



Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats: 2022 State Candidate Questionnaire

Name of Candidate: Phara Souffrant Forrest **Office Sought:** State Assemblymember, District 57

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Name of Person(s) completing the questionnaire: Wasi Ahmed, campaign manager

Please answer each of the following questions to the best of your ability:

1) Why do you seek an endorsement from CBID?

In my first term as a New York State Assemblymember, I believe I have shown that I embody the progressive values of CBID. I have fought to tax the wealthy, create more transparency in the political process, and implement policies that benefit working-class New Yorkers. I am excited to continue this work and I hope that with CBID's support I can continue to grow our movement.

2) If elected, what would be your top legislative priority?

My priority bill next year will be Treatment Not Jail (A8524), which I introduced in the Assembly this year and which would increase access to mental health treatment courts and substance abuse courts as an alternative to incarceration. This much-needed reform would help keep people out of the carceral system and contribute to real public safety.

I will also continue fighting to tax the wealthy and reinvest that money in new and existing public programs and institutions like public schools and colleges, universal childcare, universal healthcare, and social housing.

3) What measures would you support to improve educational opportunities for all students in New York State.

Fully funding public schools from pre-k to grade 12 is key to setting up students for success later in life. We must shift the burden for funding our state's public schools off the shoulders of working people. The government's historic underfunding of public schools has denied students their constitutionally protected right to quality education, and I will insist that the state continues to make good on its commitment to fully funding Foundation Aid. It is our moral responsibility to fully fund historically underfunded schools—especially schools that serve Black and brown students.

As a CUNY and SUNY graduate, I am also passionate about funding our public higher education institutions. I was a champion of the New Deal for CUNY this year and I will continue to fight for fair salaries for professors and staff, necessary resources for students, and a return to the time when CUNY provided a high-quality education without charging tuition to its working-class student population.

4) NYS previously passed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. What are your priorities and what level of funding would you support to implement this Act? Do you support the Climate Can't Wait package?

I support the Climate Can't Wait Package in its entirety. We need funding to jumpstart a just transition for New York to begin large-scale implementation of the CLCPA. I supported the ask for \$15 billion in the FY23 budget and I will continue to advocate for full implementation of the CLCPA, along with the Build Public Renewables Act and the All-Electric Buildings Act.

5) How do you propose getting same-day voter registration and universal absentee voting approved



by voters in NY?

The 2021 ballot measures had been voted down in NY as a result of massive misinformation peddled through Republican Super PACs along with lack of interest from Democratic stakeholders across the state. I believe the State Democratic Party must make voter engagement and voter education a priority. In the meantime, I am proud to be a sponsor of the John R. Lewis voting act (A6678D) and will continue to advocate for legislative measures to make voting easier.

6) What, if any, groups or types of people will you not accept campaign contributions from? If so, please note whose money you will not accept.

I strongly believe in the power of campaigns funded and run in the interests of working people. I am proud to refuse all donations from corporate PACs, real estate, police and corrections associations, and the charter school industry.

7) Do you support the work of the state's Public Finance Commission? Do you support any campaign finance reforms in NY State? If so, please describe.

New York State politics has unfortunately been dominated by special interests and corruption, instead of being responsive to the needs of ordinary voters. I support the efforts of the public finance commission, as well as restrictions on Super PAC spending. I believe a matching funds system similar to New York City's would make it easier for candidates who are not independently wealthy to run for office.

8) The Supreme Court has ruled that state legislatures can gerrymander political districts along partisan lines. How and by whom should political districts be drawn?

The current redistricting process is a complete mess that does not serve the voters of New York. Ideally, political lines should be objectively drawn, however, a truly objective and nonpolitical entity is difficult to achieve, as we saw with the partisan breakdown of the Independent Redistricting Commission. I would like to see us work toward a fair and objective process for drawing district lines that does not dilute the voting power of marginalized ethnic and racial groups.

9) Now that the Reproductive Health Act has passed, what is your next priority in increasing reproductive healthcare access and gender equity?

The draft opinion that was leaked by the Supreme Court overturning Roe vs. Wade poses an incredible threat to reproductive healthcare. I am proud to cosponsor A10148, the reproductive freedom and equity program, to ensure that all women can access reproductive healthcare regardless of their income. If Roe vs Wade is indeed overturned, I will continue to push for resources for New York's abortion providers so that women can access reproductive healthcare.

We also must fund health clinics that provide free reproductive healthcare, including birth control and abortions, with an especial focus on clinics that are based in Black and brown communities. We need to fund sex education for all young people and ensure that it is based on principles of consent, includes LGBTQA+ people, and provides important resources about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and contraception. We should expand funding for NYC Care to cover all necessary pre- and postpartum care, and create similar



programs in parts of the state where they don't yet exist. We must increase funding for clinic-escort programs and outreach programs to ensure that all those who seek abortions can safely receive them, free from harassment. And we need to ensure that incarcerated people receive reproductive healthcare. This year, I introduced a bill, A9646, which would require that all incarcerated people with cervixes have access to gynecological care.

10) What actions would you take to promote safer and more efficient transportation options for pedestrians, cyclists, mass transit users, and drivers in New York?

I will do everything I can to make large-scale public transit investments a reality, especially in terms of accessibility, system-wide. I have advocated to the federal DOT to install elevators in the subway stations in my district. New Yorkers deserve free public transportation, clean and open bathrooms, all entrances re-opened, clean and functional elevators in every station, updated signals, and fast and frequent service.

Pedestrian safety is also a key issue in my district, especially at major intersections like Grand Army Plaza or Flatbush Avenue and Atlantic Avenue. The number of pedestrian and cyclist deaths in crashes is unacceptable after eight years of Vision Zero.

I also support legislation like the Ride Clean eBike Rebate bill so bike commuters can travel more efficiently, without a car.

11) What policies do you support to ensure fairness in employment and workplace conditions, as well as strengthening and increasing access to unions?

I firmly believe that the working people of this state need legislators who are willing to march and speak at picket lines and during strikes, who will stand up for workers not only in the halls of power but also on the streets, and who understand that regular working people are the backbone of any progressive movement.

From the beginning, I have kept those priorities front and center. Before taking office, I was a proud member of the New York State Nurses Association. Both of my parents were union members. I started out as labor's candidate and I remain labor's candidate. I have walked picket lines alongside my fellow workers and used my platform to amplify their voices. I will continue to do so because this is at the very heart of what it means to be a progressive legislator.

Furthermore I am an advocate for the following bills to ensure fairness in employment and workplace conditions:

- One Fair Wage Campaign's bill to close the tipped minimum wage loophole in New York State (A2244)
- The EMPIRE Act for Worker Protection (A5876) which would allow workers to file claims on behalf of the state and hold employers accountable for violating workplace protections and committing wage theft

12) What would you do to ensure access to affordable and quality housing for everyone?

I am very proud to be a champion of Good Cause Eviction (A5573). Passing this has been and continues to be a major priority for me. I was first compelled to start organizing in response to my landlord's attempts to evict my family and my neighbors in order to turn our apartments into luxury condos for the super-rich. My first trips to Albany were as part of the tenant movement, pushing for the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act. Evictions are a form of violence that inflict untold trauma on working-class communities,



especially immigrant communities and communities of color. I unequivocally believe all tenants should live without the fear of eviction when their lease comes up for renewal.

I am also a proud cosponsor for the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA). This legislation will provide a vital pathway for tenants who would otherwise be at risk of eviction and displacement to stay in their homes and take control over those homes back from landlords and wealthy real estate interests.

Additionally, I am very seriously committed to keeping public housing in public ownership while also addressing the drastic need for repairs that we hear about so much from our constituents. I believe that this requires deep engagement with residents and I look forward to doing so in the years to come. I believe that in order to resolve the housing crisis, we need to massively expand the development of deeply affordable housing, and we need to do so in a democratic and public way. A social housing authority would allow us to do precisely this, creating quality jobs and guaranteeing housing a true human right. I call for the repeal of 421a and preventing any look-alikes from coming back.

13) What are your views on criminal justice reform issues, such as (but not limited to) police accountability, and ending solitary confinement?

Working towards criminal justice reform has been central to my time serving in office, and I am committed to decarceration and the principles of restorative justice. In my first year, I passed the Less Is More Act, a transformative parole reform bill, and this session I am the lead sponsor of the Treatment Not Jail bill in the Assembly. I have supported legislation that would decriminalize victimless activities from sex work to low-level drug possession to fare evasion. I voted against this year's budget because of the rollbacks to 2019's historic bail reforms. I believe that there are ways to address concerns about public safety without relying on the criminalization of poor people.

In addition to Treatment not Jail, I am a cosponsor of the Challenging Wrongful Convictions Act, Ending Qualified Immunity, Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole, Clean Slate NY, the Eliminate Mandatory Minimums Act, the Second Look Act, and the Earned Time Act.

14) Do you support the New York Health Act?

Yes, I will continue to fight vehemently for the New York Health Act, as I have done my entire time in office. I have seen firsthand how the insurance industry, the pharmaceutical industry, and a whole host of other companies are profiting off patients and preventing many from getting the care they need. Nobody, anywhere, should ever be turned away from a healthcare provider for lack of funds, find their lives ruined by a medical crisis, or be spending their last dollars enriching the wealthy.