



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, March 5, 2020. Responses will be shared with C-PAC’s membership.

Office Sought: Ward 8 Councilmember

Candidate’s Name: Mike Austin

Current Occupation: Attorney

Party: Democrat

Campaign contact information (Address, Phone, Fax, Email, Website): Mike for Ward 8 Committee, PO Box 31528, Washington, DC, 20030; 202-656-1830; info.MikeAustin8@gmail.com; www.MikeAustin8.com

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?

My approach to improve agency responsiveness is to hold agencies accountable by establishing regular meetings and check-ins with troublesome agencies under my purview so that Performance Oversight is not the only time concerns are raised and addressed. I also plan to hold meetings, roundtables, and hearings in the evenings and on weekends throughout Ward 8, in order to give more people the opportunity to express their concerns and have their voices heard. I plan to bring agency heads to our high-crime and poverty-stricken areas so that there is a face to the dire issues Ward 8 families face. If responsiveness continues to be an issue, I would put pressure on the Mayor herself to address inadequate response times.

In order to improve the lives and wellbeing of my Ward 8 constituents, I would first and foremost work with my Council colleagues to advocate for and advance Ward 8 priorities. I will support and assist Councilmember Gray to deliver a hospital with a trauma center East of the River to save more lives. Ward 8 has the highest homicide, maternal, and infant mortality rates in the District, so access to a nearby trauma center is critical. I will also work to increase job growth by attracting small businesses to Ward 8 that will create jobs for residents so they do not have to travel across town to make a living. I plan to strengthen our workforce with high-wage training facilities so that residents are ready for the workforce demands of tomorrow. I will fight to invest



The Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

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

equitably in Ward 8 schools and early childhood education to give all of our children the equal opportunity to thrive and be successful. Finally, I would shift the conversation around development in Ward 8 to responsible development to ensure that all stakeholders have a seat at the table and that centers on resident and community benefits. Ward 8 residents also deserve the recreational space, grocery stores, coffee shops, and other amenities like other areas of the city.

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?

As a second generation Trini-American, I wholeheartedly support the *Office of the Caribbean Affairs Establishment Act* that creates an office to track legislation, develop policy recommendations, and monitors the quality of services for the District's Caribbean community. I think this bill is important, because it brings the Caribbean community in line with other cultural groups that have specific agency offices that address their needs, and it ensures that Caribbean residents -- like my mother -- are connected with the programs and services that help support their families. Too often, Caribbean residents are isolated from government services, because they fear the risk of deportation. The District needs a comprehensive approach to outreach and connecting immigrant communities to services and opportunities in the District of Columbia, and the Office of the Caribbean Affairs is a good step. I fully support efforts to staff and fund the proposed office to ensure that the Caribbean community can safely and confidently access District programs and services.

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

I have led and supported several initiatives that impact the District's Caribbean-American community. I led programs like FinanciallyFitDC, which helps support the financial health of District residents. I also led the effort to open the DC Infrastructure Academy, which created a one-stop job training facility for residents in Ward 8 to access high-wage industry job training. Further, I led and supported the George Washington contract to run the Emergency Room and Hospitalist at United Medical Center, providing Ward 8 residents with the same quality care that residents in Ward 2 receive. These are just a few examples of bold actions that I am willing to take to help uplift my constituents. These programs help Caribbean-Americans realize financial



The Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

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

stability, participate in workforce training programs, and access quality healthcare. Once in office, I will work in partnership with the Caribbean-American community to help solve specific and underlying issues that they prioritize most.

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?

Yes, I am familiar with the status and impact of Caribbean-American businesses in Ward 8 and throughout the District of Columbia. In order to support these businesses, I will help with access to capital. I led Project500 which is a program that assisted 500 businesses identify and secure capital for startup costs to make them viable. I will also work tirelessly to help businesses, particularly small businesses, access 504 loans to help purchase buildings to establish brick and mortar locations. Finally, I will get creative to find ways to help businesses access additional grants for infrastructure costs and expansion of current businesses. The District needs to do a better job to highlight and support Caribbean-owned businesses, and I intend to be that voice on the Council.

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?

The District's crime rate continues to climb – especially in Wards 8 – where I have personally lost family, friends, and mentees to gun violence. We need to have a comprehensive approach that addresses the root cause of the crime, and not one that continues the policies that have failed Black and brown communities, and failed to reduce crime. Reports have found that Ward 8 crime is often associated with economic status and an absence of basic resources needed to survive. Ward 8 is a high-crime area, because our residents do not have the same opportunities as residents in other parts of the city. Those who resort to crime need to have better options so that they do not feel like the need to turn to the streets and crime.

Therefore, I will work diligently to create and increase high-wage training programs in Ward 8 to bring job opportunities to the community. If we can touch our residents who are most at-risk to commit crimes, and provide opportunities for training



The Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

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

and real opportunities that can support a family, we can address crime in more ways than merely increasing police presence.

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

My approach to safe, quality, affordable mental and physical health care services throughout the District of Columbia, is to move with a sense of urgency to evaluate our mental and physical healthcare service providers, and increase funding for those doing it right. I also plan to support a comprehensive hospital with wrap-around services in Ward 8. Residents in high-crime and high-poverty neighborhoods need a nearby hospital with behavioral health doctors, primary care physicians, addiction recovery counselors, and mental health evaluators, that is ready to treat the severe healthcare issues in Ward 8.

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. Immigration is what makes America one of the most unique countries in the world, and it enhances our global competitiveness. I believe immigrants living in the United States should have a pathway to citizenship so that undocumented immigrants can stop living in the shadows. I also oppose ending DACA – that is not the solution. DACA opens doors for our young people who are just looking for a chance like -- all of us once did. I know that there are ways that we combat the challenges facing DREAMers on the local level. The District of Columbia can take concrete steps to make undocumented life easier whether it be granting driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants, and giving undocumented students access to affordable higher education by allowing them to access in-state tuition and grants on a local level.

I also believe that we should support and expand organizations like the Central American Resource Center, that specially-trains employees to give guidance on navigating the naturalization process in DC libraries, and to include these services at neighborhood pop-up locations, recreation centers, and at grocery stores to increase access. I also believe that we should expand the partnership between DC Government and the National Immigration Forum which provides financial support to District residents going through the naturalization process for over a year. We can work to expand the



The Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

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

LAYC DREAMER Fund, and increase Mayor Bowser's \$2.5 million commitment to the Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition that provides legal representation for DC residents, including those detained by ICE.

I absolutely support District of Columbia as a sanctuary city. Councilmember Allen recently introduced emergency legislation to strengthen the District's Sanctuary City protections. Once I am the Ward 8 Councilmember, I will support the permanent bill that will be introduced before the emergency legislation expires. I fully support limiting the District's cooperation with federal immigration authorities, and ending any loopholes the federal government uses to detain immigrants in the city. Our immigrant community should not live in fear and constant worry. Also, if the Trump Administration suspends temporary protective status for DC residents, I will introduce legislation to protect those living in the District. My goal is to ensure that immigrants have a sense of security so they can continue to live and make great contributions to our city.

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 believe that education is the foundation to success in America. I think that our public school system has done a disservice to our students long enough. I would take a pragmatic approach to improving our public schools, especially those East of the River, and be a champion for equitable funding for our Ward 8 students and schools. This Fiscal Year, 17 of the 20 proposed school budget cuts were from Wards 7 and 8 schools. This is unfathomable and with the right proactive leadership, severe budget cuts will not go unnoticed.

Teachers are a critical aspect of student learning and performance. As Councilmember, I will be a resource and a sounding board for teachers who want to speak out about issues happening inside our schools. I will listen – I want teachers to be my thought partners as I develop education policies that improve student learning. To reduce teacher turnover and improve teacher treatment, I would change the IMPACT evaluation system to make sure that teachers feel supported and are not victims of burnout. DCPS leadership needs to ensure that all teachers are empowered to discuss their concerns without fear of retaliation.

The areas where student learning takes place are also important, as students feel a sense of pride when they like their school's campus. Several schools in the District have



The Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

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

been modernized and transformed into beautiful, state-of-the-art buildings. To improve facilities and equipment modernizations, I will ensure that no school is skipped in the modernization line, and I will thoroughly review District of Columbia Public School and the Department of General Service contracts, that are sent to the Council, to ensure that the District is getting a fair deal and that there are no unscrupulous contractors.

I am also a proponent of measuring a student's growth and proficiency. I think that the District could have done a better job reflecting student progress in our STAR rating system. As Ward 8 Councilmember, I will work with my Council colleagues and our education agencies to find ways to amend the way we rate our schools to ensure that we do not exacerbate the issues our underperforming schools face.

One of the most important aspects of our public education system is our parents. I want to ensure that our public school leaders are properly engaging parents since they are a critical component to student learning. I will work to guarantee our parents have their voices heard and concerns addressed in a timely fashion.

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?

Our seniors need support and services so they can age-in-place. Our seniors deserve a quality of life to enjoy their seasoned years; unfortunately, many of our seniors in the District need access to work opportunities so they can remain in their homes. Many of our seniors have reverse mortgages on their homes and they don't own them outright like they had hoped after 30 years of payments. In order to fix this issue, we need to ensure our seniors have appropriate job opportunities in the District. Next, we need to increase funding for the DC Office of Aging, so there is more money to engage our seasoned citizens at their doorstep not just at Council hearings.

To improve service accessibility, we need to be forward-thinking like the Uber for seniors program so they have access to grocery store rides, and we must get creative with how we get seniors around the District beyond the Seabury transportation. The support for families could be addressed by ensuring there are more tax credits available for children who are the guardians for their parents so that money is not stretched too thin. Finally, we need to address recreational and program/services for seniors. Our recreational accessibility inequality concerns are a serious matter because our seniors need to be engaged and involved



The Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

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

with recreational options. If we are intentional, if we listen to our seniors, and if we engage them at their doorstep beyond just hearings, then we can allow our seniors to age-in-place.

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

My candidacy was inspired by mentee who is now serving a life sentence in prison as he was failed on so many levels by the District government. However, the priority issues that inspired my candidacy for Ward 8 Councilmember are income inequality, education, and crime:

- **Income Inequality:** The disinvestment in Ward 8 has gone on long enough. We are not in a position to stop job creators like the incumbent did with Reunion Square (it would have created 2500 jobs), instead we need to be prepared for the 2500 jobs by having our community with first priority, having already gone through the training, and with the agreement that small businesses will do more than low-dollar work on the project. That will allow our community to be empowered and will leverage the investments to create opportunities.
- **Education:** Our students are still failing to meet grade level and failing to produce the scores they need to be successful. When elected, I will fight to equitably fund our neighborhood schools, review Mayoral control of schools, increase collaboration with charters so there is a uniform standard for education practices across the District of Columbia.
- **Public Safety:** Crime is such a huge issue for us. I will reduce crime by reducing the abandoned buildings where crime hubs are in Ward 8; improving lighting in our community; focusing on security cameras for everyone; creating job opportunities so we reduce crimes of desperation, increasing accountability for our violence interrupters; and fully funding the *NEAR Act*.