

Kwame R. Brown's
Responses to the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club's
2010 Council Chair Candidate Questionnaire

Human Rights

1. As Council Chair, what will you do to help ensure that the marriage rights secured for DC's LGBT Community remain intact?

Answer:

As a member who voted in favor of the Marriage Equality Act, I unequivocally support the right of individuals to marry regardless of sexual preference. If elected Council Chair, my commitment to ensuring that the Marriage Equality Act remains law in the District of Columbia would involve proactive efforts on two fronts:

- (1) First, I would aggressively monitor and lobby Congress to ensure that the will of our residents to give everyone the right to marry is not overturned by a Congressional mandate; and
- (2) Second, I would actively require the General Counsel's office of the Council of the District of Columbia to actively defend against any litigation challenging the legality or enforcement of the measure.

To put it simply, the Marriage Equality Act is a law that I voted for, a law that I believe in, and a law that I am willing to vigorously defend.

2. Would you be supportive of the Mayor's Office of LGBT Affairs having grant making authority and an increased budget to provide grants to 501c3 organizations in the District providing services to the LGBT community?

Answer:

Conceptually, I have no problem supporting any effort to secure grant-making authority and increased funding for the Mayor's Office of LGBT Affairs. However, in this current economic climate, the

government of the District of Columbia is facing an increased demand for basic government services combined with constantly declining revenues. That means that, in order to survive, our government must do more with less.

I believe that, more often than not, the basic needs of our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender residents are identical to the basic needs of all heterosexual residents—needs like access to quality jobs in an a work environment free of discrimination, access to affordable housing, access to a quality education b, and the ability to live in safe and clean communities. In these current economic conditions, I believe that the government should encourage and require agencies already possessing grant-making authority and funding in these areas to actively market to and recruit LGBT organizations and individuals to apply for grants under their programs. In that way, we can make sure that the LGBT community has the right to fully participate in and receive benefits from the existing grant programs established by the Government of the District of Columbia.

3. As a legislator, what can and/or will you do to support increased funding or assist in securing additional funding for LGBT social service organizations such as the DC Center, the Mautner Project, SMYAL, Metro Teen AIDS, and Transgender Health Empowerment?

Answer:

Please see my response to question # 2.

4. As a legislator, what can and/or will you do to advocate for increased education, job training, and hiring of transgendered people?

Answer:

Transgendered residents are among the most vulnerable population for discriminatory treatment in both employment and education. That reality exists because few of us recognize the special difficulties, impediments, and general ignorance faced by the transgendered community.

I am proud to say that the District of Columbia is among the most responsive jurisdictions to address the issue of transgender discrimination— having adopted specific language in the Human Rights Act to prohibit employment discrimination based on gender identification and passing a Safe Schools Act that specifically prohibits harassment and bullying due to gender identity. Still, we can and must do more.

With respect to employment and job training, the District of Columbia has already enacted laws to prohibit employment discrimination based on gender orientation. We can improve upon the effectiveness of those laws by actively and aggressively monitoring their enforcement—particularly in cases where a business or organization is receiving government assistance in the form of grants, contracting dollars, or other funds.

In addition, the government should embark on an awareness campaign to actively dispel the myths surrounding the employment of transgendered residents and inform both businesses and individuals of their rights and obligations under the law.

5. Do you support mandatory sensitivity training in workplaces that have transgender employees or new hires who may be transgender?

Answer:

Yes, I do.

6. In the past, what LGBT related events, activities, or organizations have you participated in or been a member of or are currently a member of?

Answer:

As an At-Large Councilmember, I am currently responsible for representing all residents of the District of Columbia—including those residents that are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. To do that job well, I need first-hand knowledge of the concerns and issues affecting the LGBT community. That’s why I have always required

my staff to routinely attend events sponsored by multiple LGBT organizations such as Gertrude Stein as well as do outreach to LGBT publications regarding policy matters before the Council. When I first became Chair of the Committee on Economic Development, the Committee partnered with the Department of Small and Local Business Development and the Capital Area Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce to host an economic development summit. Since then economic development summits continue to take place and I make it a point to attend to support the growth of local businesses.

In addition, each year since I have become an elected member of the Council, I have participated in the Capital Pride and Black Pride parades and have make outreach to the LGBT community a priority.

Public Safety

7. Given that the GLLU is one of the only LGBT related units in the country, will you support and advocate for the Metropolitan Police Department to increase the current staffing, as well as support the hiring of a full time sergeant who understands the LGBT community and LGBT policing?

Answer:

The most recent data available indicates that the GLLU has less than 10 sworn MPD officers to police and monitor crimes affecting a community that consists of thousands of District residents. That ratio is both unacceptable and woefully inadequate. If elected Council Chair, I would commit to ensuring that more officers are recruited to join GLLU, whether as full-time staff or as reserve officers. In addition, I believe that the unit must have a full-time sergeant that understands the LGBT community and LGBT policing in order to be effective and to ensure residents of the LGBT community that the Metropolitan Police Department understands their concerns and is committed to addressing their safety needs.

8. Will you advocate for the executive office of the mayor to establish policy requiring agency directors to implement mandatory training for all members of DCPS, Fire and EMS workers regarding LGBT people

(including LGBT people of color, those that are limited English proficient, and those that are disabled)?

Answer:

Yes, but I would be willing to do even more. Mandatory sensitivity training is such an essential component of ensuring that the LGBT community receives the same access to the core services provided by DCPS, Fire, and EMS that—rather than relying upon the Mayor to adopt a sensitivity training policy—I believe this Council can and should act to require that sensitivity training as a matter of law.

9. As Council Chair, what can and/or will you do to insure that the District is aggressively responding to the increase in incidents of hate crimes against the LGBT community that have been occurring over the last two years, aside from holding yearly hearings on the issue?

Answer:

A key component of the platform of my campaign for Council Chair is to increase transparency, community involvement and accountability in the District's government. That effort begins by creating and enforcing uniform performance measurements and data collection efforts so that we can ensure that our government is doing the job that it is supposed to do.

So, one way that I would ensure that the police department is aggressively responding to the increase in hate crimes is to implement reporting requirements that would have the department explain its response efforts in detail. For example, instead of requiring the department to report only the number of hate crimes and the outcomes of those investigations, I would also have the department report the response time to the crime scene, any complaints that were received about the department's investigation efforts, the department's collaboration efforts with GLLU in solving the crime and assisting the victim(s), and detail all specific efforts to reach out to the LGBT community to solve the crime. I believe that this information, especially if produced on a quarterly basis, will give

us a better assessment of the effectiveness of the District's efforts to respond to hate crimes.

Also, as I mentioned earlier, I support increasing the number of police officers specifically dedicated to the GLLU. More officers will help ensure that the department has the resources needed to carry out a more aggressive enforcement effort.

10. As a legislator, will you be committed to working to stop the DC Department of Corrections policy of relying on genitalia as a basis for gender identification rather than an individual's gender identity or expression?

Answer:

This is a difficult question—one that does not have an easy answer. Our corrections system depends upon gender segregation as a means of ensuring and protecting the safety of all incarcerated individuals. As a result, transgender individuals are often placed by their genitalia, rather than their stated gender identity. Absent empirical research showing that a correction facility's placement of individuals based on gender identity, rather than anatomy, does not lead to increased safety concerns, I would not support an end to the Department of Correction's policy.

Having said that, I am acutely aware that the placement of transgender individuals with genitalia-identified populations may also lead to increased acts of violence against them. That's why, with some reservation, I support the segregation of transgender individuals from the general prison population or at a separate facility as a means of ensuring their safety.

I admit that this solution is not without its own problems. Specifically, it raises concerns of discriminatory treatment against the transgender community by denying them access to basic privileges of prison rights. However, that sacrifice is one that I believe we must be willing to make, until a better solution is presented, in order to ensure the safety of transgender individuals while they are incarcerated. This is an issue that I am actively willing to work with members of the

transgender community to develop the best solution for everyone involved.

Education and Youth

11. Do you support the current DC Board of Education's Health Standards that include discussions of sexual orientation in learning about sex education in public schools?

Answer:

Yes, I do.

12. Do you support DCPS leadership in advocating for additional mandatory teacher and faculty training in all DC public schools regarding LGBT student safety?

Answer:

Yes, I do.

13. As Council Chair, what can and/or will you do to hold DCPS, OSSE, and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education accountable for making sure that all LGBT students can learn in a safe and supportive environment?

Answer:

Before we can hold these agencies accountable, I believe that we must first ensure that this Council has taken the necessary legislative steps to promote LGBT student learning in safe and supportive environments. That means that we should:

- require additional mandatory sensitivity and safety training of all teachers and school staff on LGBT concerns,
- ensure that funding exists so that school counselors are available to our LGBT students, and
- should mandate that our school modernization efforts to account for sexual preference and gender identity concerns by mandating the inclusion of some gender-neutral bathroom and changing room facilities in renovation designs.

These legislative steps will help create the right environment for our LGBT students and assist DCPS, OSSE, and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education in making sure that our schools provide a safe and supportive environment for learning.

Once these steps are taken, I believe that we can make sure that those agencies live up to their responsibilities by actively overseeing and monitoring their enforcement of the Safe Schools Act, implementation of sexual preference and gender identity sensitivity and safety training, and promotion of activities and programs specifically designed for LGBT students. In addition, I would look to those agencies to demonstrate a zero-tolerance policy for bullies or harassers that single out individuals due to their sexual preference or gender identity.

14. As a legislator, what can and/or will you do to support afterschool activities and initiatives that specifically include the needs of LGBT youth?

Answer:

As a legislator and, if elected Council Chair, I will support afterschool activities and initiatives aimed at LGBT youth by ensuring that those activities and initiatives receive the funding that they need in order to be available for any student who wants to participate.

Health/HIV/AIDS

15. As Council Chair, what can and/or will you do to hold the HIV/AIDS Administration and the Department of Health accountable for aggressively working to develop and implement a strategy to reduce the unacceptably high HIV/AIDS rate among the District's LGBT community, specifically LGBT communities of color and the transgender community?

Answer:

With the recent departure of Dr. Shannon Hader, the Director of the District's HIV/AIDS Administration for the past three years, the question of how the District continues to make progress against the

HIV/AIDS infection rate is at the forefront of everyone's minds. As Council Chair, I will be looking to the new Director of the HIV/AIDS Administration and the Department of Health to build and expand upon Dr. Hader's efforts to ensure collaboration with the District's LGBT community—especially in the transgender and people of color LGBT communities.

In particular, I will work closely with the Chair of the Committee on Health and ask the administration to produce a written strategy outlining its efforts to reduce the infection rate in specific communities and to analyze the effectiveness of its existing practices in relation to promoting awareness and access to health care services designed to prevent individuals from contracting an infection or assist those individuals already infected with managing their illness. Once that strategy is produced, I will work with my fellow councilmembers, members of the LGBT community, and all District residents to ensure that the strategy produced is the right approach and that the Administration has the resources needed to make implementation of the strategy effective.

DC Taxi Cab Meters

As Council Chair, will you hold the District government accountable for conducting the impact study of DC taxi cab meter rates every two years as the law requires?

Answer:

As Council Chair, I will be committed to ensuring that the District Government meets all of its obligations under the law—including the requirement that an impact study on meter rates be conducted every two years.