

## **GLAA Questionnaire 2020**

### **Responses for Christina Henderson – Candidate, DC Council At-Large**

[www.christinahenderson.org](http://www.christinahenderson.org)

#### **HEALTH**

1. Will you support budgets that target funds to address LGBTQ health disparities, including in mental health and substance abuse treatment, and mandate data collection and timely reporting on these populations?

Yes. I am running for the DC Council because I believe we need a more equitable DC, and that requires policymakers being targeted and intentional with investments and policies to address those with greatest need. We know that LGBTQ individuals in our community face higher rates of substance abuse and mental health issues than those who are heterosexual or cisgendered, and it will take additional investments to address this issue. I started working to address this issue as it relates to young people when I served as Director of the DC Council's Committee on Education. My colleague and I worked closely with the Trevor Project, the D.C. Center for the LGBTQ Community, and the American Federation for Suicide Prevention to draft and pass the Youth Suicide Prevention and School Climate Survey Amendment Act of 2015. The legislation aimed to address the disproportionate rate of LGBTQ youth in our schools who attempted suicide. At the time, the [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) (YRBS) indicated that 38% of our LGBTQ middle school students had attempted suicide in their lifetime and 28% of our LGBTQ high school students had attempted suicide within the last year. The legislation also included a data collection component, because I believe that disaggregated data by subgroup can better inform our policies. While working at the Council, I supported Councilmember Grosso's efforts to force the DC Department of Health to gather data on sexual orientation and gender identity demographics in public health data and was supportive of the work that went into adding these questions to the YRBS. If elected, I would continue to push for timely reporting.

#### **JUDICIARY AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

2. Will you support Bill 23-435, the Tony Hunter and Bella Evangelista Panic Defense Prohibition Act of 2019?

Yes, I support the Tony Hunter and Bella Evangelista Panic Defense Prohibition Act of 2019. A legal defense that is premised on bias against LGBTQ individuals or any person's identity should not be allowed to stand in DC. Even with our strong human rights laws, we know that blaming the victims' sexual orientation or gender identity has been floated in criminal cases over the years— in particular the murder cases for the two victims for which this bill is named. One's sexual or gender identity does not constitute incitement and therefore should not be grounds for a legal defense. Ten other states have already passed this legislation. It is my hope that the Council will pass the legislation this Fall, but if not, I will reintroduce the measure and fight for its swift passage if elected.

3. Will you support revision of the DC Riot Statute, Section 22-1322 of the District's penal code, to correct its overly broad language that allows abuse of prosecutorial discretion against individuals who exercise their First Amendment rights?

Yes, I would support revisions to the DC Riot Statute. The last several months of protests after the police killing of George Floyd underscores the need to strengthen First Amendment protections here in DC. While there are certainly individuals who engage in acts of vandalism and destruction of property during protests, we have already seen examples of abuse of prosecutorial discretion using DC's very broad statute to bring charges against residents. We should update this statute.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS**

4. Will you support a Gender Equity and Neutrality in the Official Code Amendment Act to update the D.C. Official Code as necessary to ensure that outdated terms are removed or replaced as well as to utilize language inclusive of the gender diversity of our population?

Yes. While there are many pressing issues that demand the Council's time, this kind of common-sense update to outdated language should be a light lift. I am disappointed it has not yet had a hearing on this legislation this Council Period and would reintroduce it next Council Period if I am elected. I know a tremendous amount of work went into the drafting of the bill and we really should have a code of laws that reflects our values as a District. But this bill should not be the end of it. When I worked for Councilmember Grosso, I helped to examine the gender, race, and sexual orientation (when known) of Mayoral appointees to the various boards and commissions. Unsurprisingly, there was a lack of diversity among those appointees. As a Councilmember I would pressure the Mayor to make appointments to better reflect the rich diversity of our city. I would also pursue other legislative and oversight avenues to address structural biases against women, LGBTQ+ people, people of color, and other marginalized communities.

5. Will you support Bill 23-0318, Community Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2019, to decriminalize consensual sex work for people 18 or older and create a task force to monitor the implementation and effects of the act?

Yes, I support the Community Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2019 and efforts to remove criminal penalties related to consensual sex work. I view this as an issue of safety, dignity, and human rights. The hearing on this legislation provided an opportunity for us all to hear from sex workers—a group who has been traditionally marginalized by our government—about the very real harm that criminalization causes, especially to trans and cis women of color who engage in sex work. Decriminalizing consensual adult behavior will empower individuals in this industry to report instances of crime and violence committed against them, work with law enforcement when there is suspected coercion and trafficking, and to negotiate safer sex practices, which is a public health issue.

It is important that we do not conflate sex work with sex trafficking, which happened often during the debate of this legislation. It is absolutely necessary that we protect children and adults from exploitation, and the Community Safety and Health Amendment Act does maintain the

strict prohibition against coercion, force, and sex trafficking of minors and adults. I will always fight for justice for survivors of trafficking and assault. I will also fight for those who have been unjustly over-policed and over-criminalized. Black and brown women, especially Black and brown trans women, historically have been disproportionately targeted by police, particularly under the guise of fighting commercial sex. I believe we need to ensure their safety and that means limiting their interactions with the police by decriminalizing sex work and alleviating the structural inequities like housing and employment discrimination that often makes sex work the only form of work available to this community. Too often we have seen that police themselves perpetrate violence against sex workers or fail to take assault and rape of sex workers seriously. Even without the passage of this bill, I believe that MPD should immediately cease sex work-related stings and divert those resources to investigate suspected cases of trafficking and supports outside of MPD for victims of violence while involved in sex work.

When I worked for Councilmember Grosso I helped to draft the legislation which repealed the discriminatory “prostitution free zones” in 2014. I also supported the efforts within Grosso’s office to put out statements about bringing a human rights approach to commercial sex, including smaller steps such as a Council resolution recognizing International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers.

6. Will you support increased funding for LGBTQ budget priorities, including fully funding the Office of Human Rights and establishing a new competitive community development grant program in the Office of LGBTQ Affairs?

Yes. DC’s Human Rights Act creates a welcoming, inclusive DC, protects our workers and residents, and attracts so many newcomers to our city. But without strong enforcement, the protections afforded by the Human Rights Act are just words on paper. I would support stronger investment in the Office of Human Rights’ (OHR) work would ensure that D.C. is living the values enshrined in our policies. A backlog at OHR means that the agency has not reached a decision on a case after seven months. This is entirely unacceptable and has been for years. It is bewildering that OHR only recently began using an electronic case management system. From what I can tell, 2010 was the last time the OHR announced that it no longer had a backlog of cases. Residents should not have to wait this long for resolution to complaints concerning a potential violation of their human rights. We need to give our residents the confidence that the DC government is prioritizing their human rights, and fund to that commitment. As a Councilmember, I will work with my colleagues on the Council, the Mayor, and OHR to analyze where the bottlenecks at OHR occur thus creating this backlog, and then make appropriate investments to increase the staff proportionally to meet the demand of incoming cases. I would also support establishing a new competitive community development grant program at the Office of LGBTQ Affairs. I believe now more than ever that we must harness the power of our communities to outline and advocate for what they want to see from DC government in this next phase of progress, and in a world post-COVID 19. A new community development grant program would help advance that work.

7. Will you support a study of employment of transgender individuals in the government of the District of Columbia as a first step to creating a truly inclusive workplace and the implementation of transgender employment initiatives?

Yes, I would support a study of employment of transgender individuals in DC government. I was glad to see that this study was included in the FY21 budget, and I would use my position as Councilmember to ensure that it is conducted with fidelity. Further, that the Council and Mayor take action on the recommendations. I would like to see the DC government be a model employer of transgender people, which I know is not currently the case. We can change that with sustained effort, and this is an important step toward that end.

## **YOUTH**

8. Will you support improved services and treatment for homeless LGBTQ youth, including extended transitional housing?

Yes. I was a staffer at the Council when we passed the LGBT Homeless Youth Reform Act, which established important new parameters for funding and support of LGBTQ homeless youth in our city. As a Councilmember, I would look to build on the work of the community to reform the homeless service system, especially for families and LGBTQ youth. I believe our vision for ending homelessness needs to be comprehensive and include services and treatment. It also needs to bring together the agencies (including schools) who touch homeless LGBTQ youth so we are not responding as a government in silos or unintentionally making a situation worse. For example, one priority area for me when I worked at the Council was addressing exclusionary school discipline practices, which disproportionately affects LGBTQ+ youth and homeless youth. Going forward, I am interested to learn where the gaps are such as extended transitional housing and identify how DC government can be impactful and how we can support innovative approaches such as what No Justice, No Pride has been able to do with their grassroots approach.

## **SENIORS**

9. Will you support improved services and treatment for LGBTQ seniors, including affirming senior housing and tenant based rental assistance and the Care for LGBT Seniors and Senior with HIV Amendment Act of 2019?

Yes. LGBTQ seniors and seniors living with HIV are a growing segment of our senior population in the District and across the country and face increased discrimination and health disparities. I was pleased to see the Council include funding for Targeted Affording Housing Vouchers for 10 LGBTQ seniors experiencing homelessness, five Local Rent Supplement Program Tenant-Based vouchers for LGBTQ seniors, along with \$100,000 for dining supports for LGBTQ seniors. However, this is not nearly enough. If nearly 10% of our population is LGBTQ, then we have approximately 70,000 LGBTQ residents, and thousands of them are likely seniors and may need additional housing assistance. I am committed to doing more.

The Care for LGBTQ Seniors and Seniors with HIV Act of 2019 passed the committee markup earlier this year, and I look forward to seeing the Council pass this important bill. I fully support this legislation and will do the oversight necessary to ensure its funded and implemented with fidelity, especially the provisions prohibiting discrimination at long-term care facilities. In the spirit and the text of the DC Human Rights Act, I also pledge to work with community

stakeholders to revisit and update the legislation if necessary, or to craft new legislation to continue to protect and enhance the lives of our LGBTQ seniors and seniors living with HIV.

## **HOME RULE**

10. Will you oppose Trump administration efforts to nullify the legal identities of transgender individuals, such as by assigning a person's gender based on their "original" birth certificate?

Yes. I will oppose such efforts vocally and vigorously, though I believe it will be irrelevant because a Biden-Harris administration will never pursue such policies. If we are faced with continued challenges at the federal level, the District of Columbia must stand firm in support of our transgender residents and their human rights. At the local level, I will oppose any effort to bring the District into compliance with federal policies that erase the legal identities of our transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming residents, even if it places federal funding for DC in jeopardy.

---

## **PAST RECORD**

As the Committee Director for the Committee on Education, my colleague and I worked closely with the Trevor Project, the D.C. Center for the LGBTQ Community, and the American Federation for Suicide Prevention to draft and pass the Youth Suicide Prevention and School Climate Survey Amendment Act of 2015. This legislation was first in the nation to specifically mention LGBTQ youth as an at-risk subgroup, supported by data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The bill mandated biannual training for all teacher and principals in DCPS and public charter schools on suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention, and required the Office of the State Superintendent of Education to publish guidance on those topics. Finally, it created a pilot program to collect school climate data regarding engagement, safety, and physical environment through surveys which asked questions specifically on sexual orientation and gender identity. This legislation became law in June 2016.

Additionally, while I worked with Councilmember Grosso, we worked every day to ensure that D.C. is a diverse and inclusive city that embraces and welcomes every individual. I worked with my colleagues on many LGBTQ issues including narrowing LGBTQ health disparities through the LGBTQ Cultural Competency Amendment Act of 2015 (passed and became law effective April 2016); introducing legislation to require the Department of Health to include questions regarding the sexual orientation and gender identity of respondents in the Department's annual report; and the Government Travel and Human Rights Act of 2016, which banned government travel to jurisdictions that affirmatively sanction or require discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression.

I also advised the Councilmember on introduction, co-introductions, co-sponsorships, votes, and messaging on the following bills:

- B20-0032, Surrogacy Parenting Agreement Act of 2013

- B20-0051, LGBTQ Youth Homeless Reform Act of 2013  
*(Law Effective May 3, 2014)*
- B20-0142, Japarker Deoni Jones Birth Certificate Equality Amendment Act of 2013  
*(Law Effective November 5, 2013)*
- B20-0417, Sexual Assault Victims Rights Amendment Act of 2013  
*(Law Effective November 20, 2014)*
- B20-0461, Marriage License Issuance Amendment Act of 2013  
*(Law Effective December 17, 2014)*
- B20-0475, Domestic Partnership Termination Recognition Amendment Act of 2013
- B20-0501, Conversion Therapy for Minors Prohibition Amendment Act of 2013  
*(Law Effective March 11, 2015)*
- B20-0660, Transparency of Boards, Commissions, and Task Force Act of 2014
- B20-0760, Repeal of Prostitution Free Zones Amendment Act of 2014  
*(Law Effective May 6, 2015)*
- B20-0933, Human Rights Educational Institutions Fairness Amendment Act of 2014
- CER20-0291, Transgender Day of Remembrance Resolution of 2014