

# 2023 Primary Candidate Questionnaire - New York City Council

Citizens Union - Local Candidates Committee

**THIS IS A BLANK QUESTIONNAIRE – YOU CAN SEND IT WITH YOUR RESPONSES TO  
[CANDIDATES@CITIZENSUNION.ORG](mailto:CANDIDATES@CITIZENSUNION.ORG) OR SUBMIT IT ONLINE [HERE](#)**

Dear candidate,

Congratulations on your decision to run for a seat on the New York City Council!  
Citizens Union appreciates your commitment to serving the public.

This form includes six sections with questions about your positions on various reform  
issues and your plans for the office:

- Serving constituents
- Elections and voting
- Campaign finance
- Oversight of City Hall
- Police accountability
- City Council rules
- There are also questions about the candidate's bio and the campaign

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](#).

You can learn more about Citizens Union's policy agenda in our [issues section](#).

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**If you wish to be considered, please submit this questionnaire by Tuesday, March  
14, 2023.**

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 cannot 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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

All fields marked with \* are required and must be filled.

### Candidate info

Name\* [Yusef Salaam](#)

Running for Council District number\* [Council District 9](#)

In which primary\* [Democratic](#)

Age [49](#)

Education: [Dutchess County Community College - Associates of Arts and Sciences in Social Sciences](#)

Occupation [Self Employed](#)

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement [Founding Board member of Justice For The Wrongfully Incarcerated](#), [Board member of The Innocence Project](#)

### Campaign contact information

Website [harlemforyusef.com](http://harlemforyusef.com)

Twitter [twitter.com/ys4thepeople](https://twitter.com/ys4thepeople)

Facebook: [facebook.com/YusefForThePeople](https://facebook.com/YusefForThePeople)

# Affirmations

Have you completed the required campaign finance filings?\* Yes/No

Have you qualified to receive matching campaign finance funds from the CFB?\* Yes/No/I did not join the program/Other [please detail] We have not made a decision on joining the program

Are you willing to be interviewed by Citizens Union's Local Candidates Committee?\* Yes/No

(Please note: interviews are prerequisites for Citizens Union's endorsements)

## SERVING CONSTITUENTS

**1. For most New Yorkers, the most important thing their Council Members do is provide constituent services. How have you run your office (or for non-incumbents, how would you run your office) to serve your community's needs? Please give specific examples. What are the major problems in your district that require constituent services?**

Preliminarily, I want to note that – while incredibly important to ensure residents are being connected to relevant government services and getting direct assistance as individual issues arise – constituent services actually are not the “most important thing” that Council Members do. Only a limited number of residents seek such assistance each year, and Council Members have a much greater impact through the laws they pass, how they allocate funding, their oversight of City agencies, etc.

District 9 residents are very concerned about housing, crime, jobs, education and social services, and I will provide robust assistance in these and other areas. I will provide multiple ways for constituents to reach me (phone, text, email, online and open “office hours”), in multiple languages, and hire staff in my office who all well-versed in assisting our community; I will actively seek to hear concerns by holding meetings throughout the community, and will act quickly to address those concerns.

**2. For incumbents: Which bill did you introduce, and most want to see passed? Why is that your top priority? For non-incumbents: If elected, what is the first piece of legislation you would introduce in the new year? Why is that your top priority?**

It is much too early to decide what my first piece of legislation will be. There are many important bills currently pending in the Council, and my efforts might best be spent working to get those bills passed, rather than introducing new proposals. In addition, new and urgent needs may arise between now and January.

My priorities are clear – protecting tenants and homeowners, building truly affordable housing, making our streets safer, improving local schools, creating good-paying jobs, supporting our local businesses, and expanding health and mental health programs. If elected, I will review the legislative needs in each of these areas, and then decide how best to focus my efforts, including working to pass existing bills, and introducing new bills if needed.

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

As everyone knows, I was wrongfully arrested at the age of 15, wrongfully convicted at age 16, incarcerated for almost seven years, and not finally exonerated until I was 27. As a result, I have been a staunch advocate for police reform, criminal justice reform, how government treats the most marginalized among us, and have been vocal about these issues not just in New York City, but throughout the country and the world.

**4. What are your top three campaign promises or goals? Feel free to reference an answer to another question on this form rather than restate it.**

There are seven areas that I consider to be priorities: (1) protecting tenants and homeowners; (2) building truly affordable housing; (3) making our streets safer; (4) improving local schools; (5) creating good-paying jobs; (6) supporting our local businesses; and (7) expanding health and mental health programs. Different Harlem residents have different needs, the above areas are the ones that local residents tell me are most important to them, and I therefore will be focusing on all of these issues.

# ELECTIONS AND VOTING

**5. How would you describe the relationship between the City Council and the New York City Board of Elections? How will you use (or have you used) your power as a Council Member to improve the operations of the NYC BOE?**

The unfortunate reality is that the current challenges regarding election administration relate not to the NYC Board of Elections itself, but rather the structures and powers as established in law, which can only be changed at the State level. That said, at a minimum the City Council should be holding public confirmation hearings on Board of Elections nominees, so that Council Members and the public understand the qualifications, skills and goals of the nominees, and whether they have the necessary commitment to the fair administration of elections in New York City.

**6. Citizens Union recently [published a report](#) about moving New York City's municipal elections to even-numbered years, so they would align with presidential or gubernatorial elections, showing this change could boost voter turnout, diversify the electorate, and save money.**

**What is your position on that proposal to move New York City's municipal elections to even-numbered years and on the overall concept?**

I support this change.

**7. Are you a supporter of Ranked Choice Voting? If so, how will you work to maintain this system and educate voters on how it works? If not, please elaborate on your position.**

I support Ranked Choice Voting, and if elected, I will work closely with local community groups, schools, tenant associations, religious congregations, block associations, senior centers and others to educate community members about the system, and ensure that they understand how it works – committing government resources where necessary to assist in maintaining the system and educating voters.

**8. New York City is one of few cities that maintains a closed primary system, in which only registered party members can vote in the election that typically decides who gets elected to office. Do you believe New York City should shift to a form of open primaries, allowing all registered voters to vote in the primary?**

Yes.

\* In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve elections and voting or increase competition in New York City's political system. Or, if you ran out of room in the fields above, you may continue your answers below.

## CAMPAIGN FINANCE

9. If you ran for office before, to what extent have Independent Expenditure entities ("Super-PACs") spent money in your race? Was it done in your favor or opposition of your candidacy?

N/A

10. Individuals with business ties to city government and registered lobbyists can bypass their donation limits by "bundling" donations from other people, a loophole that can give insiders greater access to officeholders. Do you support banning bundling by people on the Doing Business with the City database?

Yes

\* In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to strengthen New York City's campaign finance system. Or, if you ran out of room in the fields above, you may continue your answers below.

## OVERSIGHT OF CITY HALL

11. For incumbents: Oversight of the administration is one of the most important roles of the City Council. Please describe how you used your position to ensure City agencies and City government are accountable to the people of New York.

N/A

12. In the last year, media reports have exposed potential ethical issues within City Hall concerning [conflicts of interest](#) among [top officials](#), the [use of public resources for private matters](#), [appointments](#) of friends and relatives, and [loosening transparency measures](#).

**How do you see your role as a Council Member in ensuring high ethical behavior standards and effective ethics oversight and enforcement?**

First, I will ensure that my own conduct, and that of members of my staff, is always in full compliance with the highest ethical standards. Second, I will work with my colleagues in the City Council to ensure that both we and members of the mayoral administration adhere to those standards as well. Third, where there are violations of those standards, I will work to ensure that they are addressed immediately, and where the laws are determined to be too weak, I will work with my colleagues to strengthen them.

**\* In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve ethics in New York City government. Or, if you ran out of room in the fields above, you may continue your answers below.**

## **POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY AND REFORM**

**13. Who do you think should have the final say on discipline in the New York Police Department? How would you ensure that penalties imposed on police officers are commensurate with the gravity of their wrongdoing?**

If elected, I will work to eliminate Police Commissioner review of CCRB decisions. In addition, currently the CCRB can only investigate misconduct by uniformed members of the NYPD, and I would expand that power to address misconduct by non-uniformed members of the department.

**14. What changes should be made to the independent oversight bodies to ensure they can effectively hold police officers who commit wrongdoing accountable (the Civilian Complaint Review Board, Office of the Inspector General for the NYPD, the Commission to Combat Police Corruption)?**

One of the problems with police oversight is that it is currently balkanized among different agencies, which significantly reduces effectiveness. If elected, I would work with my colleagues in the Council to review the various oversight entities and determine whether they should be merged. In addition, as noted above I would expand the authority of the CCRB, so that they can also investigate wrongdoing by non-uniformed members of the department.

**15. Under the 2021 police reform plan, the City committed to expanding programs that effectively shift responsibilities from the NYPD to other agencies in areas like mental health, homelessness outreach, school, and youth, while investing in alternative models for community-driven public safety, such as Cure Violence programs. What do you think about the progress of these efforts? How would you improve policing in the City's various communities?**

NYC's progress under the 2021 police reform plan has been much too slow. In order to make NYC safe, we don't need more enforcement, we need smarter enforcement, and I have a seven-point plan to achieve that goal: (1) have police officers focus on serious crimes; (2) require police officers to live in NYC; (3) invest in preventative services like after-school programs, job training and wellness initiatives; (4) divert defendants with substance abuse issues away from the criminal justice system and into treatment programs; (5) end qualified immunity for police officers; (6) provide competent counsel to all individuals charged with a crime; and (7) provide incarcerated individuals with education, counseling and job training programs.

**\* In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve police accountability, oversight of the NYPD, and police-community relations. Or, if you ran out of room in the fields above, you may continue your answers below.**

## **CITY COUNCIL RULES**

**16. In December 2022, Speaker Adams proposed changes to the Rules of the City Council that would have potentially rolled back positive reforms related to bill drafting services and the power of members and committee chairpersons, among other issues. Although this proposal has been pulled, additional work is needed to make the Council a more democratic, effective, and open legislative body. What reforms would you like to see in the Rules of the City Council?**

Because I have not yet been elected to or served in the Council, it is too early for me to be advocating for any particular changes to the Council's rules. Once I am elected and have begun to serve, I will be in a better position to consider the impact of specific rules, and to work with the Speaker and my colleagues to identify and implement any necessary changes. That said, I believe that government must be transparent and accountable to the community in order to build trust and be truly effective. As Council Member, I will work to advance these values.

## **PATH TO VICTORY**

**What is your win number (the number of votes needed to win this race)?**

6,000 votes

**What are your current fundraising numbers? What are your fundraising goals?**

In order to be successful, we anticipate raising at least \$200K for the race. The campaign is working diligently towards that goal and is currently about 15% of the way there.

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

162

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

Frederick E. Samuel Community Democratic Club

# **ADDITIONAL INFO**

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

**Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?**