



Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats: 2022 State Candidate Questionnaire

Name of Candidate: Jo Anne Simon **Office Sought:** Member of Assembly, AD 52

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Name of Person(s) completing the questionnaire: Jo Anne Simon

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

1) Why do you seek an endorsement from CBID?

I seek CBID's endorsement because I would find it particularly significant to have the support of a group that represents so many of my constituents and conducts invaluable work to engage citizens in the democratic process. I am a long-time member of CBID and have worked with its leadership and members for many years. I have been honored to have CBID's endorsement in the past for State Committee/District Leader, City Council, Assembly and Borough President. I believe our values and perspectives are well aligned.

My experience as a grassroots community leader has given me an uncommonly deep level of familiarity with my district and its people. I have lived in my district since 1981 and have witnessed the strong community ties that bind the people living and working in the 52nd together for nearly 40 years. While there has been tremendous change in the district, the heart of the district remains its people and their relationships to each other and to our environment. I began my activism fighting against a land use boondoggle and continue to take an active role in development projects and rezonings, transit and transportation issues, education and environmental justice. In 2003-2004, I coordinated 10 neighborhood and community-based organizations to respond to the Downtown Brooklyn Plan, which issued a Contract with the Community and Statement of Needs that was unanimously agreed to by organizations which had often previously disagreed bitterly. I led the effort to create a stewardship group to re-engage community to improve a dilapidated NYC park (Thomas Greene Park) in Gowanus.

As president of the Boerum Hill Association, I created the community planning effort that led to the Hoyt Schermerhorn plan, a model for community-based development. When community is at the table from the onset, they don't spend the next 20 years fighting amongst themselves. I also led the Gowanus Expressway Stakeholder Group and litigated against the state and federal governments to plan for an environmentally and fiscally just tunnel to replace the aging elevated Gowanus Expressway, which has divided and polluted predominantly poor communities of color along the western Brooklyn corridor. I fought against the closure of Long Island College Hospital and have advocated for a better and more environmentally sound rezoning of the Gowanus area, and fought to close Rikers Island and revamp the Brooklyn House of Detention.

My experience as Democratic State Committeewoman and District Leader has given me insights into the political workings of our communities and the borough of Brooklyn. I also was one of the few people who stood up to party boss Vito Lopez, and I also worked hard for rules reform and to create the independent judicial screening panel. My career as a teacher of deaf and deaf-blind children and as a disability civil rights lawyer has given me an opportunity to serve and make a real difference in people's lives.

I am running for re-election to ensure that New York is a leader in progressive policies and to ensure that government works for the people in the 52nd Assembly District and throughout New York State. I fight tirelessly for my constituents to address their quality of life issues in the district, and I have had some key legislative wins this year. In 2021, I ensured that the NYS Firearm Violence Research Institute be codified and funded and a separate Gun Violence research fund be established to provide additional funding for the



Institute; and ensured that illegally overweight trucks throughout the BQE corridor will be ticketed through electronic enforcement – a first in the nation use of such technology.

I am also a staunch supporter of criminal justice reforms, the expansion of affordable (including supported) housing, environmental justice, single payer health care, and women's rights and am pleased that the legislature instituted landmark reforms in each of those categories.

My vision is to ensure a vibrant community where people have access to affordable housing, accessible transit, quality education, child care, and good-paying jobs. I also envision a society where diversity is celebrated, and does not divide us. I have been a strong voice to ensure equality for women, people of color, immigrants, the LGBTQ community, and particularly the disability community.

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

There are so many. I have once again passed my bill to ensure that people who are incarcerated are screened for dyslexia and learning-related disabilities (a2062). We await passage by the Senate. People who are in prison and people of color have a higher rate of undiagnosed dyslexia. This bill would require that those persons incarcerated who do not have a high school diploma or GED are screened for being at risk for dyslexia. This bill is patterned after a similar provision in the federal First Step Act. In a similar vein, I will continue to fight for universal screening of children PreK - 2 for being at risk for dyslexia (A2083) and I am working with stakeholders to ensure that our colleges of education teach our educators how to teach reading (A2217). Only 38% of our 4th graders read fluently, which means 62% do not. They are not all dyslexic; they need instruction consistent with the brain science.

I am also working to pass my bill which would require community notification and coordination when a hospital, emergency room, or maternity center plans to close. A few of my other top priorities include improving street safety and ensuring a more sustainable transit system. I have also been working very hard to build support for a new bill (A08064), sponsored by Assemblymember Harvey Epstein, that protects home care workers and their patients from unfair labor conditions and prohibits a 24-hour workday, splits up shifts, and caps hours at 50 hours a week so that home care workers and the people they care for are better protected. Another priority is my hate crimes bill on which I am working with Sen. Gounardes regarding possible changes by the Senate. Stay tuned.

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

I am relieved that we finally funded the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) decision with foundation aid.

I believe strongly that class size matters a great deal and well-trained teachers make a huge difference in promoting learning. I also support quality professional development so as to support teachers, help them hone their skills and retain them in the system. A successful school system requires the development and retention of teachers. Otherwise we will lose good teachers from the system, which can only have a negative effect on student learning, educational outcomes, and college and career readiness.

When services and programs aren't adequately funded, students suffer and students in struggling schools and students with disabilities who require additional support suffer the most. I pioneered an annual Dyslexia Awareness Day at the Capitol, which has included a town hall speak out where we have heard from



students, parents, teachers and advocates about their concerns. In 2017, I passed my dyslexia bill into law (A.8262), I sponsor three bills that would go a long way to improving the literacy of our students and stop the school to prison pipeline: A.2283 which provides for universal screening of PreK-2 in order to identify children who are at risk for dyslexia, A.2217 which would re-make teacher preparation at the college of education level by ensuring that preservice teachers are taught structured multi-sensory methods of teaching reading that align with the National Reading Panel's findings and recommendations; and A.2062 which would require that those persons incarcerated who do not have a high school diploma or GED are screened for being at risk for dyslexia.

I have also been an outspoken advocate to repeal the SHSAT test for specialized schools, since that is one of the few areas of school admissions for which the state does have oversight. Throughout my career as a disability rights lawyer, I have represented many individuals who have been denied reasonable accommodations for standardized tests, and have gained a significant understanding of these tests. The SHSAT is not a valid test and disproportionately impacts African American and Latinx students, and girls. The City should find a fairer way to handle these admissions.

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?

Yes. I am working with the NY Renews coalition on securing \$15 billion for building the infrastructure for implementing the CLCPA.

5) How do you propose getting same-day voter registration and universal absentee voting approved by voters in NY?

Passing the bills again and better advocating for them when they are before the voters. We got snookered by the GOP and that never should have happened.

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 have never taken money from the real estate development community. I did this long before it was fashionable. Since I first became a Democratic State Committee member (2004) and since I was elected to the Assembly nearly eight years ago, I have not taken donations from real estate development, corporate PACs or charter schools, or fossil fuels.

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.

I have long been a supporter of campaign finance reform and public financing of elections. I was also the main Assembly sponsor of the bill to close notorious LLC loophole, which finally passed last session. However, I have several concerns about the PCFC's recommendations, including campaign contribution limits (which were rightly lowered, but not enough) and their new restrictions on ballot access for minor parties.



Another feature in their proposal was to restrict matching contributions only to those coming from a candidate's district. However, in districts where the majority of constituents are people of low to moderate income, the likelihood of contributions from in-district donors is greatly decreased. In the City's public financing scheme, contributions from all New York City resident donors are matchable, so City Council candidates representing low to moderate income districts are not limited to contributions from their districts in order to qualify for matching funds. I had proposed a regional approach that more closely resembled the New York City approach.

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?

I have supported the Independent Redistricting Commission approach. Unfortunately, the commission could not agree on a set of maps this year and the rest is history. I believe many of the new districts corrected for prior gerrymandering abuses, but I understand that can be hard for people to see.

My district was very oversubscribed and had to shed many thousands of constituents. I am sorry to lose the honor of representing so many of my friends and neighbors in the parts of Park Slope that I will lose next year and look forward to representing a few new folks in the northern part of the district.

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

I am strongly pro-choice without restriction, believe that abortion is health care and worked for several years (1979-1981) as an abortion counselor at a clinic in Washington, DC.

I am currently working to expose fake "crisis pregnancy centers" including one in my district in the same building as Planned Parenthood (and I co-sponsor a bill in this area). I have been working with BK Forge, NIRH, Planned Parenthood, and others on this effort.

Another priority is to pass the comprehensive sexuality education bill. I also cosponsor the New York Health Act, which would be critical for ensuring coverage of maternity care and reproductive health care. I also cosponsor a bill to create a public fund to financially assist low-income New Yorkers with abortion care expenses by allowing taxpayers to voluntarily contribute to the fund on their personal income tax returns. I also co-sponsor the midwifery bill.

I fought Trump's gag rule on reproductive health care to change the Title X Family Planning Program and defund Planned Parenthood and am grateful for the Biden Administrations reversal of that. I was a leading voice to ensure that the state covers the loss in federal funding to our health care centers, including Planned Parenthood. I am also an active member of the Bipartisan Pro-Choice Legislative Caucus (BPCLC).

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?

Last session, the State invested more in mass transit and passed congestion pricing (which I supported for nearly 20 years), but we still need to invest much more to fix our subways and bus systems to encourage people to rely less on cars. I advocated for two-way tolling on the Verrazano to reduce unnecessary traffic flow through Brooklyn, which has now been done. I am an avid supporter of speed camera expansion,



expansion of protected bike lanes and increased cycling infrastructure including the designation of the bike lane on the Brooklyn Bridge, I supported making car share permanent, and responsible and safe street re-designs (complete streets principles).

I carry a bill that would impose additional surcharge for cars parked in bike lanes. I also co-sponsor a bill to require instruction in pedestrian and bicyclist safety as part of the drivers pre-licensing course. I am also a cosponsor of Assemblymember Carroll's bill to suspend the registration of a vehicle which has been documented for traffic violations multiple times within a certain time period.

Last term I joined transportation advocates to fight for more transparency from the MTA to build up trust with straphangers through the Build Trust Campaign. This campaign recommends four points for the oversight of the MTA capital program: to set the right, achievable priorities, get costs under control, be transparent and accountable, and make legislative oversight work for straphangers. These goals are still needed. I am fighting for a new entrance at York Street which has only one staircase exit.

I actively participated in the MTA NYCT's Brooklyn bus re-design, encouraged my constituents to participate, and also have advocated for bringing back the B71 bus line and still favor that. Linking the transit-starved neighborhood of Red Hook to Crown Heights (and even lower Manhattan) through a new East-West bus route would provide a solid and accessible option for riders to go to work, school, medical visits, local businesses, or cultural institutions.

I use public transit extensively and was part of the MTA's "mask force" handing out face masks to riders so they can travel safely. I am also working with consumers to bring issues of pedestrian safety to the fore and support Families for Safe Streets efforts in this regard. I co-sponsor the package of bill to improve street safety and also sponsor a bill to lower the blood alcohol level in drivers.

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

Unions have been at the forefront of improving workplace standards, and I have regularly shown support for union organizing drives, contract campaigns, and strikes. I supported the fight for \$15 and I support the One Fair Wage Campaign to close the tipped minimum wage loophole in New York State. I am also very concerned about the misclassification of certain workers as independent contractors in an attempt by employers to get around hourly wage requirements and to avoid providing workers with benefits and other protections. I cosponsor a bill to address this, but I am also in communication with freelance workers who are independent contractors and wish to remain so; they have raised legitimate concerns about this issue and I want to ensure that their concerns are addressed.

I am a cosponsor of "safe staffing for quality care act" (A02954) to address the understaffing at hospitals and nursing homes. I also support a livable wage for part-time adjunct faculty and co-sponsor the New Deal for CUNY package; I was an adjunct professor for nearly two decades and understand their concerns well.

I have also worked hard to fight discrimination in the workforce in all its forms. I worked very closely with legal advocates and the bill sponsors to pass A8421, which expanded New York's laws to ensure that justice can be served when employment discrimination, including sexual harassment, occurs in the workplace. Last year I passed the bill to close a wage theft loophole which Governor Hochul signed last fall.



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

I was a co-sponsor of the Housing Stability Act, which enacted sweeping changes to our housing laws last term. I also cosponsor the good cause eviction bill, which is gaining traction and have supported extending the eviction moratorium, funding ERAP and mortgage relief.

I support setting aside a higher number of affordable units in new developments, and ensuring that units are set aside for homeless families and individuals. The state needs to end tax breaks to corporate developers like 421a and 485a, and fully fund repairs in NYCHA.

I have been one of the most vocal legislators about the need to include real affordable housing in new developments – more units and more deeply affordable units.. Too often, developers promise the community a benefit or a pathetic nod to affordable housing so they can build out of scale developments that line their pockets and end up increasing the rents in the area, pushing out people of color and people with low incomes. I have stood up to these developers time and time again, from Atlantic Yards to the 80 Flatbush skyscraper. I believe strongly that the community must not only be involved, but their voices must be heard and addressed, and they should be at the table from a project's inception, such as the Boerum Hill community was with the Hoyt Schermerhorn project (successfully building 37.5% low to moderate income housing).

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

I have been an active supporter of criminal justice reforms and an end to mass incarceration. I supported the package of criminal justice reforms that were included in last year's budget, and additional ones passed in spring of 2020, and I voted against bail reform roll back last year, and am staunchly opposed to making additional change in response to the current rhetoric. I recently wrote at length about this in my most recent community newsletter.

I cosponsored the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act, the HALT bill to end the atrocious policy of solitary confinement, the repeal of 50a of the civil rights law that prevents the public from accessing law enforcement records of misconduct and discipline, and Police Statistics & Transparency (STAT) Act which makes statistical information regarding interactions with police available to the public. I cosponsor the Fair and Timely Parole, and Elder Parole bills and also co-sponsor the bill to end qualified immunity. I support Gov. Hochul's proposal to provide TAP to people who are incarcerated and have advocated for this for a number of years.

14) Do you support the New York Health Act?

Yes. I have cosponsored it since I arrived in the Assembly in 2015.