

Candidate Questionnaire  
Local Candidates Committee  
District Attorney Elections 2019

Citizens Union appreciates your response to the following questionnaire related to policy issues facing New York City and our interest in reforming city and state government. **Please return the questionnaire to us as soon as possible, and no later than May 1<sup>st</sup>.** Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for District Attorney, and to issue our preference for the Primary and endorsement for the General Election. Please feel free to affix any additional information such as a résumé, campaign brochure, or issue statements.

If you seek our support, we will also need to schedule an interview with you as part of the evaluation process. **Please contact us if you wish to be interviewed.**

We plan to make responses to this questionnaire public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues.

We thank you very much for your response.

**Biographical  
Information**

Candidate Name: Tiffany Cabán

Candidate Cell Phone: +1 (646) 265-9352

Party Affiliation(s): Democrat

Age: 31

Education: PS 62 in Richmond Hill, JHS 210 in Woodhaven, and St. Francis Preparatory High School in Fresh Meadows. B.S. in Crime, Law, and Justice from Penn State, and a J.D. from New York Law School.

Office Sought (including district): Queens County District Attorney

Occupation/Employer: Public Defender, New York County Defender Services

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement: Obama for America volunteer, Amplify Her member, Know Your Rights volunteer, LGBTQIA+ sports league volunteer, and I have done public interest work in different areas from VAWAs and U-Visa assistance to supporting housing and government benefits.

*(Please feel free to affix any additional information such as a résumé, campaign brochure, or issue statements.)*

### **Campaign Contact Information**

Campaign Manager Name: Luke Hayes

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Twitter: [@cabanforqueens](https://twitter.com/cabanforqueens)

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### **Affirmations**

Have you completed required campaign finance filings? **YES** / NO

Are you willing to be interviewed by CU's Local Candidates Committee? **YES** / NO

*(Please note: interviews are prerequisites of being considered for Citizens Union endorsements.)*

Signature of Candidate:



Date: 5/2/19

## **I. CANDIDATE QUESTIONS**

Please state your position on the following issues by using the space provided below each question or a separate sheet of paper. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

1. What trends do you see in criminal activity that the district attorney's office should address?

I have seen firsthand how violence and substance use disorder – and the over-policing of historically marginalized groups – destabilizes and destroys communities. Real public safety comes from equal application of the law across racial and class lines, and genuine justice means racial, social and economic justice for every community. That's why I'm running on a participatory justice platform that calls for expanding community-based holistic services and treating violence as a public health issue.

2. What would your priorities be as district attorney? What would you change in the incumbent's approach to fulfilling the responsibilities of the district attorney?

First, we would decline to prosecute crimes of poverty, mental illness or substance use. We would end cash bail, and replace it with holistic pre-trial services including treatment, housing, education and job training. This is critical to decarcerating our city.

We will prioritize serious offenses that cause widespread harm and destabilization – we would hold bad corporate actors accountable, charge police misconduct and brutality, and investigate serious violent felonies such as murder and rape with the resources no longer wasted on minor prosecutions for recreational drugs, sex work or crimes of poverty, mental illness or substance use disorder. We commit to providing and publishing all relevant data to illustrate office charging practices and transparently work with the community to improve office policy so that laws are not enforced in way that is biased by race or class.

Additionally, my office metrics of success will mirror these metrics – if you are decarcerating, reducing recidivism, and applying the law equitably across race and class lines, you will earn promotion. Prosecutors who do not succeed on these metrics will be let go. Our plan is to provide substantial and ongoing training to office personnel.

3. What about your background and approach to the position differentiates you from the others running for district attorney?

I am running for Queens County District Attorney because I am frustrated and infuriated by the system within which we operate. But even more importantly, I am hopeful and full of the relentless fight that so often defines public defenders. I am running because I believe that District Attorneys must innately understand the generational trauma and historical systems of oppression that have been disproportionately enacted on black and brown, LGBTQIA+, immigrant, low-income, and other disenfranchised communities. Failing to truly understand that history will result in well-meaning but otherwise immaterial progressive policies that continue to be biased along racial and class lines. This is dangerous, because many will erroneously think

our system has become more equitable and just, when in fact, it has not. I do not believe in incremental change. We can only be successful with wide-reaching, innovative reform. I want to ensure that Queens is home to the most progressive, justice-oriented District Attorney in the country, and I believe I am the best person to bring real reform to the office.

4. What role do you think the district attorney plays in anti-corruption efforts and building public trust, and how would you fulfill that role once in office?

Transparency helps build and repair trust, and I cannot imagine running an office where the policies were not available to the communities most directly impacted by said policies. I will also implement systems that ensure the work of the Queens DA is clearly apparent and easily understood by all members of the community, ensuring that our office is accessible to everyone. Our participatory justice model calls for community engagement in and direction of internal DA policy, and will include transparency and accountability at every level.

5. To what extent would your office use the district attorney's existing authority to investigate and monitor elected officials' conduct in relation to issues like campaign finance compliance and proper use of government resources and influence?

Corruption exists at all levels and prosecuting it as Queens DA would be a top priority. Resources would be diverted to ensure that a corruption and public integrity bureau is operating in its most effective capacity, and investigating and convicting all levels of public corruption -- from police conduct to government employees and officials.

6. Do you believe more needs to be done to ease the re-entry of formerly incarcerated persons into society and, if so, what would you propose?

Yes, we should expand services but facilitate re-entry in a way that maximizes the speed that a person can leave government supervision. Working with community organizations to fill that gap is critical, and we would add leniency to laws to allow for inevitable slip-ups that occur upon reentry. These services should be aimed at keeping people out of jail, not looking for ways to punish and re-incarcerate them.

7. Do you think that the number of incidents of police misconduct is a problem? If so, what would you propose to facilitate more effective oversight of police misconduct? What data do you have to support your point of view?

Yes. We will investigate and prosecute officer misconduct, including but not limited to corruption and perjury. I will work to create an independent prosecutor to hold police officers accountable. I will also work to publish the existing list of officers who are demonstrably unreliable under appropriate due process. We must make it untenable for bad officers to remain employed.

8. What are your views on the state legislation recently enacted with regard to discovery and use of bail?

Ending bail and open discovery are both critical — I fully support both measures. I would advocate in Albany to go further. Full open discovery and a total end to cash bail would allow for a more fair system. There is no fair way to implement cash bail. It creates one system of justice for the rich and another for the poor. Relatedly, the District Attorneys Association of New York is wrong to have opposed both measures. DAASNY regularly uses its power to impede reform; I would exit DAASNY and work with like-minded DAs to create a new progressive organization that advocates for the reforms critical to ending mass incarceration.

9. Do you support requiring police interrogations to be videotaped?

Yes. Police and prosecutorial accountability are critical. Videotaping these sessions would decrease likelihood of coercive tactics and would increase the public's trust in evidence. In general, we have to do more to increase officer and prosecutor accountability through an independent prosecutor where appropriate.

10. How do you feel about the city's plan to close the Rikers Island complex? What concerns do you have and what are the potential benefits and pitfalls of the plan?

Rikers must be closed, but the city's current timeline is not expedient enough. There is no reason why Rikers cannot be closed in less than 10 years. No single initiative would have the greatest impact on reducing the incarcerated population. Ending cash bail, declining to prosecute a number of offenses, turning over Discovery immediately, and focusing on alternatives to incarceration will all result in reducing the incarcerated populations and reducing it quickly. The existing plan does allow for defendants to stay closer to home, which is important, but that can be done without creating new superstructures and cages. It can be done with community-based models of intervention and housing provision.

Our most powerful initiative will be participatory justice - by centering community solutions, we can expand existing evidence-based services to address problems ranging from housing to jobs to education to healthcare. When we treat these issues, we treat the root causes of criminal behavior and allow for communities to be whole. We cannot build cages without assuming we will fill them. We need transitory housing with supportive services through renovating existing structures, and to reimagine facilities to resemble Dutch or Scandinavian correctional systems - places that actually rehabilitate and provide training to facilitate reentry.

### **Additional Comments:**

I have fought my entire career for racial and economic justice in my work as a public defender representing over a thousand indigent clients. I have committed to rejecting corporate dollars and to advocate for publicly financed fair elections. My platform works to protect and invest in education and hold bad corporate actors accountable including for environmental crimes that put our communities at risk and hurt the public health. I fought against Amazon and stood by folks suffering during the MDC crisis. My entire reason for running is decarcerating our city and decriminalizing a multitude of areas – from immigration to recreational drugs to sex work to quality of life offenses – so that the system finally stops disproportionately targeting people of color and low-income communities. We will instead work to hold bad actors that cause widespread destabilization including corporate bad actors, land lords, wage theft, immigration fraud, labor discrimination, and more – and serious violent crime like negligent homicide on construction sites, rape and murder.

## **II. CAMPAIGN PROMISES MADE TO VOTERS**

What are the top five campaign promises you are making to the voters during this campaign?

If elected, Citizens Union will use these promises to evaluate your performance while in office, as well as to evaluate your candidacy in the future.

Please feel free to use additional paper if the space provided is not sufficient, and to affix additional information such as a résumé, campaign brochure, or issue statements. We thank you very much for your response.

### **TOP FIVE 2019 CAMPAIGN PROMISES OR GOALS**

1. Decriminalize poverty, mental illness, and substance use disorder.
2. Decline to prosecute recreational drug-related charges, sex work, and other charges that are biased by race or class.
3. Treat violence as a public health issue: expand Cure Violence and treatment services.
4. Decarcerate our communities including by ending cash bail and asset forfeiture.
5. Invest as many resources as possible into neighborhood-rooted holistic services for housing, healthcare, education, and career opportunities.

### III. ETHICAL REPRESENTATION OF CONSTITUENTS

Citizens Union believes that all New Yorkers deserve to be represented by officials who work for the public interest and honor public trust. We seek to endorse a candidate who will demonstrate that they will honor the full commitment of the oath of office, and will always represent the public interest above all else. Please give us your views on this aspect of public service.

I completely agree that all New Yorkers deserve to be represented, which is why I've rejected corporate PAC dollars including prison and real estate industry donations. As a public defender who has represented over 1,000 clients, my fundamental loyalty is always to the public – I know that when you accept and rely on those special interests, it will be impossible to say no to their policy demands later. My model calls for participatory justice at all levels – we will have a Community Steering Committee to decide what to do with the existing \$100m federal asset forfeiture fund, and to hold the office accountable at all times to the public interest. The entire purpose of my run is bring public accountability to the justice system.

Please return to: Citizens Union, Local Candidates Committee, 299 Broadway, Suite 700 New York, NY 10007 Via email to [candidates@citizensunion.org](mailto:candidates@citizensunion.org) or fax to 212.227.0345 • Call us at 212-227-0342 with questions.