our city's need for improved education, improved health services and smart mixed-use development at projects such as the former Walter Reed Army base which lack vision and where the design should have been more on par with the Mazza Galleries Chevy Chase Pavilion corridor or at minimum reflective of Reston Towne Center or the innovative MGM National Harbor complex.