



Sunday, April 25, 2021

Citizens Union 2021 Candidate Questionnaire - City Council

Dear Candidate,

Congratulations on your decision to run for New York City Council!

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. The form includes five short sections: serving constituent, elections and voting, police accountability, council rules and procedures, and miscellaneous.

Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for city offices, and to issue our preference for the June primary. Read more about the method, principles, and criteria of the candidate evaluation process [here](#).

**

If you wish to be considered, please submit the questionnaire by April 17 and no later than 48 before your interview.

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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

We thank you very much for your response.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Your Info

Name

Shahana Hanif

Running for Council District number

39

In which primary

Democratic

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

Democrat

Age

30

Education

CUNY Brooklyn College, BA Women's and Gender Studies

Occupation/Employer

Former Director of Organizing and Community Engagement at Council Member Brad Lander's office

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

I co-founded Bangladeshi Americans for Political Progress (BAPP) to expand the electorate within our City's Bangladeshi working-class communities.

I am a co-founding member of the Bangladeshi Feminist Collective (2016), a closed space that serves as a healing, thinking, and resting political home for NYC-based women-identified Bangladeshi feminist organizers and activists working across a multitude of issues impacting working-class New Yorkers. We are rooted in shaping transnational, grassroots feminist responses in the socio-economic context of the post-Rana Plaza garment factory collapse, migration of women as domestic workers, the politics in Bangladesh and the global South regarding dissent and free speech, as well as incidents of violence against women and queer communities, and xenophobia, Islamophobia, and escalated deportation in the US.

I'm a member of New Kings Democrats, Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats, Working Families Party, and Democratic Socialists of America. In

2020, I was appointed as the Chair of the Women's Committee in ASAAL's Brooklyn chapter.

Campaign Contact Information

Website

<https://www.shahanafrombk.com/>

Twitter

<https://twitter.com/ShahanaFromBK>

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/shahanafrombk>

Affirmations

Have you completed the required campaign finance filings?

Yes

Have you qualified to receive matching campaign finance funds from the CFB?

Yes

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

Yes

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

Signature



SERVING CONSTITUENTS

1. For most New Yorkers, the most important thing that their council members do is provide constituent services. How would you run your office to serve your community needs? Please give specific examples.

In my roles as Bangladeshi Community Liaison and Director of Organizing and Community Engagement, I've done direct constituent services work and have brought targeted City services into the district,

especially prioritizing the district's limited English proficient Bangladeshi constituents. I have coordinated and mobilized actions to protect neighbors against ICE and hate crimes, and led and expanded Participatory Budgeting within the district. I've paid close attention to working-class and limited English proficient families but my work spans across the district, including my work to secure funds for an elevator at the 7th avenue F/G stations.

Given the district's multi-neighborhood coverage, having pop-up offices across the district is crucial. I intend to have rotating mobile offices in every neighborhood in partnership with existing community spaces to anchor my office's reach and constituent attention. The constituent services team will work in close partnership with a radical communications team to uplift the demands of the movement. As District 39's Council Member, I will ensure that constituent outreach can provide resources to the community without having to rely on policing (ex. creating a hotline for domestic violence survivors in the district office, ensuring that constituent services staff are able to direct constituents to local grassroots based mental health services, etc). Hiring staff from our community with bilingual language fluency is also critical in building trust with immigrant constituents, while ensuring meetings include interpretation and literature are translated with support from community-based language access providers. Constituent services means providing better public services, but it also means robust political education: when I provide legal aid workshops to asylum seekers or recent immigrants in my District, we also talk about the violence of this administration, or the NYPD.

2. If you served as an elected official, what did you do to help your constituents during the Covid-19 pandemic? Please be specific.

N/A

3. How long have you lived in the district in which you are running for office?

I have lived in District 39 my entire life - 30 years.

4. If elected, what is the first piece of legislation you would want to introduce?

The first piece of legislation I want to introduce is a

Survivor Security Fund to protect survivors of domestic violence. Support for survivors must be intersectional and holistic. Domestic violence advocacy is an issue of gender inclusion, immigration, language access, homelessness, and criminal justice reform. I've collaborated with multilingual and community-based service providers to advocate for survivors of domestic violence seeking support in my district. Most notably, I collaborated with the Asiyah Women's Center, the first Muslim women's shelter in Brooklyn, when it just opened in 2018. Its first resident was from Kensington, Ms. Zahan. According to Sakhi for South Asian Women, the organization's highest survivor intake of domestic violence cases in Brooklyn comes from the Kensington neighborhood. Our City has not done enough to protect survivors or invest in and cultivate targeted, multilingual services that reach the most vulnerable survivors like Ms. Zahan. My advocacy for Ms. Zahan was featured in The New York Times. As she was transitioning from the shelter, I raised over \$4000 in survival funds as rent relief for a new apartment and bills as she searched for work. During COVID-19, I helped Sakhi for South Asian Women secure \$50,000 to help survivors obtain temporary housing amidst the pandemic. Our City is lagging behind on providing truly affordable housing options to survivors of gender-based and intimate partner violence. These experiences have informed my policy decisions. Ms. Zahan's case shaped the foundation for my Survivor Security Fund plan, which would provide immediate financial support to all survivors. I speak more extensively about my Survivor Security Fund in the next section, but ensuring survivors have the tools necessary to survive and thrive means securing access to legal protections such as reforming early lease termination and lock-change policies to ensure survivors do not have financial barriers that prevent them from leaving an unsafe household, comprehensive and intersectional sex education, and access to rehabilitative, trauma-informed care for survivors through establishing a hotline and employing social workers in the district office.

VOTING AND ELECTIONS

5. How would you describe the relationship between the City Council and the New York City Board of Elections? How will you use your power

as a council member to improve the operations of the NYC BOE?

I'm really thinking about this question in the lens of Ranked Choice Voting. Obviously NYC Council has oversight over the BOE, which can look like a lot of different things. Proposed Council bills have included comprehensive public education for RCV (in partnership with the Campaign Finance Board (CFB) and BOE, although implementation is mostly CFB's job), or requiring the BOE to report on election night until there is a winner to encourage increased transparency. There needs to be greater transparency between the BOE, Council, and general public, especially as we approach opaque early voting and (manufactured) mistrust in early voting and absentee voting. I will create legislation for the BOE to continually send quarterly reports on progress around implementation leading up to election day and GOTV weeks, in greater collaboration with the City Council and the CFB.

6. Do you consider yourself a supporter of Ranked Choice Voting? How will you work to maintain this system and educate voters on how it works?

Yes, I adamantly support RCV! It's critical that voters in my district understand the ranked-choice voting (RCV) system, and my team is committed to collaborating with local community groups and nonprofit organizations to educate district residents on how the ranked-choice voting process will work. We plan to do this outreach through community-centered events and workshops and ensure that all outreach will prioritize language accessibility, particularly in Spanish and Bangla. In 2018, I was a huge proponent of passing ranked-choice voting because of the opportunities it extends to insurgent candidates, particularly women of color, and electing a candidate with a majority of votes. Since its overwhelming win, I haven't seen our City prioritize voter education where it's most needed. I recognize that RCV may be difficult for first-time voters in my community but I am committed to including it in my core message and campaign materials.

7. The next City Council will appoint members to the city's redistricting commission and decide whether to approve or reject the commission's districting plans. In doing so, future council members will be responsible for shaping a fair

political map for the coming decade. If elected, what would your approach be in proposing or voting to appoint commission members, and in considering proposed district maps?

The Council should look at Census data for each neighborhood/district and see what the racial and income level makeup of each neighborhood is. The data should be used to inform the council to make choices that will allow them to pick a commission that reflects the community and city. Council members should speak to voting rights grassroots community based organizations (especially those who represent and reflect marginalized communities) to consult with the commission

8. Now that New York City has implemented Ranked Choice Voting, do you support moving to an Open Primary system (eliminating party primaries and establishing a non-partisan election system)?

Yes

Comments

POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

Citizens Union has been studying police accountability and performance in New York City for more than a decade. In our reports and advocacy efforts we have urged city government to strengthen the accountability of the New York Police Department to the public and create a more cohesive system of police oversight. Previous reports include: [2016 issue brief](#), [2013 position brief on Stop and Frisk](#), [2012 report on the CCRB](#), [2008 policy statement on police misconduct](#). Citizens Union's 2021 agenda for police reform, [published as a report](#) in March, calls for establishing a Deputy Mayor for Public Safety, allowing the CCRB to appeal the Police Commissioner's decisions, making the appointment of Police Commissioner subject to advice and consent of the City Council, consolidating agencies with oversight authority, ending qualified immunity, and more.

9. Do you support making the appointment of the Police Commissioner subject to the advice and consent of the City Council?

Yes

Comments

10. Who do you think should have the final say on discipline in the police department? How would you ensure penalties are imposed on police officers that commensurate with the gravity of their wrongdoing?

The CCRB, not the Commissioner. Although I will echo your concern, even with the existence of a

CCRB, police still continue to engage in violent acts (ex. response to Black Lives Matter protests and violence against protestors, the destruction of Abolition Park, etc.) Not only does the Commissioner tend to vote against CCRB wishes, sometimes members of the CCRB vote in accordance with entrenched racist beliefs. I believe that the only way to ensure penalties are imposed on police officers that commensurate with the gravity of their wrongdoing, or police are held accountable for their actions, is to start defunding the police, to weaken their political power in the City, and to eventually abolish the police as a whole.

11. Do you support consolidating the three bodies that exercise oversight of the NYPD: the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB), the Inspector General for the Police Department, the Mayor’s Commission to Combat Police Corruption?

Yes

Comments

12. Do you support giving the CCRB prompt and full access to footage from body-worn cameras, police officers’ employment history and disciplinary records and all other document and materials in the possession of the NYPD relevant to its investigations?

Yes

Comments

13. Feel free to add any other policy proposals you support in regards to police accountability, misconduct, and oversight, or to effective policing including functions, training, and community relations.

Police brutality is a threat to public health. Police interventions in situations regarding schools and social services have all too often escalated the situations and harmed the very same New Yorkers they are supposed to serve. Police officers are neither social workers nor mental health providers and they should not be filling those roles. Social workers trained in transformative justice should

intervene in these situations and de-escalate urgent, immediate, or violent crises. I would structure a response system through the City Council, and I would hire a staffer trained in social work and de-escalation that community members within the district could contact directly through a hotline.

For long-term mental health support, the Council can provide additional funding and support to existing systems of transformative justice led by non-profits and culturally sensitive affinity groups that can provide mental health support to people in crisis. Long-term mental health support also means funding in-patient and community-based drug treatment services, educational training and opportunities, harm reduction and substance abuse reduction activities, and providing housing assistance.

I support defunding and reducing the number of police in the NYPD and I will do the following to achieve this goal as Council Member: I will work to amend the City Charter section governing the police department and its duties. We, in the Council must also reallocate resources by freezing all new hires of the city's police force, strengthening the ability of the Civilian Complaint Review Board to dismiss officers with excessive disciplinary complaints, and removing police officers from Department of Education (DOE), Department of Homeless Services (DHS), Administration for Children's Services (ACS), and other government agencies.

Lastly, as Council Member, I will work to advocate for legislation that ensures that police union contracts do not include provisions that prevent police oversight and accountability. Police unions have been a barrier to truly holding the police accountable and we must ensure that police unions do not have the power to continue protecting cops who continue to brutalize the community.

HOW CITY COUNCIL WORKS

One of the first items on the next City Council's agenda will be adopting its rules of proceedings. Those rules will have a substantial effect on the ability of lawmakers to advance their goals, and can send a signal to New Yorkers about elected officials' commitment to making the Council more representative, deliberative, accountable, and efficient. In the last decade, the Council took important steps to reform its rules, including a 2014 overhaul by then-Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and a 2018 administrative change

by Speaker Corey Johnson. These reforms have made the body more democratic, given members a more meaningful role in the legislative process, ensured greater equity in the allocation of discretionary funding, and made drafting procedures more transparent. Still, more work is needed enable members to function more effectively and independently of the speaker, and to increase public participation.

14. Do you support allowing bills with strong support to go through the committee process and put to a vote on the floor without needing the permission of the speaker?

Yes

Comments

15. Do you support reducing the overall number of committees so members can participate more meaningfully in fewer issues?

Yes

Comments

16. Do you support making all actions designed to influence any City Council outcome, including the choice of speaker, reportable as a lobbying expense?

Yes

Comments

17. The Council Speaker controls the allocation of a large share of the Council's overall discretionary spending, and in 2020 it was reported that the Speaker used this power to "punish" council members who opposed the 2021 budget. How would you balance control and order in the council with reasonable dissent?

Punishing Council Members who voted against a resoundingly unpopular budget is immoral. I would've voted no against the FY21 budget too, and probably suffered the consequences. There's no need to punish members of Council for reasonable dissent. I want to explore the possibility of creating a rule that prohibits Council Members from punishing other members for voting against bills.

This moment calls for a rethinking of the City Council Speaker and their powers. With Speaker

Corey Johnson, we've had to put up with immoral budget cuts across individual districts when Council Members didn't vote his way. He has consistently wielded egregious power and thrown Council Members under the bus. The Speaker cannot act like a dictator and be vindictive when members side with justice and their constituencies. At this moment, the Speaker holds unchecked and often abusive decision-making power and displays preferential treatment to members on their side. Ideally, the incoming Speaker should be a socialist who will advocate with radical care to build up our City. I will be organizing with left-leaning and socialist members as part of the process to democratically elect a Speaker who is committed to the interests of working-class New Yorkers.

18. The ability of citizens and advocates to make their voices heard in City Hall has been severely curtailed since the council and city government shifted to work remotely. How would you propose to improve community engagement and public participation while using remote technology (in public hearings, meetings, etc.), particularly to ensure equity in participation?

In my district there was a lawsuit about this - many constituents felt that the ULURP and review process for the upcoming Gowanus Rezoning were inequitable because they were conducted over Zoom!

I want to use this question as an opportunity to underscore the need for language access in digital forums - from translators to accessible captions to recruitment in different languages! Language access is crucial to ensuring all New Yorkers are able to engage with civic life and democratic participation. I want to expand language access throughout the City. Limited English proficient constituents should not be barred access to their government and its resources due to the government's failure to be accessible. A lack of language access permeates every public service that the city fails to provide. I'm committed to continuing language accessible services and legal aid both as a means to get vital immigration-related information (like when a judge blocked changes made by the Trump administration to fee waiver rules) to my community in Bangla and challenge voter suppression by helping community members on their path to citizenship or bring them

into the campaign to fight for noncitizen voting access in municipal elections. While the City promises translation and interpretation services, the majority of limited English proficient speakers do not receive the services they need. The implications of this are stark - staff at COVID-19 testing sites have not been able to provide accessible communication for folks whose primary language is not English. It is not enough to simply tell folks to get tested and be protected from COVID-19, it is important that folks are able to access the resources and services they need to survive the pandemic.

MISCELLANEOUS

19. New York City has suffered an immensurable loss from the pandemic and its effects and the city's economy, social life, and culture. What is your path to recovery from this crisis?

There is no recovery from COVID-19 without a strong system of mental health care and community support. As Council Member, I will fight for mental health services that center the experiences of immigrant, low-income, uninsured, Black, and brown New Yorkers. The Council must leverage its resources to recruit and retain more mental health counselors of color, and counselors who speak different languages by supporting professional development through a pipeline development through CUNY, scholarships, and stipends. During a global pandemic, it is crucial to fund health agencies to ensure that all New Yorkers, regardless of who they are, have access to healthcare. We must ensure that going forward in this pandemic, especially as cases start to rise back up in New York, our hospitals and our healthcare infrastructure are prepared to service New Yorkers. Our healthcare infrastructure must be able to service our City's workers, especially our essential workers, who have played a huge role in sustaining our economy. I will support any program that will insure all folks, regardless of insurance and immigration status. I believe that healthcare is a human right and not something that should be profitable. All New Yorkers, regardless of employment or immigration status, should have access to safe, unbiased, and culturally-informed healthcare. As a Council Member, I will ensure that more funding will go towards programs like NYC

Care so that the program survives and is expanded to more New Yorkers. In addition, I will ensure that more funding will go towards health centered community organizations and clinics (ex. free/low cost community based clinics) and will work with City agencies like the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Health & Hospitals to ensure that health resources are available for working class New Yorkers and that outreach is done in an accessible and culturally responsive manner.

All recovery plans should include COVID-19 relief for small businesses, introducing legislation providing a right to counsel for small businesses employees, creating an undocumented workers bill of rights, and retrofitting small businesses with PPE. I will provide additional support to industries that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, particularly small, immigrant/BIPOC owned businesses and the taxi industry, through empowering local businesses to fight gentrification, hosting workshops on entrepreneurial opportunities, and cancelling medallion debt. I will also advocate with gig workers to ensure critical resources, like healthcare, pension funds, and debt relief. COVID-19 has decimated the taxi industry, which is only exacerbated due to longstanding debt from the medallion crisis. Recovery means establishing a health and pension fund for drivers. Recovery means investing in our City's youth of color, particularly through properly funding youth job training programs such as the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), fostering more opportunities for trade and vocational programs in schools, focusing on green industries, like urban farming/gardening and community WiFi digital stewardship.

20. 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 Director of Organizing and Community Engagement for Council Member Brad Lander, I ran Participatory Budgeting, which is the epitome of good governance and budget transparency. Participatory Budgeting is rooted in democratizing power over public funds, which has led to critical and creative reinvestments in our schools, streets,

and parks conceived of and voted on by the people in my district. Participatory budgeting is one of the few ways all New Yorkers, regardless of age or citizenship status, are able to meaningfully engage in civic life. Participatory budgeting is not an excuse for austerity budgets and is not perfect - and like other forms of democracy can unintentionally amplify the voices of more powerful, affluent, and white populations - but I have been intentional about centering marginalized voices in the PB process, and transferring power to youth and women of color in my district. In my capacity as PB lead, I've transformed the district's participatory budgeting volunteer leadership infrastructure by recruiting and onboarding youth and women of color leaders. As a result of these intentional additions, ideation and final projects reflect the needs of youth, women, and often marginalized Muslim women, like the 10-week self-defense workshops facilitated by Malikah, an organization led by Muslim women, and peer-to-peer workshops to destigmatize reproductive and sexual health for middle schoolers at MS 442.

I have also worked closely with the School Construction Authority and schools in the district to secure funding through participatory budgeting to repair our school buildings. As a part of this participatory budgeting project, I have worked alongside students and parents in advocating for their needs to create an accessible, equitable, and inclusive education system. Participatory budgeting recognizes budgets as moral documents and allows for constituents to take an active role in how discretionary funding within the district is spent. It is important for the Council to facilitate community control of budgets using participatory budgeting to sustain the resources our communities need. Engaging our neighborhoods in this process is not easy work and is not intuitive. Accessible community town halls and workshops can be tools used to brainstorm local needs and solutions for removing police from neighborhoods. Participatory budgeting is a crucial tool in investing back into our communities by working with the people who know it best, the constituents themselves.

21. 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: Housing justice for all: Although there are no NYCHA developments in District 39, the Gowanus neighborhood includes the Gowanus Houses, Warren Street Houses, and Wyckoff Gardens, and I've been excited to see the work Sunrise NYC and public housing organizers are doing to achieve a Green New Deal for Public Housing. Through my work in the Queensbridge Houses fighting for language justice with Asian residents, I know what it's like to organize with NYCHA residents and achieve real wins. As the only candidate in this race who has experience organizing with NYCHA residents, I will be best positioned to organize and advocate for a Green New Deal for Public Housing alongside public housing residents and NYIC in my capacity as a City Council Member. In order to provide more affordable housing, we must effectively utilize vacant lots and vacant/foreclosed buildings in the City to create CLTs run by community members. Community land trusts are a promising way of investing back in Black, brown, and Indigenous communities - as they aim to provide long-term homeownership and generational wealth. Council can provide much needed long-term and stable funding to CLTs, recruit diverse possible homeowners, help organize residents to learn about their rights as homeowners, and require cooperatives/CLTs to reveal their rationale behind rejections to ensure non-discriminatory practices. In addition, as Council Member, I will abolish the Giuliani tax lien sale law to ensure that sales of foreclosed properties do not prioritize private developers and instead, properties can be considered as spaces for CLTs and will work to advocate for the passage of the Community Opportunity to Purchase Act (COPA). I will also work with my colleagues in the State legislature to pass the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) in the State Legislature.

Second: Language justice: The premise for radical language justice in our city is simple: no one will be abandoned, no one is left behind in their share of fair and equitable care. Radical language justice is proactive in bringing in more people into our work. And I am explicit about calling it language justice and not language access, because leaving no one behind requires a shift in power and leadership. Despite our organizing bringing language access laws and necessary policy changes in this city, we often find rooms with translation equipment with no one to interpret for, we find materials on agency websites that are not disseminated and without an outreach plan. This current moment has underscored the urgency of language justice: a lack of (1) medical interpreters in hospital rooms, (2) bilingual contact tracers, or (3) legal materials in multiple languages to protect our communities from ICE can be fatal. True language justice requires adequate funding. Within my language access and justice policy platform, I suggest establishing a Citywide Interpretation Fund to finance language co-ops, sign language services, interpretation equipment, and research to support the work of language activists on Indigenous languages and languages of limited diffusion.

Third: Defunding the NYPD: As Council Member, one of my first priorities will be to defund the police and reinvest the funding into other agencies such as the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), Department of Homeless Services (DHS), and the Health + Hospitals -- agencies that will need the most resources to help New Yorkers get through a global pandemic. Specifically, this means pulling money away from surveillance technology used to separate families and deport community members to militarized equipment used against protestors to school safety officers - in NYC public schools, there are more SSOs than guidance counselors, social workers, and nurses combined.

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 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.