



Saturday, March 19, 2022

## Candidate Questionnaire - 2022 Primary

Dear Brian Kavanagh,  
Congratulations on your decision to run for a seat on the New York Legislature! Citizens Union appreciates your commitment to serve the public. In the following pages, you will find questions regarding your positions on various reform issues and your plans for office. Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for office, and to issue our preference for the June primary. Read more about the method, principles, and criteria of the candidate evaluation process [here](#).

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**If you wish to be considered, please submit the questionnaire by March 16.**

If you seek our support, we will need to schedule an interview with you as part of the evaluation process. Given time constraints and the limited capacity of a member-based organization, we may not be able to evaluate all contests or candidates in this election cycle.

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If you cannot complete the questionnaire in one sitting, you can click Save at the bottom of every page.

Once you submit the questionnaire, you will receive a confirmation email with your responses. Citizens Union will not be able to see your answers unless you submit the form. We plan to make responses to this questionnaire public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).

For any questions, please email [candidates@citizensunion.org](mailto:candidates@citizensunion.org)

We thank you very much for your response.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### Name

Brian Kavanagh

### Office Sought (New York State)

Senate

### District Number

29

### In which primary

Democratic

### What party line/s are you running under?

Democrat

### If elected, which legislative conference will you join (e.g., Democrat, Republican, other)?

Democrat

### Age

### Education

### Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

I was the Assembly member for the 74th district for 11 years before being elected to the Senate in 2015

### Website

### Twitter

### Facebook

## AFFIRMATIONS

**Have you completed the required campaign finance filings?**

Yes

**Are you willing to be interviewed by Citizens Union's Local Candidates Committee?**

Yes

(Please note: interviews are prerequisites for Citizens Union preferences and endorsements)

**Signature**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of the letters 'B' and 'K' written in a cursive, stylized font. The 'B' is on the left and the 'K' is on the right, with a single continuous stroke connecting them.

# ETHICS

**Do you support replacing Joint Commission on Public Ethics with an effective and independent enforcement body, whose members are not appointed directly by elected officials?**

Yes

**Do you support the new independent ethics oversight agency to also replace the Legislative Ethics Commission (LEC)?**

Yes

**Do you support allowing the new ethics body to investigate misconduct more effectively by simplifying its voting rules, giving it the authority to subpoena testimony and documents, empowering it to suspend or terminate public officials (not elected officials), and increasing its transparency?**

Yes

**Do you support significantly limiting outside compensation earned by state legislators and eliminate stipends, while increasing their pay?**

Yes

**Do you hold financial interest or serve as an officer on an entity that receives funding from the state? If you do, how will you manage this conflict of interest?**

No

If needed, you may elaborate below on your positions on the previous questions. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

No

# ELECTIONS AND VOTING

## Election Administration

**How would you use your power as a legislator to improve election administration in New York? Feel free to add any policy proposals you support in regards to reforming the BOE.**

As a legislator, I have worked to provide oversight of the boards of elections through public hearings, and co-chaired several while I was in the Assembly. We've achieved some significant reforms, but have a long way to go. Last year, I joined Senator Myrie and colleagues on the Election Committee to take testimony that resulted in the report released on November 15, 2021. I strongly support the report's findings and recommendations. Among other legislative reforms, I support Senator Myrie's bill S263, requiring a mandatory training curriculum for election commissioners and key staff of boards of elections; Senator Mannion's bill S8292, to require commissioners to have certain qualifications; and Senator May's bill S337, which would facilitate the removal of election commissioners for incompetency, misconduct, or other good cause. We should also push the boards of elections to implement multiple shifts throughout Election Day; requiring poll workers to arrive around 5am and work until 10pm or so severely limits the pool of potential workers and means that polls are staffed by many exhausted workers.

**Do you support removing the constitutional requirement in election administration that empowers the two major political parties to nominate and effectively control election boards?**

Yes

**Do you support reducing the party-based hiring in boards of elections to the minimum currently required by the constitution?**

Yes

**Do you support implementing an open, competitive, merit-based hiring process for all election administration staff and certain functions at polls?**

Yes

If needed, you may elaborate below on your positions on the previous questions.

## Voting Rights

**Do you support re-passing the constitutional amendment to enact same-day voter registration, and putting it on the ballot in 2024?**

Yes

**Do you support re-passing the constitutional amendment to enact no-excuse absentee voting, and putting it on the ballot in 2024?**

Yes

If needed, you may elaborate below on your positions on the previous questions. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

## Open and Competitive Elections

**Do you support easing access to the ballot for parties and independent candidates, by returning to the pre-2020 voting and signature thresholds? That includes reducing the voting threshold to become a registered party back to 50,000 votes in a gubernatorial election, and the petition requirement for independent candidates back to 15,000 signatures.**

Yes

**Do you support reforming the process of filling vacancies in the state legislature by implementing nonpartisan special elections or holding a primary election at least thirty days in advance of the special election?**

Yes

**Who do you think should draw new district maps every decade in New York? (e.g., the current Independent Redistricting Commission, the Legislature/LATFOR, a new body)**

We need to reform the independent redistricting commission, or create a new entity that is structured so it will actually produce consensus maps.

If needed, you may elaborate below on your positions on the previous questions. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

# CAMPAIGN FINANCE

**Do you support further reducing campaign contribution limits?**

Yes

**Do you support setting even lower contribution limits for registered lobbyists and those who do business with the state?**

Yes

**Starting from the next election cycle, New York will have a public campaign finance program, offering matching funds on small donations for candidates who opt in. If you decide to run again in the next election, do you intend to participate in the program?**

Yes

**Do you support moving the campaign finance matching program to be administered by an independent, nonpartisan body outside of the State Board of Election?**

Yes

If needed, you may elaborate below on your positions on the previous questions. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.



# COURT REFORM

**Do you support simplifying and consolidating New York State's court system - which includes 11 trial courts - by passing the Chief Judge's proposed constitutional amendment to modernize the courts?**

Yes

If needed, you may elaborate below on your positions on the previous questions. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

# GOALS, PLANS, AND REPRESENTATION

**What are the top three campaign promises or goals, and what action will you take to achieve them if elected? Feel free to reference an answer above rather than restate it.**

First: Making New York an inclusive and affordable place to live—for all New Yorkers, not just multi-millionaires and corporations—and doing everything possible to end homelessness. As the Senate Housing Chair, I'll work to pass a new five-year capital plan that will invest billions of dollars to increase production and preservation of housing, especially new supportive housing, renovations to fix the terrible conditions in public housing, and new housing affordable for low- and middle-income households. I'll also build on the work I've done—including the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act (HSTPA, the strongest tenant protection law in at least half a century), the COVID-19 eviction and foreclosure moratorium, and the COVID-19 emergency rental assistance program, all of which I negotiated and passed, and which I'm still fighting to fully fund. I'll work to strengthen anti-eviction laws and other provisions that prevent tenants and homeowners from being evicted and displaced from their homes and communities; enact new programs like the Housing Access Voucher Program, which will offer rental subsidies rather than shelters when people are homeless or in danger of losing their homes (described further below); continue my long-standing efforts to expand rent freeze and property tax exemption programs for seniors and New Yorkers with disabilities; and ensure that fair housing laws, codes that are necessary to keep people's homes safe, and other housing laws are enforced. I'm also working with local advocates and State agencies to maximize affordability at the residential tower proposed at 5 World Trade Center and to reduce the threat of displacement in Battery Park City.

Second: Protecting public safety without sacrificing justice and respect for our communities. I will do this by recommitting to effective gun violence prevention strategies and laws (which I've played a leading role in enacting for many years and which have been part of giving New York one of the lowest rates of gun-related deaths in America); by helping to foster a mutually respectful and productive relationship between the police and our communities; by supporting more mental health and substance abuse services and treatment for people who exhibit persistent dangerous behavior (and supportive housing for those who are homeless, as mentioned above); and by continuing to actively support and co-sponsor legislation that is made to reduce the inequities of our criminal justice system such as Senator Jackson's bill changing qualified immunity, the Solutions Not Suspensions Act (S7198), the repeal of section 50-a of the Civil Rights Law, the Less Is More Act (S1144A), and now Lt. Governor Brian Benjamin's Less Is More Act (S1144A).

Third: Taking strong, decisive action to fight climate change and ensure a fair transition to clean energy, healthier communities, and economic vitality. This includes properly funding and effectively implementing the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, the the most comprehensive and ambitious climate change law in the United States, which I was proud to help enact; making rapid reductions in climate pollution, investing in clean, renewable energy sources; passing legislation like my All-Electric Building Act; and expanding training for green jobs to enable us to do the work we need to get done and promote environmental justice.

**If elected, what is the first piece of legislation you would want to introduce? If you are an incumbent, what is the first piece of legislation you would want to pass?**

My top priority right now is enacting and funding the Housing Access Voucher Program, bill S2804A, which would create a new, large-scale, State-funded rental subsidy modeled on the federal Section 8 program, to provide housing for New Yorkers who are currently experiencing homelessness or facing imminent loss of their housing. I wrote and originally introduced the bill in February 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, I have succeeded in getting \$250 million included in the Senate and Assembly budget resolutions (working with the Assembly Housing Chair Steve Cymbrowitz), and I'm working toward getting the program included in the final budget due March 31st. As currently conceived, the program would aim to house 20,000 households in its first year; my goal is to expand the program to include \$1 billion in annual funding to support more than 80,000 households, or some 200,000 people. The program is a key part of my larger goal to end the homelessness and eviction crises throughout New York.

**In providing constituent service, what are the major needs of your district's constituents and how will you meet them?**

Like many offices much of the work we have done in the past two years has centered around relief from the worst effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have helped an enormous number of residents access the help they need in terms of financial and material assistance such as rent and utility payments, food, vaccines, masks, and COVID-19 tests. I'm particularly proud of the eviction and foreclosure moratorium legislation and the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, which I sponsored and passed in Albany, and which benefited a large number of my constituents, as well as hundreds of thousands of other New Yorkers. Similarly, I am proud that my colleagues in the legislature and I enacted and funded the Excluded Worker Fund, which provided for benefits for workers otherwise excluded from federal unemployment benefits and other assistance, and my constituent services staff and I were then able to ensure that individual constituents could get through the application processes for both Unemployment Insurance and EWF benefits; we helped thousands of constituents secure these benefits. The need for COVID-19 relief has subsided somewhat, but continues to be a significant part of our work.

Thousands of my constituents live in New York City Housing Authority developments and we work closely with Resident Association leaders and residents to get prompt responses to the many serious lapses in maintenance and basic services; we also work with the RAs and residents on community-wide concerns, like the effects of construction on quality of life, and the need for greater resiliency from coastal flooding (since the NYCHA developments tend to be built in

low-lying land along the East River).

Housing affordability, landlord-tenant relations, and maintenance concerns are big issues throughout the district; we work to ensure that the City and State housing agencies respond where appropriate and often connect tenants with the legal resources they need. Many residents are also dependent on public benefits like Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), NYS Disability Insurance, and other programs. We work to resolve issues that arise as to establishing or maintaining eligibility for these critical programs.

In addition to individual casework, we also work on larger community issues, like efforts to manage potential environmental contamination from construction on brownfield sites; access to public open space; MTA service issues; pedestrian, bicycle and traffic safety; and many others.

**What experience have you had, if any, with good government and reform issues? (e.g. voting and elections, campaign finance, ethics, government transparency and oversight, police accountability). If you've worked to advance these goals, we'd love to hear about it.**

Since my time in the Assembly, I have been among the strongest and most effective advocates for reforming New York's election and campaign finance laws, which were some of the worst in the United States when I took office in 2007, and have significantly improved in recent years. In the Assembly, I chaired the subcommittee responsible for election operations and in the Senate I was the ranking Democrat on the Election Committee, for the year I served in the Minority; I used those positions to advocate for many of the major reforms that were years in the making—and have been enacted in the last three years. I sponsored the original versions of many of the election reform and campaign finance bills that have now become law, but which were mostly blocked by the Republican-controlled Senate, including bills to create early voting, the Voter Friendly Ballot Act, automatic voter registration, pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds, and many others. I also sponsored the original versions of the constitutional amendments to allow same day registration and no-excuse absentee voting, which the legislature passed, but the voters unfortunately rejected in November. And I was an early strong supporter of public financing of elections, and closing the LLC Loophole—an egregious failing of campaign finance regulation that allowed for virtually unlimited contributions to political candidates, often with contributors' true identities hidden. I introduced and passed the LLC bill several times in the Assembly; I also served as a plaintiff in a lawsuit, working with the Brennan Center, to attempt to get the State Board of Elections to change what I believed to be an erroneous interpretation of the Election Law, which created the loophole in the first place.

With the change in Senate leadership in 2019, I joined colleagues in enacting comprehensive election reform as the first act of the new legislative majority. This

initial package included many of the items mentioned above; I was especially pleased to finally enact my bill to close the LLC Loophole. We have continued to make reforms in each successive year. Looking forward, I currently sponsor legislation to: move up the deadline for voter registration to the 10th day before elections, which would effectively provide for same-day registration on the first two days of early voting, and is an important reform until we can re-pass the constitutional amendment for same-day registration (S2951); provide for risk-limiting audits of election results, which will far more effectively detect any problems with the manner in which votes are tallied (S2853); decrease contribution limits (S2899); and regulate and require disclosure of intermediaries who direct political contributions (commonly known as bundlers), an areas regulated by the federal government, most states, and New York City but not New York State (S3090); and provide for lower limits for campaign donations by lobbyists (S2810).

The national organization Fair Vote presented me with its Champion of Democracy Award, for my work on ranked choice voting.

In the Assembly, I co-chaired the Working Group on Legislative Process, Operations, and Public Participation, which proposed dozens of reforms intended to increase transparency and the ability of rank-and-file Assemblymember to act independently; the reforms resulted in changes to the Assembly rule and modest improvements in transparency and availability of public information.

**How long have you lived in the district in which you are running?**

I have lived in what is now the 29th District for the past 9 years, and have lived in Manhattan for over 30 years.

**Have you lived in the district before this year's redistricting?**

Yes

**For incumbents: If your district has changed significantly following this year's redistricting, how do you intend to run your office to serve the needs of the new constituents you now represent?**

One third of the 26th Senate District, which I will continue to represent until the end of 2022, is located in Brooklyn; we will continue to serve those neighborhoods effectively, as we have for the past 4 years. The new 29th Senate District, in which I am running for reelection, includes all of the Manhattan neighborhoods I have represented in the Senate—Battery Park City, Chinatown, the East Village, the

Financial District, Little Italy, the Lower East Side, SoHo, the South Village, Tribeca, and Two Bridges—as well as East Midtown Plaza, Gramercy, part of Kips Bay and Rose Hill, Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village, and Waterside Plaza, all of which I represented for 11 years in the State Assembly. As a result, I am deeply familiar with the issues of all portions of the district as it exists now and am excited to represent all of these neighborhoods for another two years. Ultimately, I will work with community partners in all the areas of the district to tie in local activists, leaders, and residents to ensure that they are getting what they need from my office and that we are working together to solve community problems.

# PATH TO VICTORY

**What is your win number (the number of votes needed to win this race), and what is your plan to achieve that number?**

I believe that to win this race we will need approximately 25,000-30,000 votes, depending on projected turnout. I think this campaign will come down to being able to connect with as many voters as possible to hear their concerns and to share how having an effective State Senator has had a meaningful positive impact in their day-to-day lives and can continue to help them and their families and neighbors. We will achieve this by building a true grassroots organization that relies on strong networks throughout our communities. We will also communicate through mail, digital messaging, and other mass media, but the goal will be to ensure that voters are not expected to make their choice simply based on the advertisements that we all get inundated with during an election, but also on the basis of real conversations they have with me, with people they know in the community, and with articulate representatives of the campaign. In the end, my hope is that voters throughout the district will know how I have fought for them and understand what we can continue to achieve working together.

To do this we have already hired a campaign manager and field director who have a combined eleven campaigns in both New York and around the country between them and are experienced organizers with an understanding of how to engage communities and build messages around what voters care about. We are recruiting now to expand the size of our organizing team as we progress through the race. In addition to my campaign's staff I am working with the consulting firm Berlin Rosen, who have extensive experience supporting winning progressive candidates in New York City by developing paid media that is based on the interest, values, and concerns of a district's neighborhoods. And as noted above, we are already building a network of community leaders who are endorsing me and actively supporting the campaign, including the elected presidents of the residents associations of the largest public housing complexes, and organizations with very strong roots in progressive activism and significant organizing capacity, like CODA on the Lower East Side.

**What are your current fundraising numbers, if different than the last campaign finance filing?**

As of our January 15th filing we raised \$187,319

**How many individual donors do you have?**

As of our January 15th filing we had 308 donors.

**Please indicate any endorsements that your campaign has received, if applicable  
(you can also share a link to a list of endorsements)**

[BrianKavanagh.org/endorsements](http://BrianKavanagh.org/endorsements)



## ADDITIONAL INFO

Please feel free to attach any additional information such as resume, campaign brochures, or issues statements.

What else would you like us to know about yourself?

**Please review your answers by clicking PREVIEW ANSWERS below. You can submit the questionnaire at the bottom of the preview page by clicking SUBMIT. Once you click SUBMIT, you will receive a confirmation email with a PDF file containing your responses. *If you don't see the email, please check your spam box.***

If you have any further questions, you may contact us at [candidates@citizensunion.org](mailto:candidates@citizensunion.org)

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