



Response to the DC Latino Caucus Candidate's Questionnaire

I am pleased to submit the following responses to the DC Latino Caucus in support of my candidacy for Ward 6 Councilmember:

1. Discuss what you have done or will do to work collaboratively with other elected officials on issues important to the Latino community.

Throughout my professional career, I have worked to bring individuals, organizations and policy makers together to discuss issues, identify opportunities, and develop solutions to address the needs of working families, parents, businesses and individuals. Whether seeking or facilitating business opportunities and partnerships to enable the provision of healthcare, or supporting the cause and rights of the immigrant population as part of the governing board of one of the region's largest social service agencies, my efforts have been one of a unifier in search of common ground, mutual respect and a genuine appreciation for the diversity that binds us as one community.

In my appointed capacity as Chief of Staff to former Mayor Anthony Williams, part of my responsibility was to facilitate the Administration's relationship with the Latino and other critical communities to ensure that the issues of concern to each were thoughtfully considered and incorporated as part of the Administration's overall policy initiatives. I also was responsible for organizing the city-wide and neighborhood summits, as well as served as lead liaison for the Administration's relationship with the DC Council, White House, Congress and our regional and national partners to advance the goals of the District.

As Chair of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A, I have continued the practice of elevating and coalescing divergent opinions and ideas to address local issues of juvenile crime, neighborhood development, business and job creation and retention, and traffic safety with the recognition that it is only through our collective efforts that we will be able to achieve a stronger District of Columbia. As Ward

Councilmember, I will work to broaden this approach among my colleagues, the executive branch, as well as the private and non-profit sectors.

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2. **Describe what your policy agenda would be, including ways you would improve the economic and social condition of Latinos and their families, if elected.**

I am running to specifically address four key areas for working families:

A. Continue Education Reform and the improvement of our recreational centers:

Although progress is being made, our children still lag far behind their peers in the region and the nation in math, reading and science. However, four years ago we initiated long overdue reform of the DC Public School System. And while I support this effort, I believe there is more we can do to ensure a full range of options are provided to parents and students.

Special Education:

One of the most important efforts we can undertake is to provide equity in education by getting a handle on the skyrocketing costs of special education. Currently, special education students are roughly 16 percent of the school population, but serving them depletes more than 36 percent of the \$494 million education related budget. Two of the biggest special education costs are out-of-state tuition for special education students who receive services from private providers, as well as those students under the care of the Child and Family Services Administration and the Department of Mental Health who attend schools outside of the District. Additionally, the cost of transportation for more than 4,100 special needs students has skyrocketed.

At a minimum, as we look to modernize older school facilities, we should consider how special needs students may be accommodated and integrated into the school population, or if needed, provide instruction within special settings within the modernized school.

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Parental Options and Involvement:

I am a supporter of school choice because of the limited options available to parents when looking at current traditional public school options for their children, especially at the middle and high school levels.

While we continue our efforts to improve our traditional public schools, we should continue to make available options for magnet schools within the traditional system, charter schools and opportunity scholarships as part of a comprehensive reform initiative for education in our city. These options offer parents immediate alternatives to ensure the education of their children and include such options as trade schools, bilingual education and vocational institutes.

In addition, it is important to ensure parents have a way to become engaged in their child's education, no matter what option they choose. Therefore, we must ensure that there are well functioning and accessible Parent Resource Centers in every Ward, involve parents in major decisions related to their child's schooling, including forums on state-level changes to educational standards, hiring of principals, school closure and future use of school facilities.

B. Reduce Juvenile Crime:

To have a world class city, we must ensure we have a safe city, where visitors and neighbors alike can feel free to enjoy the rich history and diversity of our neighborhoods and national resources, without the threat of harm from muggings, car-jackings, home invasions, youth violence and assaults with deadly weapons. While today, we are told that crime is down, when we look closer at these claims, a different view is revealed.

Overall crime is down, but we are seeing an alarming increase in criminal incidents involving our youth and a dramatic increase not only in the number of crimes, but also an increase in the violence associated with the crimes they commit. We also have seen a sharp increase in the number of gangs. According to the report: "Responding to Gang, Crew and Youth Violence in the District of Columbia," the District is home to more than 130 criminal street gangs and smaller crews, whose members make up more than 60 percent of the city's homicide suspects and four in every 10 of the victims. We must come together to address this disturbing trend.

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While some have suggested we get tougher, treat them as adults and place them in a system that is already overcrowded and incapable of offering any meaningful rehabilitation. I suggest that doing so cannot be our only answer, although clearly some of them will need to be detained.

Over the years, there have been many reports to study and talk about how best to engage youth to help them deal with, reduce and avoid participation in drugs, violence and delinquency. We continue to pour money into separate youth prevention related programs and initiatives without, the proper requirements to facilitate collaboration between them, oftentimes not allowing the best use of our limited resources.

At a minimum, we should come together - the courts, District agencies, community groups, parents, young adults, and others - to have a constructive dialogue about what the needs are, what's in place now and what more can be done to address the problem. We should strengthen the relationship between the courts, responsible District agencies and the not for profit community to better define what we collectively consider success, and determine what efforts and resources will be required from each to ensure loopholes are closed, funding requirements and collaboration are strengthened and progress is made.

C. Put District residents to work:

Career Readiness:

There is great concern in the private sector about the gap that exists between the skills required in today's workplace and those exhibited by potential and incumbent employees. Businesses have trouble finding and hiring people who have basic employable skills and who are therefore trainable for specific jobs. The Career Readiness Certificate is a portable skills credential, assuring employers that a job applicant actually has the basic skills they seek.

Employers know that the costs of hiring, training, and retention significantly affect their bottom line. For an employer who may be contemplating moving his/her business to a new state or expanding an existing company, the skill level of the available workforce is often a deciding factor. Hiring for entry-level positions is particularly difficult because the applicant often has little or no work

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history, and presents with only a brief resume and an educational credential such as a high school diploma or a two- or four- year degree. While these credentials are beneficial, they do not always give a clear indication of the skills that the applicant possesses.

To address this, I propose that a Certificate of Career Readiness be implemented that offers the portable skills credentials needed to allow a candidate to secure a job. Although the District was part of the initial states that came together to advance this idea, it has yet to be implemented and our residents continue to remain at a competitive disadvantage with our neighbors.

Maintaining the Child Subsidy Program:

The District's Child Care Subsidy Program is a great example of leveraging government funding. The program, funded jointly through both local and federal dollars, offers a subsidy to providers of high quality pre-school programs to enroll the child of a low-income working family. This not only supports a bright educational start for the child, but also allows the parents, particularly single caregivers, opportunities to work without paying for costly childcare.

The program currently and usually has a waiting list of approximately 5,000 children, despite steady increased funding from the government over the past years. This could amount to at least equal that amount of working parents who are struggling between their job and their commitment to their child. Though we may never be able to drive this waiting list down without significantly expanding the program, we can take immediate steps to ensure that the program is aligned with workforce strategies.

For instance, the program is open to children ages 0 through 14, and sometimes higher, depending if that child is a special education student. The program also provides funding for after-school services for some children. Given limited resources, we should:

- a. Explore the policies of this program to determine ways to leverage investment and reduce potential double funding of efforts. For instance,

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we should look into ways to place an age preference for children under the age of 4 and those with special needs. Because the District already funds children ages 5-18 the opportunity to attend a public or public charter school, many of which provide after-school programs, it seems children of this age group should receive a lesser priority, as working parents already have alternatives for their children's time and safety.

- b. To the extent that funding is available, the Child Subsidy Program should be targeted as a strategic investment area, the funding increased and the collaborations initiated between the Department of Parks and Recreation, the DC Public Schools, and DC Public Charter Schools, all of whom are funded to provide similar programs to support the overall workforce initiative.

Restore the DC Chamber/DOES Summer Youth Employment Program:

The last year that the DC Chamber of Commerce was able to partner with the Department of Employment Services was in 2008 in which they provided 300 area youth with a minimum of ten (10) weeks employment in private sector jobs, including paid pre-employment training prior to job placement.

The Summer Youth Employment Program was a successful public private partnership that allowed the District's business community to partner with the Government and District schools to provide meaningful employment experiences for District youth and allowed participating youth the opportunity to contribute to their achieving success in the marketplace as working adults.

This program provided pre-employment training for selected youth between 17-21 years of age, who met DOES economic guidelines. These interns were pre-screened by the Department of Employment Services (DOES) and DC Chamber of Commerce and included the following guidelines to ensure a rich a meaningful experience for both the interns and employers.



D. Smart Neighborhood Development:

As the requests for development to expand from the downtown corridor to the neighborhoods, it is critical that there be sufficient community engagement to envision and identify the highest and best use of development locations so that the desires and needs of the community are addressed.

Currently, in Ward 6 there are a number of new development activities and opportunities in practically all areas of the Ward. Such major opportunities include the H Street corridor, Barracks Row, SW Waterfront and Barney Circle, that could bring millions of dollars of new investment to the Ward allowing new residents, businesses and jobs.

To ensure each opportunity is planned for carefully and cohesively it is critical that robust community engagement be initiated and/or enhanced to ensure all sections of our community is considered. Such engagement also could help jump start the development of critical areas of the Ward in need of greater job opportunities, as well as neighborhood based, higher end goods and services that currently do not exist in the Ward.

3. What is your position on DC implementing the secure community program, and what is your position on comprehensive immigration reform?

Generally, I support the concept of the secure community program to reduce violent criminal activity in our communities and as a way to further facilitate the critical coordination required between and among the various law enforcement agencies and entities responsible for securing our public safety. I do, however, believe that it is important to ensure adequate safeguards are put in place to prevent the abuse or expanded use of such information sharing beyond the program's original intent and that severe penalties be included for those agencies or individuals who violate or circumvent such safeguards.

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I also support immigration reform and the need for an immigration system that will:

- Reduce the backlog of individuals seeking residency or citizenship and restructure the naturalization process in a manner that is streamlined, consistent, fair, and equitable for those seeking US Citizenship,
- Include a family reunification component and a pathway to legalization for those seeking documentation,
- Ensure strong worker protections and
- Address our enforcement needs in a manner that is consistent existing due process and civil rights laws.

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