

CBID - Response from Justin Krebs, candidate for City Council, 39th District

1. If elected, what would be your top priority in your first term?

All of the first term will happen in the shadow of covid -- facing the challenges and opportunities of a post-pandemic recovery. Ensuring an equitable, responsive, transparent, ambitious recovery -- that strengthens New York, relies on real community participation, and builds back better (to echo a popular phrase) will be the priority. Within that, there are several areas that my campaign has focused on and that I would continue to prioritize:

1. Reforming, resourcing and revitalizing our education system to address the needs of our students, teachers, families, and our communities including investing in and integrating our schools in ways that engage parents, support teachers and recognize the individuality of students, while protecting their data privacy.
2. Making sure our Main Streets are vibrant -- from protecting safe streets for cyclists and pedestrians, to supporting small businesses while taking on big corporations, to investing in parks, open space, restaurants, and culture.
3. Ensuring New York is a leader in all ways in confronting the climate crisis -- through and beyond our recovery.

2. What personal and/or professional experiences do you believe make you uniquely qualified to run for City Council? Attach resume if desired.

I'm running for City Council because I've been a progressive movement-builder and organizer for 20 years; I love my home where my kids go to public school and my wife—a nurse-midwife and birth educator owns a small business; I'm ready to bring my range of experience from national campaigning to local organizing to serve my community and my city; and I love bringing people together in joyful ways to get big things done -- which is essential for our city and society.

In local and national work, in politics and culture, my work has always been characterized by harnessing the collective power of people working together to build things together, make change, and strengthen community.

For the past 6 years, I've run the national campaigns team at MoveOn—where we've played a central role in the resistance to Trump's agenda, from fighting to stop the repeal of the Affordable Care Act to organizing Families Belong Together rallies to fueling the Blue Wave in 2018 to being a leader in the efforts to impeach (the first time, and the second) and so much more. It's been a unique opportunity to participate in some of the biggest national fights, collaborate with leading allies and thought-leaders from across the movement—and also always know that we rely on the power of our members, millions across the country and many right here in Brooklyn, to get anything done.

During that same time, **my wife Casey and I have been raising 3 kids**—8-year-old Sadie and 6-year-olds Juno and Ruby (yes, identical twins). Schleppling around 3 kids under 3 prepared me for a lot. Now they are all in PS 39, where I serve in a parent leadership role that has also led to being an executive member of the Community School District 15 Presidents Council, with the opportunity to work with schools across our district.

Prior to MoveOn, I worked on projects with progressive allies across the country, labor unions, digital organizations, and a range of advocacy groups—including WFP, Central Labor Council, the New York League of Conservation Voters, and other groups right here in New York. Over those years, I was best known for **founding and growing the Living Liberally network of social political communities—hundreds of Drinking Liberally happy hours, Laughing Liberally comedy shows**, and other gatherings that fortified social bonds through political values. In New York, these clubs have regularly been platforms for our leading progressive candidates. Nationally, they've been lifelines for progressives in conservative places.

And 18 years ago, **I started The Tank, a non profit performance venue that supports emerging artists and premieres more new work than any other venue in New York City**. I've also written for WNYC political opinion site extensively and authored two books on politics.

This work history has given me experiences important for a City Council member. I've seen the city through many lenses—non-profit leader, small business owner, freelancer, parent, cyclist, voter, artist. I've had the chance to balance budgets, negotiate with landlords, suffer the wrecking ball of developers, fight alongside folks of all walks of life, hire (and sometimes fire) staff, coordinate volunteers, grow operations, work with, in and out of government. I've had the chance to work with the largest national partners, and work intimately with small business owners and insurgent candidates and struggling artists.

And through them all, I've always seen that we all do better when we're in it together—when we pool our collective energy and resources behind common goals, and build something that can serve all of us.

3. List all endorsements

I have endorsements from PTA presidents, small business owners, artists, and community leaders across the district, as well as national progressive leaders.

4. What, if any, groups or industries will you not accept contributions from? Please note specifically.

I will not be accepting contributions from police unions, real estate industry lobbyists, representatives of fossil fuel industries.

5. How do you propose helping NYC recover from the COVID pandemic and resulting economic recession, particularly given the projected shortfall in city revenue?

For the past 8 months, I've had the opportunity to work with the leadership team in establishing and expanding the Camp Friendship Food Pantry. Coordinating hundreds of volunteers, donors, drivers, and supporters around the neighborhood, we serve hundreds of families each week—with direct distribution at Camp Friendship and through two days of deliveries. This has made very real, very regularly, how much need there is in our community and neighboring communities. And it's been an opportunity to affirm how many people in our district want to tackle this problem—with focus, passion, time, resources, money, food and advocacy.

I am not saying that volunteer-run food pantries are the answer. They are a critical band-aid, but we need much larger systemic solutions. They are, however, a reminder that folks across our district and our city are tuned in to the deep pain of the pandemic, aware of the need for ambitious and even radical efforts, and committed to prioritizing efforts that lift us all up as we recover.

Our solutions for the pandemic aren't unique to the pandemic – they are solutions to the problems that already existed before coronavirus that have now been exposed. This is a place where local elected officials have some direct power – to invest in childcare, healthcare, and other direct support for impacted workers. This means ensuring that schools both during and after the pandemic are serving all students and families, providing relief and support for small businesses so our main streets remain vital and are here to meet us on the other side, prioritizing food security for all, and branching into green infrastructure to take advantage of low interest rates and invest more heavily in strengthening our city and providing jobs to do so.

But it's where we also need to use our organizing power and our platforms to advocate to state and federal entities for real relief – from direct payments to programs that cancel/reduce rent to increasing revenue with fair progressive taxation. We need them to act, and we have to treat ourselves as organizers and emissaries, lifting up the voices of the impacted, centering the stories of workers and families and individuals hit hardest. We need to make sure all measures include undocumented workers. That we, as a city, track data of who is impacted – in their health, jobs, and community health – with explicit understanding of race and income. Then we need to direct solutions with that knowledge. And we need to make sure those most impacted are part of the discussions and planning for solutions.

As someone who has spent part of my life in arts and culture, I also want to say a word about reviving the arts. As I wrote about in Gotham Gazette this week (<https://www.gothamgazette.com/opinion/10070-plan-save-the-arts-in-new-york-broadway-beyond>), we need a plan as creative, innovative and nimble as the culture we seek to support. Reviving the arts is, in fact, part of reviving our economy—a boost to those who work in culture and entertainment, to the countless small businesses that serve the entertainment world, and to the vibrancy of our city.

6. What measures would you take to improve educational opportunities for all students in NYC? How do you plan to ensure that all NYC children are able to attend high-quality, integrated schools? Do you support D15's integration plan as it has been implemented? What changes, if any, would you make to the current D15 integration plan?

As a **former board member of the New York Civil Liberties Union**, which has fought educational battles across New York, I start with the clear affirmation that education is a civil right and a human right.

We need to make our schools a funding priority, which means relentlessly advocating for more federal and state resources, working overtime to tackle inequities in funding across the system by having a bright-line of standards for all our students, and investing in teaching not in testing.

As an **executive leader in the Community School District 15 (which substantially overlaps Council District 39) Presidents Council**, I've experienced the challenges of allocating resources for different schools and the structural difficulties helping all schools thrive. The work is not over – and I'd join forces with the parent, student, faculty, administration and civic leadership that made these strides so far as we bolster, deepen and expand the District 15 Integration Plan. This is a racial justice issue, an equity issue, and a deeply personal issue as someone who knows how much we rely on schools at the center of our lives.

In addition to supporting, strengthening and expanding upon the strides of the District 15 Integration Plan, I would continue to work with parent-leaders and administrators from schools across the district to invest in shared resources, address the failure to invest in Title 1 schools, and tackle school segregation in our city.

7. How would you have handled the reopening of schools for the 2020-21 academic year? How will you prepare for a second wave of this pandemic? How would you propose to ensure that the needs of highly vulnerable children (with special needs, who are homeless, come from poor families, and/or live in households without adults able to aid their learning) are not further behind when remote learning has to be relied on?

The city leadership had the opportunity to marshal resources and mobilize every sector of our city behind a clear vision that prioritized our schools—and it didn't do that. I believe that pushing to reopen was essential—for our students, families, educators, and city as a whole. But it was an enormous challenge that needed a moonshot-level of innovation, resource, focus and clarity, all of which were lacking.

Since last summer, I wrote about this in the Bklyner, Gotham Gazette, StreetsBlog and, more recently, The Daily News (links below) as I worked both in my Community School District 15 leadership role and as a concerned parent.

- We needed a plan that put schools—students, teachers, parents—first.
- That was innovative in the use of alternative spaces, including outdoor spaces.
- That leaned into the opportunities of small-group cohorts for more individualized learning.
- That invested early and in an ongoing way in resources—from technology to guidance counselors to school nurses—in tackling the inequities in our system that would only be exacerbated by this challenging year.
- That, from the start, put standardized testing on a back burner
- That amped up data privacy for all our students—at a time when more and more of them were rapidly pushed onto an expanding array of apps and sites.

Maybe more than you need, but here's some of my advocacy on this front:

- Gotham Gazette in July:
<https://www.gothamgazette.com/opinion/9587-prioritize-new-york-city-schools-p-arent-leaders-demand-real-plan-students>
- Bklyner in July:
<https://bklyner.com/uncertainty-and-lack-of-leadership-takes-school-reopening-from-hopeful-to-terrifying-opinion/>
- Streetsblog in August:
streetsblog.org/2020/08/28/opinion-show-us-the-money-for-school-streets-mr-mayor/

- Daily News in November:
<https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-open-classrooms-close-everything-else-20201113-q3dgvapcvbds7m4tpfljn2mcricri-story.html>
- Petition on Opt-In Days:
<https://sign.moveon.org/petitions/give-parents>

While the shutdown has hit everyone, we've seen clear resource equity issues emerge that can't be ignored even when we're back in school: Students with high quality devices, high speed internet and access to supplemental tutoring or at-home support have a different experience than students who don't. That will remain true even after a vaccine unless we seriously resource how we understand the needs of students individually, and ensure resources to meet those needs.

As the year went on, the lack of clear, consistent, transparent communication has hurt the trust between families and the DOE—and the only way this year was going to work was with trust. For example, the city's rash decision to change the number of opt-in periods for at-home learners to choose to go back in-person created stress and confusion with parents, rather than allowing families to base decisions on health realities and educational needs. That's why I led an effort with 3,500 families across the city to call for the city to reverse that policy.

As we prepare for next year, we need to rebuild trust between the DOE and the parent and teacher communities. That means transparency, clarity, honesty. We need a real assessment of the resource gaps so we can demand public resources, smartly use partnerships to supplement technology, and make sure we're not falling back on standardized testing. If this year taught us anything, it's that the city can change our schools when needed—well, let's take that opportunity to change them for the better. With a real plan that we can marshal necessary resources around.

8. Do you support allowing non-citizens residents to vote in City-based elections? Why?

Yes. Our government should reflect our neighborhoods, and that happens when people can have a voice in their city's government. The current system underrepresents neighborhoods with immigrant communities in both borough and citywide elections. Non-citizens attend schools, own small businesses, ride the subway, use city services, and pay taxes. They have been able to vote for Community School Boards in the past and Participatory Budgeting more recently; it's time to let them participate in local elections.

9. Do you support campaign finance reforms for NYC? If so, describe.

New York City's campaign finance system is pretty good, made better by the recent changes. (Our Board of Elections is a different story.) We really need a New York State system modeled off the city system to truly break the hold of Big Money. In the meantime, I'd explore ways to limit independent expenditures as much as possible on the city level.

10. Now that the State gov has passed the Reproductive Health Act, what steps would you have the Council and City Hall take to increase reproductive healthcare access, including maternal healthcare, and to do so equitably?

As the husband of a health care provider -- my wife Casey is a certified nurse midwife who has worked in public and private hospitals across NYC -- I've learned from my wife's experiences working with expectant mothers from all walks of life: different ages, races, immigration statuses, family structures, insured as well as uninsured. I've seen the inequity in our two-tiered system and the effects of structural racism on maternal mortality rates. I've also seen that when our city and society chooses, we can ensure that health care is accessible and that there are evidence-based models that can help us improve outcomes here in NYC.

And - yes - I would consult Casey, the former co-chair of NYC Midwives, and through her the leaders in the midwifery, doula, and birth educator communities in New York City - as a first step to fully understand and address these issues. I'd seek to follow the lead of midwife-, doula- and women-of-color-led groups like Ancient Song Doula Services, which contributed to the NYS Task Force on Maternal Mortality, and the national Every Mother Counts which has taken in New York's Choices in Childbirth.

There is a crisis for black and brown mothers giving birth—with disparate outcomes that are unacceptable and outrageous. If we invest in more midwives, especially midwives of color, and create and improve settings that are more conducive to patient-centered birth experiences and improved collaboration between midwives and OBs, we can improve health outcomes. Additionally we need more access to implicit bias training across our hospital system, and more pipelines and resources for doctors, midwives and doulas of color to work together in a collaborative model that builds on all providers strengths and centers the patients autonomy to improve safe and satisfying reproductive health care.

I would support the guidelines of the NYS Task Force on Maternal Mortality, and work to improve and expand our midwifery-centered care in public health. We can employ more midwives in hospital settings where there are the full complement of surgical and emergency back-ups when there is a crisis. We could create a gold standard for maternity care by centering the midwifery-model of care in each borough of NYC, which is supported by research and, as seen in other developed countries, leads to less health disparities and improved medical outcomes. In order to do that, we need to increase access to midwifery training and offer scholarships to students, specifically midwives of color.

New York City needs more birth centers—several of the most prominent ones have closed down over the last decade. While more free-standing birth centers is a goal, midwife-centered birth center services within our hospital system will save money and increase positive outcomes.

Lastly, as a former board member of the New York Civil Liberties Union, working with the reproductive justice champion Donna Lieberman, we can be proud of the work passing the Reproductive Health Act at a city level. Making sure it is fully accessible, including to undocumented people and minors, is now critical. I would invest in community-based initiatives to improve access and education around reproductive health.

11. The MTA is facing a significant revenue shortfall and many parts of the city lack access to reliable public transportation. What measures would implement and/or enforce, to promote safe, efficient, and accessible transportation options for mass transit users, pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers in Brooklyn?

This is a huge question! And an important one! And among my closest campaign advisers and friends are folks who have been studying these issues and advocating for better public transit and safer streets for much of their careers.

For subways & buses:

- Congestion Pricing needs to be implemented ASAP.
- Shortfall in real estate taxes and fares needs to be made up with a tax surcharge on high income earners.
- Need to prioritize real investment in regional transit access, including a regional bus plan along with fully implementing the Riders Alliance Bus Turnaround campaign.

For safe streets:

- better enforcement, including expanding automated traffic safety enforcement
- a local network of protected bike lanes that work for ages 8 to 80
- working closely with the advocacy world to identify the most dangerous areas and develop a collective approach to solve safety issues
- working closely with organizations like Families for Safe Streets to continue to foster a cultural awareness around vehicular killings so that there is a collective effort to change our culture toward safety and accessibility.

And on a final note: So much of what I want to work on is ensuring our main streets are the vibrant hubs of community life that we want them to be—and that make New York exceptional. That means investing in public spaces, in small businesses, in our restaurants and bars, in our theater and culture—and creating public spaces, the commons, that support all of these. This inherently requires a city that is friendly to pedestrians, accessible in affordable, clean, efficient ways, and is a city that is ready to blossom back post-pandemic.

12. How would you ensure fairness in employment, salary, workplace conditions, and promotion? What is your position on strengthening and increasing access to union membership? What do you think about the unionization push by City Council Staff?

I fully support the efforts to unionize.

I have been in management or executive board decisions for the past 18 years where I've had the opportunity to learn and grow as a manager. At MoveOn, for the past 6 years, where I've managed about 25 colleagues, I've also had the chance to participate in extensive anti-oppression training, equity-in-management sessions, and work with my direct reports on their own professional development.

As Board Chair of The Tank, we have had programs to develop staff into leadership roles, and have done so multiple times in our 18 year history. During the pandemic, we kept our staff employed and, in fact, expanded our paid team. From the beginning, we had a model that never charged artists; over the years we expanded to a model in which we can guarantee stipends to artists.

I raise this because I've built big operations on volunteer labor, but have also worked exhaustively to ensure we value work, we compensate it, we develop talent, and we give staff an opportunity to grow as well as find balance in their roles.

13. How would you ensure that underserved communities receive fair equitable treatment from city government? What policies do you support that would level the playing field for historically marginalized groups?

Making sure that the folks most impacted are leading the discussions about solutions, are part of these conversations and partners in the execution, is always critical.

A City Council member also has two tools that should never be forgotten:

- Oversight. The ability to use committee hearings to shine a light on how our city is failing certain communities is a real power—it puts folks on record, gets media attention, and makes sure we don't treat inequity as business as usual
- A platform. Let's be honest that 1 of 51 city council members in a strong-Mayor system has only so much legislative power. But a good, effective, innovative, tenacious council member can have incredible power to organize — within the district and across districts

– around issues. A council member can draw media focus, can build an issue up, and can use that spotlight around inequitable treatment.

It's a good step to say that we'll pay attention to this. It's more critical to have a track record at how to use advocacy, public relations, social media, and community organizing all together to take action and demand changes when we see problems in our city and our system.

14. What policy and practice changes are needed for NYC gov to ensure sufficient quality housing that actually is affordable for existing residents in Brooklyn neighborhoods?

The need for affordable housing is clearly for low-income households making less than 50% AMI, and is most acute for those making 30% AMI or less. We need to ensure that housing built on public land targets these lowest income households for whom there are almost no quality options available anywhere in the city. I wholly support Council Member Lander's proposals around public land trusts and land banks, with a focus on social housing.

At the time it was adopted, MIH was a significant step ahead from the Bloomberg era of voluntary, bonus-based inclusionary housing. However, because it was applied only in areas that the administration targeted for rezoning - largely low-income communities of color, it has not served the purpose of providing affordable units in high-opportunity communities. We need to rethink MIH and ensure that we have an inclusionary housing policy that better serves the lowest income households and is applied citywide to all new multifamily development.

15. What policies would you pass or enforce to ensure public housing/NYCHA repair, upkeep, and security, and access to alternate housing and services when lacking essentials such as heat, gas, and hot water? What is your position on "privatization" of public housing/NYCHA, and on City gov sale of public housing "open areas" (outdoor seating & recreation plots) and air rights to private developers?

We need to provide additional City capital budget support for NYCHA repairs in tandem with greater state funding. I am opposed to privatizing NYCHA. I would support greater resident involvement in the governance of NYCHA as a requirement for any additional City funding. I would commit to working with NYCHA residents and community stakeholders to create and implement a resident-led oversight council that helps oversee spending and execution of repairs, capital improvements, and structures. I would commit to working with NYCHA residents and community stakeholders to create and implement a resident-led oversight council that helps oversee spending and execution of repairs, capital improvements, and structures.

16. Describe your vision for public safety in New York City? What, if any, functions would you like to see removed from the police department? What agencies assume the functions removed from the NYPD?

It's time to rethink how law enforcement is serving our communities and that includes how we fund them. We need to move funding from the police and fully fund community service programs in health, education, mental health, job training and more that address systemic challenges and inequities.

I signed onto a letter to defund the police department by \$1 billion in June 2020 and worked within MoveOn as MoveOn to organizationally move towards these goals as well. I stand by that and would vote for budgets that moved \$2-3 billion more than that into education, health and mental health, and job development programs.

A few specific steps the Council could push for around policing:

- The Commissioner should be appointed with advice and consent of city council CCRB recommendations should become mandatory
- A rule change should have residency requirements on law enforcement in line with other agencies
- Police funding should be moved to health, education, mental health and job development programs
- Transit enforcement should be moved out from under the NYPD

And then we need to look at successful models like the Fortune Society to develop the top-tier programs that support people who have been caught up in and failed by our criminal justice system.

17. Do you support changes to the ULURP process and to other NYC zoning mechanisms? If so, what specific changes do you support?

Yes, enthusiastically. First, the city has to be looking at racial impact as well as environmental impact, and we need timelines that include significant and accessible public comment, ones set by community needs not developer dollars. We also need to have higher standards of demands for affordable housing, shared public space, and amenities.

18. Do you have a plan to reduce and prevent homelessness in Brooklyn and NYC? Explain your plan.

Addressing housing in Brooklyn requires addressing housing in all five boroughs. The city can and must do more to ensure housing is a human right, and that we support and house the unhoused in New York. Part of it is in investing in mental health, public health, job training -- as well as supportive services, high speed internet and other interventions for those in transitional housing. The city needs to:

- increase investment in deeply affordable units
- do everything we can to create supportive housing for formerly homeless including converting hotels, buying bankrupt hotels, converting existing dhs shelters to higher quality permanent affordable with service enhanced transitional units
- prevent homelessness by protecting displacement from non-rent-stabilized units
- create and deeply invest in social housing trust, accelerate creation of affordable housing citywide at the scale of Mitchell Lama.