



## Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats: 2022 Federal Candidate Questionnaire

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

### 1) Why do you seek an endorsement from CBID?

I would be humbled to have the endorsement of CBID for many reasons, including your long history as a reform club, your dedication to creating a more inclusive Democratic Party and political community, and your work helping to elect reform candidates and holding them accountable. Your endorsement comes with great weight since I have worked side by side with many of you and represented many CBID members in the past. I would be honored to carry your endorsement and legislate the values that we share.

I'm asking for your endorsement because not only do I have a proven track record of passing progressive laws and the policy chops to do this job, but I have deep roots in the congressional district and I understand constituents' needs better than any other candidate in this race.

My entire career has been about lifting the voices and fighting for the rights of those who have been historically marginalized. I grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Yonkers, the grandchild of immigrants, and was the first in my family to attend college. I am a disability civil rights lawyer, a former teacher of deaf students, a community activist, and progressive NY State Assemblymember. I fought and won a landmark case that went up to the Supreme Court and changed the landscape for disability rights.

I have had significant legislative victories against big industries and institutions that needed to change - our Red Flag law which is the strongest such gun violence prevention law in the country and which is currently being replicated across the country, the campaign finance reform bill to close the notorious LLC loophole, a gender equity bill, a supported decision making bill to protect people with disabilities, an education bill for those with dyslexia and related learning disabilities, and more.

I helped secure equal pay for equal work, voter and elections reforms, paid family leave, and sexual harassment protections. I also helped codify Roe v. Wade into state law to protect the right to an abortion in New York regardless of what happens on the federal level.

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

My top issues are fighting climate change, protecting reproductive rights, ending gun violence, ensuring an equitable education for all, reviving our economy particularly for the working class, protecting our democracy and vulnerable people who are being marginalized right now.

As a lifelong educator and advocate for children, I will fight to improve our educational system and remove barriers for young learners. I understand the pressure our schools, families, and teachers have been under during COVID and will go to Washington with the experience and the urgency to fight for our nation's children. I support free college for all adults and believe we need to fund universal pre-k and kindergarten and provide full funding for all public school systems in this country. We also need to better train our teachers



in the mechanics of reading so that they have the tools they need to identify dyslexia and learning-related disabilities and improve literacy rates overall.

**3) Do you support the right of a pregnant person to choose to terminate their pregnancy? Have you always? If not, please explain why your position has changed.**

Yes. I have long been a fierce advocate of reproductive rights, and first worked in an abortion clinic as a counselor decades ago. I am an active member of the state pro-choice caucus and a vocal proponent of reproductive health care. I will never hedge on protecting a right to an abortion, and working for better abortion access and reproductive justice for everyone.

I fought to codify Roe v. Wade into state law. I also just helped pass another historic package of bills to protect and improve access to abortion for vulnerable communities, protect patients as well as health care providers, and provide additional state resources. I have been one of the leaders pushing for legislation to study Crisis Pregnancy Centers. This will ensure we can monitor the centers masquerading as providing reproductive health care, but that don't have any qualified medical personnel on staff. There is a CPC right here in our district in the same building as Planned Parenthood!

I have also helped pass major legislation relating to contraceptives and ensuring that people are not discriminated against at work for any type of reproductive health care decisions that they make (aka the boss bill). I will continue to fight for better access to comprehensive sex education.

**4) With Roe v. Wade at risk, do you plan to ensure adequate funding and legal protection to guarantee the right to accessible abortion and health services? If so, what actions will you take?**

This is one of my top issues and one of the reasons I am running for Congress, because I know that Roe is just the start, and there will be more erosion to our basic rights and our democracy through statehouses and the courts; I believe that Obergefell is also in line for dismantling as well as contraception.

I will never give up on fighting to enshrine the right to an abortion in federal law, whether this means I speak out online, attend rallies or press events, sponsor legislation and write letters, or support abortion funding. Given the Supreme Court is poised to overturn Roe and the current Senate's inability to pass such legislation, we also must support work in statehouses across the country. We just passed legislation to make New York a safe haven for women here and for women in other states who may come here, and we must ensure this promise as a safe haven state is fulfilled. We also must make a strategic plan to elect a Congress who will be able to enshrine this right into law.

I will continue to oppose bans on private and public insurance coverage for abortion, such as the federal Hyde Amendment.

**5) What is your position on the building of new oil or gas projects? What is your vision for expanding the nation's supply and transmission of renewable energy? Do you support the vision of a Green New Deal?**

I have fought aggressively and legislatively against the creation of new fossil fuel infrastructures like the Williams pipeline. I have also stood up against irresponsible development projects that harm the environment. I led the Gowanus Expressway Stakeholder Group and litigated against the state and federal



governments to plan for an environmentally just tunnel to replace the aging elevated Gowanus Expressway, which has divided and polluted predominantly poor communities of color along the western Brooklyn corridor for decades and will continue that advocacy as a member of Congress.

Congress is currently examining legislative reforms to oil and gas leasing and production and the President has issued a pause on new oil and gas leasing; I would strongly support efforts to end taxpayer subsidies for fossil fuel companies and reforms to our outdated policies governing oil and gas development.

We must meet the climate crisis head on by moving our economy to 100% renewable energy. I have been a strong supporter and co-sponsor of New York's Build Public Renewables Act to move to public power, and the All Electric Buildings Act. Moving to clean electricity is becoming more popular in state houses and can gain momentum in Congress because not only is it necessary to protect our climate, but it has enormous economic opportunity if we tie it to good-paying union jobs; the expansion of federal tax incentives will help. New York, like many states, has been under the thumb of privately-owned corporate utilities. I've been a vocal advocate calling out ConEd and National Grid for providing shoddy service and hiking up their rates while their CEOs get richer - we need to transition to publicly-owned, democratically-accountable renewable sources of energy right away. We came very close this year to passing the build renewables bill in New York, and we need both state and federal efforts.

I helped pass New York's green new deal (the CLCPA) and I support the vision for a federal Green New Deal.

In the Assembly, I have actively worked to support a variety of initiatives that would prevent change, including divesting our state and city pension funds from fossil fuels and a moratorium on proof-of-work crypto-mining that relies on fossil-fuel power plants. I cosponsored the 30x30 bill to protect at least 30% of our land and water to reduce mass extinction of critical species, which just passed the state legislature (there is also a national effort to do the same 30x30 initiative, which I can bring my state experience to). I gave a presentation on our 30x30 bill to a national audience through the National Council of Environmental Legislators (NCEL). I also carry a bill to limit the importation of species that can lead to zoonotic transmission of viruses, which has been increasing due to deforestation and loss of habitat.

I have a long track record advocating for environmental policy and environmental justice—first as a community activist and then as an Assemblymember. This began with my efforts along the Gowanus Expressway. I was an early supporter of designating the toxic Gowanus Canal as a Superfund site. I successfully pushed for New York City's first traffic-calming study, which has been added to and implemented over the past 20 years.

## 6) What health care reforms or plans do you support?

I have long supported the New York Health Act, or health care for all, which was passed in the Assembly a few times, but has not yet made it through the Senate. Similarly, I support the Medicare for All Act (Sanders/Jayapal).

I support requiring insurance plans to cover abortion services without cost sharing. I support legislation that expands access to a variety of contraception methods at no-copay, and allows for increased dispensing to make emergency contraception easier to access.

I strongly support reforms to our maternal health care, given our high maternal mortality rate, especially for women of color. I'm also in support of the Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act (Gillibrand/ DeLauro) which would create a national paid family and medical leave insurance program that would provide up to 12



weeks of partially-paid leave.

I generally support Sen. Murray's and Rep. DeLauro's Healthy Families Act, which would set a national paid sick days standard, allowing workers in businesses with 15 or more employees to earn up to seven job-protected paid sick days a year. I'd also push for a guarantee of paid sick time that time is guaranteed, and not based on time worked in order to accrue the sick time.

I support efforts to ensure that treatment for long-term Covid is covered by health insurance plans and related government benefits.

**7) Do you support repealing the Senate filibuster? If so, how will you use your platform to push for this reform?**

Yes, I support repealing the Senate filibuster. I will work in coalition with my Congressional and Senate colleagues, along with advocates and the public, to push for this change. I will speak out online, attend rallies or press events, write letters, and take other appropriate actions.

**8) Voter ID laws, poll taxes, and limitations on polling sites and early voting are all examples of voter suppression tactics. What will you do to protect voting rights and elections, including but not limited to cosponsoring legislation?**

I'd support automatic voter registration once someone turns 18 years old, with an option to select a party and the ability to opt out of registering if requested—it's one of the ways we can protect voters in other states who are being disenfranchised. Likewise, New York has just started enacting major reforms in the last few years, once Democrats took control of the Senate, so New York is a good study in how to overhaul and improve access to the ballot box.

I'd support similar initiatives like early voting, voting by absentee ballot, making federal primaries and general elections a national holiday, and same day voter registration. Ending partisan gerrymandering is critical. NY's recently enacted laws are also critical; they establish the rights of actions for denying the right of any member of a protected class to vote, provide assistance to language-minority groups, penalize voter deception, and prevent electronic interference.

I'd support the federal John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and the Freedom to Vote Act.

My aim is to also help restore the public's trust in our government and in our elected officials. I have always also acted with the utmost integrity and worked to fulfill the public's trust in me.

**9) What steps do you support to reduce gun violence in the United States?**

I have passed major gun violence prevention laws, so I know that there are so many initiatives we could implement to reduce gun violence right now. There are many states - like New York - that have taken serious and significant steps to combat gun violence. However, the people in these states are only as safe as the closest states with the weakest laws. It is critical that the federal government take serious action, and that states also take action to be a bulwark against the gridlock in Congress on this issue.

First, we have to treat gun violence like the public health crisis that it is. It is shameful and beyond comprehension that we are the only country that so devalues human life, repeatedly allowing gun violence to happen. There are public policy solutions. That, of course, would be helped by research into gun violence. I



am proud of the efforts Sen. Roxanne Persaud and I made to create and fund the Firearm Violence Research Institute at SUNY.

We need to ban assault weapons, strengthen background checks, raise the age for purchasing weapons, reduce the amount of ammunition someone can hoard, conduct microstamping, expand concealed carry laws to other states, and make significant federal investment in local community violence interruption programs.

We also must implement a national “red flag law” or Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) like the kind I passed here in New York - which is the strongest of its kind in the nation. They are court-issued orders of protection to temporarily prohibit someone from purchasing or possessing guns if they pose a serious risk of harm to themselves or others. ERPOs goal is to prevent gun violence from suicide, interpersonal actions, mass shootings. Over 875 temp orders have been issued & 589 orders were final since 8/2019. This has undoubtedly saved countless lives, but we need to make sure more people know they can request one, and that law enforcement is also aware of ERPOs; Hochul’s recent executive order will help. Biden has signaled his support for this effort and Congress is currently debating providing funds for states to pass such laws.

The vast majority of Americans are collectively mourning, horrified by yet another massacre of young schoolchildren and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas. We are still reeling from the 10 Black people killed in Buffalo by a white supremacist. We need bold action.

Importantly, we must defeat the NRA lobby and hold them accountable for this public health crisis. I’m proud of my “F” from the NRA.

#### **10) What actions do you support to protect our immigrant neighbors?**

I have long supported immigration reform with a path towards citizenship. I support the Dream and Promise Act which would provide a path to citizenship for 3-4 million DREAMers and Temporary Protective Status (TPS) holders. I would also call for a dramatic reduction of ICE’s budget and overhaul of the agency and return to an agency that mirrored INS’s efforts.

Re: Medicare for All (Jayapal’s bill) - I would include undocumented immigrants in this bill.

#### **11) What steps do you support to reform our criminal justice system?**

I have long advocated for criminal justice reforms to dismantle the deep flaws that perpetuate racial and economic bias in our judicial system. I have fought to end solitary confinement, and to break the school-to-prison pipeline (I have a bill to do the same). I was one of the few state legislators to stand strong against the bail rollback and this year’s expansion of Kendra’s law.

I have been a leading voice on criminal justice reforms in our state. We need to reallocate funding to various social and educational services, domestic violence prevention and counseling services, and cure violence programs that work in the gun violence prevention space. We ask police to do too many things for which they are neither trained nor for which law enforcement is appropriate. This includes basic transit functions like giving transit and parking tickets.

We also have to look at cornerstones of the criminal justice system that do more to punish than protect. This includes sponsoring legislation that would expunge all previous marijuana records. I support the federal legalization of marijuana, including the allocation of revenue to communities most harmed by the drug war. I





would also support Rep. Presley's People's Justice Resolution, which would repeal the 1994 Crime Bill and calls upon Congress to deal with the harmful nature and history of the criminal justice system.

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

I am a staunch advocate for workers rights - our people are our country's best resource. On many occasions over the years, I have taken a strong stand on behalf of workers to advocate for fair union elections and employment practices, and I will continue to do so if elected to Congress. Usually, I collaborate with unions and workers to identify what would be the most helpful role for me to play in a particular situation - from writing a letter, making a phone call, going to a rally, legislation, a press event, etc. I have stood with teachers at schools who were not unionized, coffee baristas, Amazon workers, workers in nail salons, yoga instructors, home care and health care workers, airport workers, legal aid workers, and many others. I would eliminate the subminimum wage.

I also am a disability rights lawyer who has represented workers, and I was the chair of the NYS Assembly Subcommittee on Worker Safety, so I bring not only a sense of justice and fairness to the issue, but also my legal background.

**13) What would you do to ensure access to affordable and quality housing for everyone in Brooklyn and nationwide?**

I have long advocated for not just more affordable housing, but more deeply affordable housing and for more housing support for those who need it. We need to pass the good cause eviction bill; I was one of the first supporters of this measure. We can't build our way out of this housing crisis so this is a critical effort to ensure that the rentals we have now are more affordable.

We need to support approaches in land use that prioritize more supportive housing - a model that we know works since it provides people with the social service support and financial resources they need to stay in their homes.

The City's housing subsidies need to target people with lower incomes. The percentage of AMI that is used is often too high. I also support setting aside a substantial number of units - at least 15% - created in new state or city subsidized affordable housing projects for homeless families and individuals and setting in motion their eventual moving to permanent housing. We also need to ensure that folks making less than that who are underemployed, retired or on PA/SSI/SSD can remain in their homes.

I helped pass a major overhaul of our state's laws to ensure that rent stabilized housing is permanently affordable; I've also helped pass major rent relief measures during Covid.

We need to ensure that housing in new development is actually affordable, and that means reforming NYC's ULURP process so the community is at the table from the beginning, as opposed to fighting to add or slightly expand meager affordable housing to an existing proposal. ULURP itself needs to be reformed and rewritten or we will continue to build housing that is not affordable and not responsive to the community's needs.

NYCHA needs massive federal investment as well as state and local investment and honesty in



communicating with residents, securing funds to provide jobs and workforce development to NYCHA residents within NYCHA. I'd support Rep. Velazquez's Public Housing Emergency Response Act which would provide \$70 billion for capital improvements to public housing nationwide.

**14) 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.**

As a District Leader and then as an Assemblymember, I have never taken contributions from real estate developers. I am not accepting campaign contributions from law enforcement unions or the fossil fuel industry.