



# Candidate Questionnaire

Local Candidates Committee - NYS Legislative  
Election - 2020 General

Thursday, September 24, 2020

Dear candidate,

Congratulations on your decision to run for office in the New York State Legislature!

In the following pages, you will find questions regarding your positions on various reform measures, campaign promises, and ethics in public office.

Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for the New York State Legislature, and to issue our endorsement for the General Election.

This is a document confirming your responses to the Citizens Union questionnaire.

We plan to make responses to this questionnaire public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues. If you seek our support, we will also 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 in this election cycle.

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Citizens Union is a nonpartisan democratic reform and good government group dedicated to making democracy work for all New Yorkers. Citizens Union serves as a civic watchdog, combating corruption and fighting for political reform. We have been evaluating candidates for public office in New York City since 1911, and our comprehensive Voter Directory has been a source of reliable information for New Yorkers for over a century.

You can read Citizens Union's [principles and criteria for our candidate evaluation process here](#).

We thank you very much for your response.

# Your Info

## Name

Andrew S. Gounardes

## Office Sought (New York State)

Senate

## District Number

22

## Email

andrew@andrewgounardes.com

# Biographical Information

## Party Affiliation(s)

Democrat

## Age

35

## Education

B.A., Hunter College; J.D. The George Washington University Law School

## Occupation/Employer

State Senator

## Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

tate Senator Andrew Gounardes represents New York's 22nd State Senate District, which includes the neighborhoods of Bay Ridge, Dyker Heights,

Bensonhurst, Bath Beach, Gravesend, Gerritsen Beach, Manhattan Beach, and Marine Park. He was elected to the State Senate in November 2018.

Born and raised in Bay Ridge, Senator Gounardes' passion for public service began as an aide to former City Councilmember Vincent Gentile, and as a Legislative Aide for Investigations in the United States Senate. Prior to being elected, he served as Counsel to Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams and a trustee of the New York City Employees' Retirement System, one of the largest municipal pension funds in the country.

As an attorney and community advocate, Senator Gounardes' experience taught him that no one can accomplish anything good by themselves: It takes a community willing to unite, organize, and stand together to help our neighborhoods thrive.

Following Superstorm Sandy, Andrew co-founded Bay Ridge Cares, an organization that prepared 25,000 hot meals for victims after the storm. Today, it still supports community members facing extraordinary need by providing them with emergency assistance. As a member of the Riders Alliance, he organized and formed the Concerned R Train Riders to fight for better service and demand handicapped accessible subway stations in South Brooklyn. Senator Gounardes also worked with Bay Ridge Advocates for Keeping Everyone Safe (B.R.A.K.E.S.) and successfully pressured lawmakers to allow speed cameras in school zones. And because he strongly believes in the importance of art and culture in our neighborhoods, Senator Gounardes served as pro bono legal counsel for the Bay Ridge Storefront Art Walk (S.A.W.), and also as past president of the Bay Ridge Historical Society.

In addition to his local and citywide involvement, Andrew is active at a national level on issues affecting the Greek community. He is a member of the Hellenic American Leadership Council, a network of Greek-American leaders from across the United States that promote civic involvement, human rights, and democratic values in and between the United States and Greece. Additionally, he is a founding member of the St. Andrew's Freedom Forum, an international initiative that raises awareness of the denial of human rights and religious liberties of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Eastern Orthodox Church and recognizes human rights and religious freedom defenders throughout the world. Andrew has sat on the Board of Directors of Saint Basil Academy, a licensed resident child care facility for children who are orphaned or come from broken homes across the United States.

Senator Gounardes graduated from Fort Hamilton High School before going on to earn degrees from Hunter College and the George Washington University Law School. He is honored to represent the 22nd District and fight for the issues most important to the constituents of Southern Brooklyn.

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## Campaign Contact Information

**Campaign Manager Name**

Mike Favila

**Campaign Manager Email**

Mike@andrewgounardes.com

**Additional Staff Contact**

Sarah Anders

**Phone Number****Address****Website**

andrewgounardes.com

**Twitter**

@agounardes

**Facebook**

[www.facebook.com/agounardes](http://www.facebook.com/agounardes)

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

Democrat

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**Affirmations**

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

Yes  No

**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)

**Signature**



## CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

Please state whether you support or oppose the following reform measures. If you wish to elaborate on your answers, you may do so in the provided space at the bottom of this page.

### Ethics

**1. Replace the Joint Commission on Public Ethics and the Legislative Ethics Commission with an effective and independent enforcement body (S594A/A1282A).**

Support  Oppose

**2. Limit outside compensation earned by state legislators and statewide officials to 25% of their salaries and eliminate stipends.**

Support  Oppose

### Elections and Voting

**3. Do you support or oppose the following changes to the state’s current registration and voting system?**

	Support	Oppose
a. No-excuse absentee voting (second passage of constitutional amendment)	✓	-
b. Election Day voter registration (second passage of constitutional amendment)	✓	-
c. Re-enfranchisement of people on parole automatically through legislation, without requiring a Certificate of Good Conduct or Relief	✓	-
d. Mandating poll sites on college campuses	✓	-

**4. Reform the special election process, utilizing a nonpartisan special election for state legislative seats and eliminate delays in filling vacancies.**

Support  Oppose

**5. Reduce the vote threshold to become a registered party back to 50,000 votes and keep the gubernatorial election as the qualifying election, and reduce the petition requirement for independent candidates back to 15,000 signatures.**

Support  Oppose

## Campaign Finance

**6. Amend the state's public campaign financing system, approved in the 2021 budget, by**

	Support	Oppose
a. Drastically reduce campaign contribution limits	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Set even lower contribution limits for registered lobbyists and those who do business with the state	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Move the campaign finance matching program to be administered by an independent, nonpartisan body outside of the NY Board of Election	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Simplify the matching system by making both in- and out-of-district donations eligible and by eliminating the three different tiers for matching	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Budget Process

**7. Require full disclosure of grants and contracts issued by the state, including the budget lines from which the spending is made and reporting on the results of each grant or contract over a certain amount.**

Support  Oppose

## Election Administration

**8. Provide for effective online disclosure and itemization of spending from elected officials' lump sum appropriations, including reporting on potential conflicts of interest and how the funds are spent.**

Support  Oppose

**9. Restructure the state Board of Elections to abolish the strict two-party division of governance and operation and put in place professional, nonpartisan administration.**

Support  Oppose

## Home Rule

**10. Empower the attorney general to investigate and prosecute election law malfeasance and cases of public corruption.**

Support  Oppose

**11. Local Board of Elections are largely funded by their county. Given the many changes to election administration introduced in New York recently, the state should provide additional funding to county BOEs.**

Support  Oppose

## Court Reform

**12. Make mayoral control of city schools permanent, with a governance system that provides for accountability, transparency, parent engagement, and democratic participation.**

Support  Oppose



# Redistricting

**13. Simplify and consolidate New York State’s court system by passing the Chief Judge’s proposed constitutional amendment to modernize the courts.**

Support  Oppose

**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.**

12. While I have generally been very supportive of mayoral control, I am seriously reconsidering this position in light of the demonstrated inadequacies of planning for reopening of schools during the COVID period.

14. I supported the proposed changes approved by the State Senate this year, including ending the practice of counting prisoners at upstate institutions who are unable to vote as upstate residents to disproportionately increase their legislative representation and to eliminate the supermajority vote requirements imposed by the Republican Senate in 2014. If approved again next year, these modifications will go before the voters to decide.

## RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

### Government under the COVID-19 outbreak

**14. Maintain the current redistricting process, supported by voters through a 2014 constitutional amendment, and particularly the elements that provide minority parties a voice in the process, allow the Independent Redistricting Commission to play a central role, and takes redistricting power away from the hands of incumbent lawmakers.**

Support  Oppose

**15. Provide public access to observe and participate in government proceedings, in meetings that would be public under the New York Open Meetings Law, via live and recorded video available on government websites.**

Support  Oppose

**16. The Legislature stopped holding regular meetings soon after the COVID-19 outbreak, and later reconvened in July and August for short sessions that dealt with urgent matters. Should the Legislature return to its regular, pre-COVID calendar next session?**

Yes  No

**17. The ability of citizens and advocates to make their voices heard in Albany has been severely curtailed since the Legislature shifted to work remotely. How can the Legislature remain open and accessible for New Yorkers who seek to engage their representatives?**

It is vital that individual lawmakers make time for citizens and advocacy groups and continue to meet virtually with them. I have continued to regularly meet virtually with constituents, attending and holding many virtual community meetings, and to make myself accessible at outdoor in-person masked and socially distanced events, as well as responding to their requests and concerns via email and social media. My office has re-opened to the public in a safe, masked and socially distant way and has been responsive to the needs of my constituents. We have received thousands of requests on various issues since we have begun to work more remotely. The legislature has also held dozens of publicly available oversight hearings to engage stakeholders, citizens and advocacy groups on the state's COVID-19 response and many other issues.

## **Serving the public under the COVID-19 outbreak**

**18. What are your concerns regarding the use of emergency powers during this crisis, and how do you think NY government can maintain public accountability standards at this time?**

Emergency powers are an extraordinary step, yet these are extraordinary times. During a public health crisis, it's crucial that the Executive Branch can make swift decisions to stop the spread of disease - but we must also maintain vigorous oversight and accountability. We certainly saw some of the concerns with emergency powers play out in terms of the rule that was implemented to mandate that overstretched nursing homes admit COVID-19 patients, or the way that the state tracked nursing home deaths. The legislature acted quickly to convene oversight hearings and continues to meet to provide the checks and balances that are part of the purpose of our branch. Together with Assemblymember Ron Kim, I introduced S.8270, which would set requirements for nursing home operators and the health department.

**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.**

**19. What are the biggest challenges in your district in dealing with the coronavirus outbreak?**

Our district has faced numerous challenges because of the COVID crisis, both in terms of the economy and in terms of mental and physical health. The small businesses that our communities rely on have been hit hard, affecting jobs, the ability of our neighbors to pay rent, and leading to closures of beloved businesses that have been in southern Brooklyn for decades. I convened a Small Business Recovery Advisory Group that meets regularly so I can hear directly from affected businesses and work with them to craft policies to help them stay afloat. Delayed communication and guidance from the city and state has compounded the problem, leading to the closure of restaurants and retail stores. Many residents who qualify for unemployment have struggled to receive payment in a timely fashion; my office reached out to Department of Labor on behalf of more than 1,000 residents. Additionally, we have seen food insecurity grow; I have worked with local nonprofits to help organize dozens of meal distributions and lines stretch around the block. Parents have also been struggling with the bungled back-to-school roll-out and lack of

childcare. I continue to keep a close eye on the school re-opening.

**20. What are the appropriate roles of city, state, and federal governments in a crisis such as this?**

We have seen the City and State take strong and substantial action to combat the COVID-19 threat. The City Council and the State legislature have both passed a series of bills to provide relief for New Yorkers and small businesses, though we can and must do more to ensure that our city can stay afloat - including passing legislation to incentivize landlords to provide recovery leases to small businesses. My office has worked with community organizations to provide mutual aid and meals, helped thousands navigate unemployment, and provided individuals and businesses with PPE. But given the drastic budget shortfall, we need the federal government to play a large role in funding the areas hardest hit. Unfortunately, under the current federal administration there is little impetus to help New York State and those suffering most.

**21. How will you help your future constituents, residents and businesses, access potential funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, or any other future government relief funds?**

Even though constituents, residents and businesses may be eligible for relief, they are not always able to navigate the system to access it in a timely manner or at all. This was one of the biggest issues we saw with residents getting access to unemployment and state PUA. Yet by following up directly with our partners in government and helping walk constituents through the application process and rules, we were able to help hundreds of them receive the federal unemployment funds they deserved. We also helped small businesses navigate the PPP process, connecting them with the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce and other resources to ensure they could get these loans. Last month, my office also assisted in helping people sign up for rent relief through DHCR. It is vital that government come through with relief funds for many of our institutions, including the MTA, institutions of higher education, unemployed New Yorkers, homelessness prevention, food insecurity, small businesses, cultural institutions and so much more. I am committed to being open and accessible to the public to help them navigate funding and to provide education and information through all of the tools that I have at my disposal to help people understand how funds are disseminated.

## **CAMPAIGN PROMISES MADE TO VOTERS**

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

### **Campaign Promise 1**

Work to pass greater workplace protections against sexual harassment in Albany.

### **Campaign Promise 2**

Fight for recovery measures to help small businesses stay afloat and remain a vital engine of our economy.

### **Campaign Promise 3**

Fight for a amendment guaranteeing free higher public education for New Yorkers, and work to fully fund CUNY.

### **Campaign Promise 4**

Fight to fully fund the MTA and continue on the path to make it accessible for all.

### **Campaign Promise 5**

Continue to push for traffic safety measures for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers.

## **Additional material**

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

## 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 the public trust. With the corruption conviction of recent legislative leaders, we seek to endorse a candidate who will demonstrate that they will honor the full commitment of the oath of office, and always represent the public interest above all else.

**Please tell us how you have and would continue to conduct the political affairs of this office in an upright manner, and maintain the public trust.**

I hold myself to the highest ethical standards and am only in this office to work on behalf of my constituents. Maintaining and being worthy of the public trust is incredibly important to me, and I uphold my responsibility to act with integrity, ethics and for the good of the public every day.

**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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