



Candidate Questionnaire  
Local Candidates Committee  
NYC Public Advocate Election 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 New York City Public Advocate, 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 publish returned questionnaires on our website, in printed voters directory, and in other appropriate venues. Thank you very much for your response.

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**Biographical Information**

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Candidate Name: Jumaane D Williams

Candidate Cell Phone: 718 290 3076

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Party Affiliation(s): Democratic

Age: 43

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Education: Bachelors in Political Science/Masters in Urban Policy  
- Brooklyn College/CUNY

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Office Sought: NYC Public Advocate

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Occupation/Employer: NYC Public Advocate

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Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:

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Candidate for Lt. Governor of New York State. I also served on Community Board 18 and was executive director of the nonprofit New York State Tenants & Neighbors advancing statewide affordable housing policy before winning election to the NYC Council in 2009.

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

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**Campaign Contact Information**

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Campaign Manager Name: Trip Yang

Additional Staff Contact:

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Address: 11 Park Pl, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10007

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Telephone: 732 771 3718

Fax:

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Website: [www.jumaanewilliams.com](http://www.jumaanewilliams.com)

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Twitter: @JumaaneWilliams

Facebook: @NYCPAWilliams

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**Affirmations**

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

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

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



Date: 9/18/2019

Signature of Candidate:

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**Signature of Candidate:** *Jumaane D. Williams*

**Date:** January 6, 2019

**CITIZEN UNION ISSUES**

1. What is your position with respect to eliminating party primaries and establishing a nonpartisan election system in which all candidates participate in the first round and the top two candidates advance to the second round? All registered voters regardless of party would be eligible to vote in both rounds.	<b>Support/</b> Oppose
2. What is your position on instituting ranked choice voting in all elections for citywide office, including all special elections?	<b>Support /</b> Oppose
3. What is your position on modifying the City Charter to require that laws enacted by referendum only be changed through approval by the voters?	<b>Support*</b> / Oppose
4. What is your position on establishing independent budgeting for:  a. Borough Presidents? b. The Conflicts of Interest Board? c. The Public Advocate? d. Community Boards?	a. <b>Support/</b> Oppose b. <b>Support/</b> Oppose c. <b>Support/</b> Oppose d. <b>Support/</b> Oppose

\*\* I would like to further discuss this with Citizens Union.

**ISSUES OF CITYWIDE IMPORTANCE**

5. How would you use the office of the Public Advocate to impact public policy to serve the broad public interest?

**I have been doing the work of a public advocate for my entire professional life, first as a community organizer in East Flatbush, then ran New York State Tenants & Neighbors, and became a Council Member for the 45th district. In all this time, I have consistently served as an activist by worked closely with grassroots organizations, unions, and advocates to raise the voices of marginalized communities while highlighting injustices and inequalities our city faces-- whether it's raising awareness by rallying community members in the streets, building coalitions with elected officials to pass legislation or**

simply speaking out against injustices, regardless of whether it's the politically right thing to do.

**As Public Advocate, I will be a watchdog and charter cop for the people of this city, and will continue serving as an activist elected official to advance transformational change. Former Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum recently said that the charter cop was that role that was least utilized by recent Public Advocate, and that's the role I plan to prioritize. Also, of all the candidates running, I have been most effective at blending outside pressure with inside operations to advance legislation that has made transformational change in our city, and will continue to do that as our city's next Public Advocate. I firmly believe that the seat I hold is not more important than those I represent.**

6. What would be your most important legislative and non-legislative priorities as Public Advocate?

**1. ) Housing and Universal rent control: we are in a housing crisis that requires strong leadership to end the displacement of New York's working families**

**2. ) Transparency & Accountability: Our elected officials and city agencies must be fully transparent and held accountable to the people they represent**

**3. ) Overhauling our Criminal Justice System: end mass incarceration and the inequitable treatment of communities in our criminal system**

7. What do you consider to be the three most important oversight functions of the Public Advocate?

**The Public Advocate is a designed, intended, and necessary check on the Mayor, Council and City Agencies, particularly as evidenced by recent acts. When the role of the Public Advocate was originally created, it was intended to "rise above politics" using five primary roles, to serve as a legislator, ombudsman, Charter cop, Pension trustee and appoint individuals to a variety of positions. From day one, my priority would be to effectively serve in each of these five roles. As a Charter cop, enforcing that agencies are executing their Charter-mandated responsibilities, has been little deployed. Especially now, in a time of expanding progressive legislation and policies, there must be a force actively guaranteeing that the intentions of the people's representatives in Council are being felt on the streets and in the lives of the people of New York. I would eagerly embrace that role as Public Advocate.**

8. The most recent Public Advocate has used litigation extensively, with mixed results, at least with regard to the Public Advocate's standing to bring a lawsuit. What is your view on the Public Advocate's use of litigation to attempt to force policy changes?

**One of the undervalued but potentially powerful tools is the ability to use the office's legal division to challenge the Mayor and city agencies, where other bodies, including at times, the council, have failed. The Public Advocate has broad Charter oversight powers, and I push the limits of those powers from what the status quo has been, be it by the cooperation of agencies, or by compelling them through legal action, to benefit all New Yorkers. While the Public Advocate has power to file lawsuits, though it should be made explicit in the Charter. As Council Member, I signed my name to multiple amicus briefs in support of other lawsuits and would be willing to file my own litigation as needed. I will also pay more attention to the role of Charter Cop, because it can be used to argue more standing in the courts.**

9. What discrepancies, if any, do you see between services promised to New Yorkers and services rendered? For those listed please indicate your proposals for bringing policy closer to practice.

**As mentioned, I plan to make further use of the Charter cop powers given to the Public Advocate to be the city's watchdog and ensure that our elected officials and city agencies are working for the people they represent. Too often, grand promises are made, which garner big headlines, but when the policy is actually rolled out, it falls far short- two recent examples being the inadequacies in the first days of the Fair Fares program, or the boasts of police reform actions such as body cameras which fall short when that footage is selectively released and accountability rare. As the Public Advocate, I will help to make sure that we focus on the implementation of policies long after a press release is sent out or a piece of legislation is signed, to help ensure the impact of policies lives up in reality to what was promised in the hypothetical.**

10. How would you approach the responsibilities of the Public Advocate regarding access to public information in monitoring the implementation of the city's Open Data Law?

**In many ways, the current administration has regressed on providing accurate and transparent information to the Council and public at large. As Public Advocate, my office would prioritize creating a more transparent government, and improving our city's Open Data Law so it is more accessible to everyday New Yorkers is an important step toward reaching that goal.**

11. What specifically will you do as Public Advocate to ensure New York achieves a full and complete Census count in 2020?

**I was a census counter years ago and understand the importance of a complete and accurate count. As a Council Member and first generation American, I have been extremely vocal about my opposition to add a citizenship question to the 2020 Census, and will work with city agencies to ensure that all New Yorkers, including those who are undocumented, have the resources they need to be counted in our society. As Public**

**Advocate, I will also continue to advocate for the census not to include a question regarding an individual's citizenship status. I will also continue to advocate for the census not to include a question regarding an individual's citizenship status.**

12. How would you leverage the office of Public Advocate to address any of the following issues, if not discussed in answering previous questions:

a. Affordable Housing

**As a longtime tenant advocate and former Chair of the NYC Council Committee on Housing and Buildings, I have fought tirelessly for tenants' and homeowners' rights my entire career. Across the city, we must not just create more "affordable" housing but income targeted housing for those who need it most. We must strengthen rent regulations here in NYC, protect the rights of tenants, promote sensible zoning, and make home ownership more accessible and affordable. One of the best things would be to repeal the Urstadt law and bring home rule back to NYC. We must also reopen MIH, which is one of the roots of our city's housing problems and the City Council completely failed on because our leadership at the time sided with the Mayor. Additionally, with the rent laws set to expire in June, if we don't get home rule we must fight to ensure we see many of these reforms in Albany. As Public Advocate, I will partner with the Council to make this city affordable, equitable and just for the many, not the few. I recently released my [Housing Justice for All platform](#) that specifically outlines many of the proposals I will pursue to address our housing crisis head on, including fixing and fully funding our broken NYCHA facilities.**

b. Public Safety

**There has been measurable improvement in the way our city deals with public safety over the past decade by not relying on police as the only option, but focusing on holistically improving communities through better housing, more jobs and safer streets. Still, the Mayor I supported in 2013 is not the same Mayor in 2018, and police accountability is worse now than under previous administrations. Still, redefining policing and increasing Police Accountability has been one of the defining issues of my time in public life. In 2013, I passed the Community Safety Act, when it was difficult to have these conversations. This package of legislation, which overrode a veto by Mayor Bloomberg, ended the abuse of stop, question, and frisk in New York City, created an enforceable ban on bias-based policing, and established an Inspector General over the NYPD. As it approaches its five year anniversary, the armageddon that some thought would happen did not, in fact, we're the safest city we've been in over 50 years. I believe that these successes can be expanded, and that transparency and accountability are vital areas in stopping abusive practices by police. We need to repeal 50-a, which has been willfully misused by this administration, and increase oversight both by the public and intragovernmentally.**

c. Public Transportation

**New Yorkers know that #CuomosMTA crisis must immediately be resolved. I support both a millionaire's tax and congestion pricing as part of this effort, and believe we must ensure that workers receive fair wages by investing the necessary amounts into creating a better functioning subway system. I also support the Council's Fair Fares initiative, which should be immediately implemented.**

**d. Health and Environment**

**Health: The health care system in our country is complicated, but our basic values should not be. My father was a physician, my mother a pharmacist and my sister is a nurse, so I understand the need for every individual who resides in our country should have access to the health care they need at a cost they can afford, and believe the current single-payer system must be expanded to ensure universal healthcare for all. I will work to resist health care cuts coming out of Washington and ensure that all New Yorkers are provided with affordable access to the care that they need. Additionally, as someone with ADHD and Tourette's syndrome, I know how important it is to seek treatment for one's mental health. As Public Advocate, I would push for additional resources to be delegated to mental health services, particularly in our immigrant communities, and would be happy to work with NYSIAF on proposals that better improve the health and wellness of immigrants across the city.**

**Environment: We must have a focused and comprehensive approach to fighting climate change and conserving our natural environment. This should include building green and investing in public transportation, preserving and enhancing green space, and divesting from the fossil fuel industry. As we do so, we must be mindful that burdens are not simply shifted to already-burdened areas, almost always communities of more color. I proudly supported efforts to equalize how waste is moved in NYC and will continue to work with attention to such consequences. I am proud to support Congress Member Alexandra Ocasio Cortez's Green New Deal, and have signed onto the citywide version onto the citywide version of the legislation sponsored by Council Member Constantinides in New York City.**

**e. Economic Development**

**In this time of Trump, when federal resources are in jeopardy, it's all the more important that our tax laws fairly assess all New Yorkers so that we have the financial resources necessary to resist Washington's harmful policies. I once was started a small cafe in Park Slope so know the struggles of small businesses and believe we must do everything we can to support them. Additionally, as New York City further embraces new economies, there's inherently the reality that workers are going to be displaced. As Public Advocate, it's important to look to the future while making sure that as New York moves toward more green and more automatic economies, that we strengthen, not weak out safety net. This is exactly why the right to organize is critical. Workers need to be protected against the inherent "disruption" that will continue to occur as we advance as a city (and country).**

f. Education

**As a public school baby from pre-school to masters, I believe New York City's schools should get the money they are owed, and more must be done to hold the Department of Education accountable to ensure our public schools are fully funded. Additionally, I am not opposed to charter schools as a rule, but I oppose the diversion of public resources to benefit charter schools, such as through forced co-location and have successfully fended off attempted co-locations in my district schools. I also support municipal control over mayoral, and believe the New York City Council should have advice and consent over the Chancellor. We must also close the schools to prison pipeline, and advance more life training programs from city agencies like the DOE.**

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

What are the top five promises or goals you are making to 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 CAMPAIGN PROMISES OR GOALS

**As a matter of personal policy, I rarely make campaign promises, but rather engage voters about my vision & platform. That being said, my top five goals as Public Advocate include:**

1. **Housing Justice for All:** I will continue to advocate for the creation and preservation of real income-targeted affordable housing, while fixing and fully funding NYCHA facilities. My full platform is available at [jumaanewilliams.com/housingrights](http://jumaanewilliams.com/housingrights)
2. **Transparency and Accountability:** I will fight to ensure that the Public Advocate is given additional tools in order to better hold government and agencies accountable, root out corruption and better serve New Yorkers-- especially considering how our city has handled the broken MTA and Amazon debacle. Subpoena power and the addition of voting rights in the council, beyond the introduction of legislation, are two concrete ways of accomplishing these goals. Sunlight is the greatest disinfectant.
3. **Overhaul our criminal justice system:** I will do everything in my power to end mass incarceration and the unequal treatment of people of more color in our criminal justice system. We've already taken large steps towards this reality as a City by pursuing bail reform, the responsible closure of Rikers, among others. I was also proud to sponsor the Community Safety Act, which helped end the abuse of NYPD's stop, question & frisk policy, and created the NYPD's office of Inspector General. We must also remember that



the best way to end recidivism is a job. My Fair Chance Act law barred employers asking about a criminal record on employment applications, removing a large barrier to the formerly convicted from re-entering society. I have also been a leader in the fight to increase funding for summer youth employment programs, doubling the available SYEP slots, and will continue this effort as Public Advocate.

4. **Combat gun violence:** I co-chaired the New York City Council's Task Force to Combat Gun Violence and created the NYC Crisis Management System, a \$20 million network of Credible Messengers that mediate conflicts on the street and connect mentees with mental health, job training and other important resources. These Messengers have helped save countless lives. As a result of this success, I launched the National Network to Combat Gun Violence, to share best practices and learn from communities near and far. As Public Advocate, I will continue to be a bold voice and leader on gun violence reduction.
  
5. **Protecting immigrant communities:** I have proudly been arrested while standing up against Donald Trump's aggressive deportation forces. We cannot let right wing, racist actions tear apart the families our friends and neighbors. The hard working immigrants who are part of the fabric of our communities must feel safe in their homes and be able to go to their jobs, schools, and government offices without fear. I am a strong supporter of the NY State DREAM Act, and would advocate for deportation relief to parents of U.S. citizens. We must also fully fund the legal services fund for undocumented immigrants, end courthouse raids and investigate detentions of activists

### **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. With the corruption conviction of recent state legislative leaders, we seek to endorse a candidate who will demonstrate that she/he will honor the full commitment of the oath of office, and will always represent the public interest above all else. Please tell us how you would continue to conduct the political affairs of this office in an upright manner.

**I have tried to honor the trust placed in me by the voters of the 45th District by working hard each day to advocate & represent what I believe to be in their best interests. As an advocate for progressive values, I have vigorously challenged the federal, state & city branches of government during my entire tenure as a Council Member.**

**If chosen to serve as our City's Public Advocate, I will continue to push forward legislation that creates more accountability in government & continue to push for the redistribution of our city resources to address the underlying social issues that result in the gun violence epidemic. As Public Advocate, I believe that I can help shepherd the conversation to do even more on these issues. A thorough review of my legislative**

**record, my statements & actions will hopefully reveal that while I may not have been perfect, i have strived to be a person of integrity, reason & passion in the service of the public.**