

Gertrude Stein Democratic Club 2012 Questionnaire

Name: Max Skolnik, Democrat Ward 4 District Council

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Human Rights

1. As a member of the Council, how will you work to increase the capacity of LGBT social service organizations? Would you support increased funding or assist in securing additional funding for LGBT social service organizations?

I support expanded funding for LGBT social services, and I would support giving authority for the Office of GLBT Affairs to provide direct grants to community service organizations. This is important not only to ensure equity, but also to improve the quality of services provided to DC residents and the civic health and vitality of our communities.

2. As a legislator, what can and/or will you do to advocate for increased education, job training, and hiring of transgender people? Would you actively support Project Empowerment's efforts to provide options for the Transgender community?

I support the ground-breaking work of Project Empowerment. Given its positive results to-date, I would push for the expansion of this type of program. Additionally, I will advocate for investments in workforce intermediaries that specialize in serving the transgender community. These entities (e.g., non-profits, civic groups, etc.) can act as important bridges between employers and employees and work to sensitize businesses to transgender issues.

3. What would you do to eliminate employment discrimination and to insure that the Transgender community obtains fair representation in all District government agencies? Would you actively support legislation and or programs designed for these purposes?

I will fight for a trans-inclusive ENDA in the District of Columbia.

4. If there is any effort to undo the marriage rights secured for DC's LGBT Community, what will you do to actively defend and help ensure that the marriage rights secured for DC's LGBT Community remain intact?

I believe that marriage equality is a civil and human right. I would publicly campaign against any initiative that seeks to deny this fundamental right to DC residents. I would also urge the DC Attorney General to initiate litigation to keep it off the ballot.

5. Would you advocate that the unique needs of GLBT seniors are included in all D.C. planning documents, including plans for senior-support services, recreation, housing and medical services, including long-term care?

Of course. I am pleased that HHS has authorized states to enact protections that ensure equal Medicaid spousal impoverishment protections for same-sex partners. I will push for DC to do so, including providing local funding to pay for these benefits. This is an issue of basic equality. More broadly, however, we need to push for greater protections for LGBT elders, many of whom are not married and are more likely to be isolated and vulnerable than heterosexual elders. I would introduce additional legislation to enact these important protections for LGBT seniors.

6. Would you openly advocate that LGBT cultural sensitivity training is mandated and for all senior service providers (including long term care facilities), plus nursing assistive personnel?

Yes, in this day and age, this requirement should be recognized as an essential part of basic professional training and cultural competence.

7. The DC Center, (which houses and assists numerous programs critical to the health and well being of the DC LGBT community) is in search for a permanent home. As a Council member, would you dedicate a staff member to work with the DC Center to identify a permanent home?

A DC LGBT community center would be a welcome addition to the Washington DC landscape. I will commit to working closely with GSDC and other LGBT groups to make this a reality. A dedicated staff member would be a top priority.

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

Yes, I would support grant authority and an increased budget for the Office of GLBT Affairs. This is important not only to ensure equity, but also to improve the quality of services provided to DC residents and the civic health and vitality of our communities.

9. In the past year, what LGBT related events or activities did you participate in? Are you currently a member of any LGBT organizations or causes?

For the past two years, my organization, Kid Power Inc., has partnered with Metro TeenAIDS to implement extensive sex education and diversity programming. In weekly sessions at all 5 of our middle school sites, mentors and students discuss healthy choices, anti-bullying strategies, self-esteem issues, stereotypes and inclusiveness, and other topics. Activities often lead to service projects, including neighborhood condom distribution, poetry slams at LGBT community centers, and fundraisers for LGBT causes.

Public Safety

10. Do you think there should be a comprehensive strategic plan to reduce hate crimes and violence in the LGBT community and if so, what elements should be in that plan?

A District-wide strategic plan to end violence toward the LGBT community should include the following components:

Education: As an educator and youth advocate, I am strongly in favor of starting the process as early as possible. Our children learn bullying and violence on the street, at home, and on the school yard. For 15 years, I have implemented in-school and out-of-school-time programs for grades K – 12 that teach the importance of peer conflict resolution, non-violence, inclusiveness, and diversity.

Reporting and tracking: MPD crime stats must track and report on hate crimes against LGBT persons. Hate crimes, especially against transgender people, are a serious problem in DC (and the surrounding area), and we must do more to document and communicate the gravity of these offenses.

Training: MPD personnel should be trained in how to identify, report on, and be sensitive to the communities they serve. Clearly, there has been unacceptable treatment of LGBT community members in the past, particularly transgender individuals. I will fight to eliminate these archaic behaviors and attitudes.

11. Besides holding yearly hearings, what can and/or will you do as a legislator to ensure that the District is aggressively responding to the increase in incidents of hate crimes against the LGBT community that have been occurring recently?

I will work with LGBTQ community leaders to identify goals and metrics for each strategic plan component (some of which have been identified above) to address this epidemic. I would require that these metrics be reviewed on a regular basis, as part of CAPSTAT - MPD reporting to ensure progress is being made toward reducing hate motivated crimes and making our communities safer for all District residents.

12. What would you do to support efforts to insure that marginalized LGBT youth and Transgender citizens of the District who are often victims of hate crimes and discrimination have safe and affirming options when challenged with homelessness, hunger and unemployment?

I would support and, where possible, sponsor legislation and policies that 1) reduce the number of people relying on prostitution and being incarcerated (e.g., by supporting and strengthening the Mayor's trans employment placement program, mandating that judges consider probation and other alternatives to incarceration for LGBT youth and adults engaging in prostitution, and funding diversion programs for transgender people); 2) improve the experience of people who are incarcerated (e.g., by mandating gender identity appropriate housing and access to proper care, including treatments related to gender transition) and; 3) support people who leave incarceration and reenter the workforce, life, etc. (e.g., by funding reentry programs, making expungement easier, and banning employment discrimination based on having a criminal record for prostitution).

I would also strongly support problem-solving courts to deal specifically with homeless youth, prostitution, and mental health. These courts have specially trained judges and staff, a non-adversarial approach, and an emphasis on treatment, case management and rehabilitation rather than punishment. Youth who are found to have violated prostitution laws should be kept out of the juvenile/criminal justice system at all costs, as studies consistently demonstrate that the more contact a person has with those systems the more likely they are to return. These youth are victims, not criminals.

We should also take aggressive steps to prevent LGBT youth from being arrested in the first place, such as making our law enforcement, school, child welfare, shelter and other youth-serving systems more LGBTQ-competent, improving job and housing opportunities for trans and runaway/homeless/aging-out youth generally, promoting family acceptance and support, and improving access to hormone therapy for youth. I agree with the recommendations promulgated by New York City Mayor Bloomberg in "All Our Children: Strategies to End Homelessness, Strengthen Services, and Build Support for LGBTQ Youth."

Education and Youth

Despite several years of so-called reform, DC youth are facing mounting challenges. Recent standardized assessments in Ward 4 and throughout the city have shown distressing reversals. Teachers operate under a punitive and highly-politicized IMPACT evaluation system. Meanwhile, the District has the worst teen unemployment rate¹, the largest black-white achievement gap², alarming social behavior statistics³, and one of the worst college graduation rates⁴ in the nation. The top-down, technocratic approach is not working.

We need to change course and embrace the community-school and Promise Neighborhood movements. We must marshal all of our local resources to build a comprehensive cradle-to-career pipeline that expands education beyond the classroom and meets all youth needs.

13. 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? As a councilmember, will you commit to requiring a report on the implementation of these new health standards as part of your role as a member of the Education committee?

Yes, I support the current standards. I will commit to requiring a report on the implementation of these standards.

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

I do support increased training for DCPS personnel, wholeheartedly.

15. As a legislator, what will you do to help the efforts of DCPS, OSSE, and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education to make sure that all LGBT students can learn in a safe and supportive environment?

I support the introduction of teaching topics (courses and/or seminars) about the lives of LGBT people into the curricula of DCPS and DC charter schools.

¹ 50.1%, Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011

² Source National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2011

³ According to the 2009 CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 57.9% of HS students have had sexual intercourse, 25% of GLB MS students reported bullying at school, and 29% of GLB students have attempted suicide.

⁴ 9% of 9th graders will graduate from college in 5 years, Source: DCPS (<http://1.usa.gov/Asejvo>), 2011

16. As a Council member, what will you do to support after school activities and initiatives that specifically include the needs of LGBT youth?

I am a strong supporter of LGBTQ social clubs (GSA's) and associations that provide safe spaces for LGBTQ students. All after-school programs, especially those that participate through DCPS's OST initiative, should have explicit expectations that they be open and welcoming of all students.

Health/HIV/AIDS

17. As a legislator, what can and/or will you do to hold the HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, STD, and TB Administration (HAHSTA) and the Department of Health accountable for aggressively working to develop and implement a strategy to reduce the unacceptably high HIV/AIDS rates in the District's LGBT community, specifically among gay and bisexual men and transgender women of color?

I would collaborate with community organizations (including GSDC and the DC Trans Coalition) and other DC Council members to provide close oversight of HAHSTA and to develop a comprehensive approach that incorporates best practices with respect to condom distribution, needle exchange, free rapid result HIV testing, and community-based support groups and peer counseling. I do not support mandatory testing. I would also focus on serious gaps in current programs, such as the failure to develop a comprehensive approach to the acute vulnerability of transgender people due to systemic discrimination and economic marginalization. Generally, I believe we must adopt a broader conception of health and well-being that includes the underlying social and economic issues that make certain groups more vulnerable to particular health risks.

18. As a legislator, what will you do to ensure that the Department of Health provides an annual report and update on LGBT health statistics? What will you do to insure that the Transgender community as well as communities of color is included in that report?

I would require that transgender people and people of color are included in DOH reports. Reducing the incidents of infection and increasing longevity rates among the most vulnerable members of our community is a top priority.

BUDGET

19. As a legislator, what are some of the proposals or initiatives that you would implement to increase revenue for critical city-wide social services that inevitably affect the LGBT community while allowing for a balanced budget?

Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote that "taxes are what we pay for a civilized society." I believe that a defining principle of the Democratic Party is the establishment of a progressive taxation system. Under the previous structure, it was deeply unfair for someone earning \$40,000 a year to be in the same tax bracket as someone making \$40 million. Thus, I would fight to make the recent increases permanent (8.95% for \$350,000 and up), and I would push for the creation of two new tax brackets (i.e., 9.1% for \$500,000 and 9.2% for \$1 million).

I also believe that we need to reassess our entire budgeting process. To that end, I will advocate for the following reforms:

- *Top-to-bottom review of agencies to reduce waste, fraud, and inefficiencies.*
- *Increased transparency to better understand program rather than agency expenditures and increased focus on outcomes measurement.*
- *Smarter budgeting practices to break the endless cycle of unexpected deficits and surpluses and reduce intra-agency transfers.*
- *More careful review of future tax abatements so that they ensure community benefits, fulfill economic development priorities, and contain clawback provisions if commitments are not met.*
- *Participatory budgeting mechanisms so that citizens have control over how dollars are spent in their communities⁵*

⁵ Modeled after programs in Chicago's 49th Ward and New York City (<http://www.participatorybudgeting.org>)