



Monday, May 3, 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](#).

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**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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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](mailto:candidates@citizensunion.org)

We thank you very much for your response.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### Your Info

**Name**

Shaun Abreu

**Running for Council District number**

7

**In which primary**

Democratic

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

Democrat

**Age**

30

**Education**

Juris Doctor

**Occupation/Employer**

New York Legal Assistance Group

**Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement**

**Campaign Contact Information**

**Website**

shaunabreu.nyc

**Twitter**

shaunabreu

**Facebook**

<https://www.facebook.com/shaunabreu.nyc>

**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.**

It is vital that we address the needs of immigrants in Council District 7 in the same way we conduct case management for our clients at the New York Legal Assistance Group. In the Council, I will create a system so that no stone is unturned: we will make sure that every issue brought to us by immigrant neighbors in need is responded to and addressed.

To this end, we will hire staffers who have familiarity with issues specific to immigrants, such as helping bodegeros apply for business licenses or apply for relief to stay afloat and stay in our community; applying for One Shot Deals and FHEPS so that families can stay in their homes; helping and supporting immigrants to file discrimination complaints or go after their employers for wage theft; and so many others.

I will also make sure that my staff connects immigrants to very critical resources, such as free legal services for those facing eviction and/or pantries and soup kitchens for food-insecure families.

As a Council Member, I will address budget inequity by advocating for balanced budgets without bridging cuts to human services, and in order to do this, I would perform a surgical review of the city budget. I would also unite my colleagues in the City Council to advocate the State legislature and agencies to do the same.

Further, to withstand the operating budget deficits, I

will advocate that nonprofits doing business with the city be given the flexibility to use city contracted dollars to support staff in creative ways, like incentive pay. I would also call on the City to convert discretionary funding to general operating support, enhancing the capacity of nonprofits to provide critical human services.

I would also lobby the Mayor's Office to provide contracted organizations with cash advances on FY 21 contracts, while giving providers the flexibility to use unspent funds at the close of their contracts towards human services. To this end, I would encourage the Council and next Mayor to set a budget that accounts for unforeseeable contingency costs related to COVID-19.

To expedite and simplify contracting and payment moving forward, I would lead an effort to carefully assess what layers of bureaucracy and overall red-tape can be removed, particularly during a time of crisis.

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

Most displaced or soon-to-be displaced workers will face food and housing insecurity. Without stable employment, they cannot afford to sustain basic necessities, such as rent or food.

First and foremost, as a tenants' rights attorney, I have worked every single day during the pandemic to keep families in their homes.

Having been formerly evicted, I know the importance of expanding Right to Counsel, which guarantees that low-income families falling below 200% of the federal poverty line have access to free attorneys in housing court. In a show of remarkable success, this law allowed 84 percent of families facing eviction to stay in their homes. This is why in an op ed, I called for the immediate expansion of Right to Counsel to all zip codes and for income coverage to be expanded, at least 400% above the federal poverty line.

Further, I authored a New York Daily News op-ed, calling for the State legislature to effectuate a viable path for a rent forgiveness grant to keep families in their homes without bearing rent costs,

while ensuring buildings will be well-maintained. As a candidate and Council Member, I will work to lobby the New York State legislature to make this a reality.

In order to address food insecurity, I championed an Emergency Food Vouchers plan to improve public health, specifically food security among low-income families. This voucher program would provide resources to undocumented immigrants, single-adults with no dependents, and part-time college students, who are either excluded or benefit-capped from SNAP. I hope that the Biden-Harris Administration nullifies these SNAP restrictions, and to the extent it does not, count on me to advocate all levels of government to ensure families are food secure.

I have also delivered in direct, tangible ways on the ground – like delivering food from local pantries to families in need in Manhattan Valley, Washington Heights, and West Harlem and I have organized and participated in several community-clean ups.

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

15+ years

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

Expanding right to counsel for tenants facing eviction.

## **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 would request a position on the Committee on Governmental Operations, which has oversight over the Board of Elections. As a member, I would work with the Chair to hold oversight hearings on the BOE and champion legislation that would require more transparency and efficiency from the agency and protect the sanctity of the vote.

**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?**

I support Ranked Choice Voting because it makes sure more voices are heard in our political process, which is essential. In the City Council, I will support increased investments educating voters about this new way of voting and work with non-profit educations to help disseminate additional information.

**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?**

I will support appointees who understand the changing needs of districts across the city and who will develop an electoral map that demonstrates commitment to equitable representation for our communities.

**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)?**

No

**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?**

I wrote an op-ed on this issue:

<https://www.dataforprogress.org/blog/2021/2/22/holding-the-nypd-accountable>.

I believe the CCRB should make legally binding decisions on findings of misconduct, while also being able to impose discipline. We need to leverage our budgetary powers to subject the NYPD to CCRB disciplinary procedures.

**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

I do, and I spoke about this at length in my op-ed.

**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.**

Not only must we equip the CCRB with full fact finding powers and its ability to obtain evidence, but we must ensure it has the ability to make legally binding decision and impose discipline for misconduct.

This should be done entirely by the CCRB, free from undue influence by the Police Commissioner or Mayor.

Going further, we should remove the Police Commissioner's appointment powers to the CCRB, granting them instead to the Public Advocate and City Council.

## 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?**

Discretionary dollars should be spread equitably for all council districts, removing the ability of the speaker to retaliate against our working families.

**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?**

We must ensure that everyone is allowed to engage in participatory budgeting through remote technology and have a voice in the distribution of critical resources.

## **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?**

We must commit to truly affordable housing and good paying jobs, make opportunities available for quality education and address the digital divide, as well as invest in our public health.

**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.**

**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: Expanding right to counsel

Second: Police accountability reform re: CCRB

Third: More after-school programs for our children

## 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](mailto:candidates@citizensunion.org).