



Candidate Questionnaire

Local Candidates Committee NYS Legislative Election - Primary 2024

Dear Candidate,

Congratulations on your decision to run for a seat in the New York Legislature! 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.

Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for office and to issue our preference for the June primary.

Read more about the method, principles, and criteria of the candidate evaluation process [here](#).

You can learn more about Citizens Union's policy agenda in our [issues section](#).

**

If you wish to be considered, please submit the questionnaire by March 1, 2024 via email to candidates@citizensunion.org.

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.

**

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public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues (your contact information will not be published).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

First Name: Jo Anne

Middle Name:

Last Name: Simon

Office Sought (New York State): Member of Assembly

District Number: 52

In which primary: June 2024

What party line/s are you running under: Democratic, Working Families

Age: 71

Education: BA Speech Pathology, Iona University; MA, Education of the Deaf, Gallaudet University; JD, Fordham School of Law

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

I was elected to the New York State Assembly in 2014, and each term thereafter by the highest number of votes cast for any Assembly candidate in NYS.

From 2004 to 2014, I was elected female District Leader and State Committeewoman for the 52nd Assembly District. I was in the forefront of the movement to bring new leadership to the party and helped lead the way to long-overdue reforms. In 2009, I ran unsuccessfully for City Council, 33rd District. In 2021, I ran for Borough President, placing second in a field of 12, and in 2022, I ran for the newly created Congressional District 10, in the world's shortest primary season.

Campaign Contact Information

Email: TeamSimon@SimonforBrooklyn.com; JoAnneSimon52ndAD@gmail.com

Campaign Manager Name: Susannah Pasquantonio

Campaign Manager Email: spasquantonio@gmail.com

Phone Number:

Website: <https://www.simonforbrooklyn.com/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/JoAnneSimonBK52>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/simon.joanne>

Instagram: @SimonforBrooklyn

Affirmations

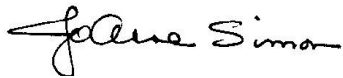
Have you completed the required campaign finance filings: **YES**/NO

Are you participating in the State Public Campaign Finance Program: **YES**

Are you willing to be interviewed by Citizens Union's Local Candidates Committee: **YES**

(Please note: interviews are prerequisites for Citizens Union preferences and endorsements)

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JoAnne Simon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

GOALS, PLANS, AND SERVING CONSTITUENTS

In addition to evaluating stances on the reform issues, Citizens Union considers the campaign goals articulated to voters, issues specific to the district, and the ability propose thoughtful solutions to represent constituents' interests.

What are your top three campaign promises or goals, and what action will you take to achieve them if elected?

1. Communicate with constituents regularly
2. Advance good bills to protect working people, the environment, reproductive health and increase access to high quality educational opportunities.
3. Advocate on behalf of constituent needs in Albany and with the City and federal governments.

If elected, what is the first piece of legislation you would want to introduce? If you are an incumbent, what legislation have you passed which you are most proud of?

- 1) Passing the Extreme Risk Protection Order or "Red Flag" in New York State to remove firearms to those demonstrating that they are a danger to themselves or others.
- 2) Closing the LLC loophole, and
- 3) the law mandating that school district can use the words dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia in IEP and other eligibility documents, reversing a 45 year history of school districts misrepresenting their obligations to children with these disabilities.

In providing constituent services, what are the major needs of your district's constituents and how will you meet them?

A major daily issue is street safety, including speeding vehicles, drunk drivers and those running red lights, the proliferation of e-bikes on sidewalks and NYPD and other agency personnel parking in bicycle lanes.

The toxicity in the Gowanus canal and its uplands and the pressure to build large multi-story residential buildings prior to the installation of major parts of the EPA's mandated Superfund remedy in this reclaimed marshland which regularly floods and is particularly vulnerable to increased precipitation accompanying climate change.

Reconstruction/replacement of the BQE triple cantilever.

Lack of affordable housing which has been driving working class families from New York, because they can't find safe, affordable housing, and those that are lucky enough to have affordable housing are increasingly threatened by private equities and other wealthy individuals who purchase residential building and either double the rent or move to evict paying tenants simply because they can. We desperately need tenant protections, subsidies to support lower income tenants, supportive housing and support for the creation of new housing with affordability, tenant protections and labor standards.

What experience have you had, if any, with good government and reform issues? (e.g. voting and elections, campaign finance, ethics, government transparency and oversight, police accountability). If you've worked to advance these goals, we'd love to hear about it.

I passed a major campaign finance reform bill in the state, which closed the Limited Liability Company (LLC) Loophole. New Yorkers deserve transparency and fairness in the electoral process and closing the notorious LLC loophole was an important step forward. This loophole allowed unchecked campaign contributions by treating LLCs as individuals instead of corporations and allowed them to funnel millions of dollars into state elections with almost no transparency, diminishing the voices of average New Yorkers.

I was a prime co-sponsor of the bill to repeal Section 50-a of the NYS Civil Rights law which gave police a means to hide their records from disclosure even in litigation. With increased transparency there will be increased attention to how policing is done and provide accountability.

I was a prime co-sponsor of the "less is more" bill (A.5576), which eliminates re-incarceration for most technical parole violations, improve due process, and permit people under community supervision to earn a 30-day "earned time credits" reduction in their community supervision period for every 30-day period in which they do not violate a condition of supervision, thus incentivizing them to avoid technical violations, and further providing for speedy hearings for those violations that do occur. I was a leading co-sponsor and advocate for the Clean Slate bill signed last year, carry a bill to ensure that defendants with major mental illness get the right kind of psychological evaluations in a timely manner informing conditions of release, and carry a bill to allow public bodies to count a member appearing remotely for purposes of a quorum.

As a Democratic District Leader for 10 years, I stood up to Vito Lopez, when it was a tough time to be a reformer – so I've been glad to see the energy being brought to these efforts today. It has led to the establishment of the Independent Judicial Screening panel, which in addition to bringing rigor to the process, also increased the number of LGBTQ+ members and women serving on the panels that would evaluate who was qualified for County's endorsement.

I have helped overhaul our antiquated voting system and enacted significant voting reforms, from automatic voter registration, electronic voter registration, to no excuse absentee ballot voting, to reforms for changing or enrolling into parties, to re-enfranchising over 43,000 New Yorkers who are on parole. I currently sponsor several election reform bills.

I served as a member of the Citizens Union Candidate committee for about two years, 2002-2004, but stepped down when I became a district leader.

I currently chair the Assembly Committee on Ethics and Guidance, and co-chair the Legislative Ethics Commission.

How long have you lived in the district in which you are running? 42 years

ELECTIONS AND VOTING

1. Do you support moving city elections from odd-numbered years to even-numbered years, and will you vote in favor of legislation that enacts that change?

Moving local elections to even year boosts turnout, reduces disparities in participation, and saves money. In 2023, Governor Hochul signed a law that moves county and town elections to even years and signaled her support for a constitutional amendment that does the same for cities and other elected offices currently held in the odd year. Citizens Union strongly supports moving municipal elections to even-numbered years.

YES/NO

2. Do you support restarting the constitutional amendment process to enact same-day voter registration in New York?

YES/NO

3. Do you support improving voter participation in CUNY and SUNY colleges by requiring schools to develop and implement a student voter engagement action plan?

YES/NO

Board of Elections Reform

4. Do you support reducing the party-based hiring in boards of elections to the minimum currently required by the constitution?

The New York Constitution only requires party-appointed bi-partisan officers in three roles: registering voters, distributing ballots, and canvassing votes. State law expanded that requirement to apply to almost all BOE employees.

YES/NO The big challenge will be to figure out how to set up a system that does it differently and successfully.

5. Do you support implementing an open, competitive, merit-based hiring process for all election administration staff and certain functions at polls?

YES/NO Having been a state committeewoman with direct familiarity with election day operations and the recruiting of poll workers, some things are easier said than done, and a lot would depend on which personnel/functions you are talking about. A formal merit-based system is harder to implement with the many part-time election inspectors that work only a few days a year. In addition, the biggest challenge has been having enough competent poll workers – from either party.

6. Do you support requiring election commissioners and top BOE staff undergo mandatory training developed by the State Board of Elections?

In 2023, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed legislation that enacts mandatory trainings for poll workers across New York. The State Senate further passed S617 that would implement mandatory training curriculum for election commissioners and key staff of boards of elections.

YES/NO I was a co-sponsor of this legislation in the Assembly.

7. How would you use your power as a legislator to improve election administration in New York? Feel free to add any policy proposals you support in regards to reforming the BOE.

I have co-sponsored a number of bills that seek to add rigor to the administration of the NYC Board of Elections. One bill that I am working to pass this session is A.1346, which would eliminate NYS's prohibition on distributing food or water to voters on line waiting to vote. This is rarely enforced but is anachronistic and the time has come to remove this prohibition. I also sponsor the following bills: A.7959 requiring the filing of reports on the assignment of election inspectors and poll clerks, A. 7960 regarding the provision of additional voting days in the case of emergencies, and A. 7963 requiring the development of a list of election inspectors from which appointments shall be made two months earlier than is currently the case, allowing for better recruitment and training of inspectors.

Overall, I'd like to see less duplication of efforts, better pay (its hard to recruit and keep high quality for the current low rates of pay and institute more normal management responsibilities and authority. Currently the Exec Dir of the Board can't even hire a personal assistant without the approval of the commissioners. That makes no sense and harms the efficiency of operations.

If needed, you may elaborate below on your positions on the previous questions.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

8. Will you support fully funding new state public campaign finance program in the upcoming budget process?

Governor Hochul has proposed to fully fund the public matching funds program with \$100 million in the FY2025 budget.

YES/NO

9. Do you commit to opposing any attempt to undermine the State Public Campaign Finance Program by changing its rules to benefit large donors?

YES/NO However, I believe there was a fundamental misunderstanding of the changes the legislature made last year which modified the program to be more like NYC Campaign Finance program, but it was vetoed. Having run under the NYC program, it is complicated but more functional than the current state program which leaves candidates without sufficient public financing support early enough in a campaign and further penalizes candidates if a donors give a dollar more that the maximum matchable contribution to a candidate. NYC never did this and now distributes funds much earlier in the election cycle so that candidates have the funds they need to run when those funds are typically expended earlier in the campaign. This being the first election year under the State system, I am hopeful that the Board of Elections learns more about how to administer such a program for the future.

10. Do you support requiring campaigns to disclose a contributor's employer in campaign finance reports, as is done in NYC?

S2362 (Rivera)/A6542 (Carroll) would require disclosure of employer for campaign contributors

YES/NO I am a co-sponsor of this bill

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.

REDISTRICTING

11. Who do you think should draw new district maps every decade in New York? (e.g., the current Independent Redistricting Commission, the Legislature/LATFOR, a new body)

I believe the IRC should, but one challenge we have seen is that independence is not assured by having equal numbers of members from the same party. Last year one member of the minority IRC panel exerted his influence to eliminate the possibility of agreement on a single map all the while planning his campaign, and as a result is now serving in the state legislature. Former IRC chair David Imamura has written about this problem. I believe there are some tweaks that could be made to the IRC to enable it to operate more efficiently and less subject to political leverage. That being said, the US Constitution gives the role of redistricting to legislatures.

12. Do you support changing the constitutional redistricting process to reduce the influence of legislators over map-making process, make the redistricting commission less partisan and more diverse, and eliminate the Legislature's veto power over final maps?

YES/NO The legislature is the branch of government that should have the final approval so as to reduce the likelihood that a so-called independent commission could divide communities of interest as the map this year did, necessitating changes in a small number of AD's so as to restore coherence to communities of interest, which are less likely to be apparent to independent commissioners, who do not possess local familiarity.

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.

ETHICS AND LOBBYING

13. Do you support establishing an independent ethics agency with commissioners not chosen by the elected officials they oversee, which would have oversight powers over the executive and the legislature (also replaces the Legislative Ethics Commission)?

Although the new ethics watchdog agency, the Commission on Ethics and Lobbying in Government (COELIG), is an improvement on its flawed predecessor, JCOPE, Citizens Union supports a constitutionally established, independent ethics agency that would deter corruption in the legislative and executive branches.

YES/NO I am familiar with the Krueger/Carroll bill. It looks inviting on paper but would be impossible of performance as ultimately someone has to appoint, and that someone cannot be a body to whom the legislature or the Executive has delegated governmental duties. Such a designation was recently overruled in a recent case of the legislature's delegation of authority to law school deans to vet judicial candidates. In addition, as co-chair of the Legislative Ethics Commission, I know firsthand how independently it operates and how well and respectfully commissioners appointed by opposing parties work together to advise on the contours of the Public Officer's Law. It is good government at work.

14. Do you support requiring lobbyists to report their contributions and fundraising activity?

YES/NO

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 ethics issues.

POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

15. Do you support giving the New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board access to certain sealed and confidential records in matters involving potential police discipline?

CCRB investigations are often hamstrung because the NYPS denies it access to effective investigative resources, such as body-worn camera footage and other police records, under the pretext of protecting sealed records. S6267 (Bailey)/A370 (Cruz) would grant the CCRB access to sealed records and certain confidential records in furtherance of its duties and functions.

YES/NO

16. Do you support transferring disciplinary hearings involving police officers from the NYPD to the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH)?

Public confidence in police disciplinary process would be enhanced if the disciplinary hearings for police officers, like those for all other New York City employees, were conducted before the independent administrative law judges of OATH rather than within the NYPD. This would require state legislation, and S2401 (Myrie)/A7863 (Simon) would enact such change.

YES/NO I am the lead sponsor of this bill in the Assembly. It is very much needed.

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.

PATH TO VICTORY

What is your win number (the number of votes needed to win this race), and what is your plan to achieve that number?

I need a majority of the votes cast. I won a very competitive three-way primary in 2014 winning by 13 points, where the mayor and certain other leading progressives supported another candidate. I won because I know my district and its people and they know my work and see me in action all the time. I take my responsibilities as a legislator seriously, never forgetting that I come from community work; as a result, I have been deeply engaged in the issues with a broad coalition of people and advocates throughout the district and beyond on issues such as environmental justice, street safety, reproductive health, education reform, revenue raising.

What are your current fundraising numbers? What are your fundraising goals?

I will have sufficient funds to run a competitive primary and win.

How many individual donors do you have?

Well over 100 thus far for this race, but we have just begun raising funds and I expect that number to increase significantly.

Please indicate any endorsements that your campaign has received, if applicable (you can also share a link to a list of endorsements)

Attorney General Letitia James, US Rep Daniel Goldman, State Senators Zellnor Myrie and Andrew Gounardes, City Councilmember Lincoln Restler, the Working Families Party, Independent Neighborhood Democrats, Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats, 504 Democratic Club, Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club, thus far. As it is still early in the season, I hope there will be more to follow. In the past I have secured the endorsement of many political and labor organizations in the past, including the UFT, NYSNA, PASE (social workers), 1199, NYS Trial Lawyers, CWA 1180 Freelancers Union, International Union of Operating Engineers Local 891, Union Local 1549 DC 37, PSC CUNY, CSA, Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers Local Union No. 1 & No. 7 (Tile, Marble & Terrazzo) NY-NJ, Sheet Metal Workers Local 28, Stonewall Democrats, Union of Arab Women of NYC, Unified Political Association.

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?

I am running for re-election to ensure that New York is a leader in progressive policies and to ensure that government works well for the people in the 52nd Assembly District and throughout New York State.

My entire career has been about lifting the voices and fighting for the rights of those who have been historically marginalized.

I am a longtime community activist, a disability rights attorney, a former teacher of deaf students, and progressive Assemblymember for 10 years. I have never shied away from standing up to powerful interests or big developers. I am an extraordinarily accessible legislator, with a storefront office and frequently hosting public meet and greets, town halls and community events.

I worked as an attorney in private practice and opened my own small law firm, concentrating on disability discrimination in standardized testing, higher education and employment. I was called upon to testify before the US Senate on amending the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 2008. I tried the landmark case of Bartlett v. New York State Board of Law Examiners.

I have had significant legislative victories against big industries and institutions that needed to change - a major gun violence prevention bill ("red flag" law or ERPO) currently being replicated across the country, the campaign finance reform bill to close the notorious LLC loophole, a gender neutral bill for firefighters and police officers, and an education equity bill for those with disabilities, and more. I hope to pass a bill this year that will cease the State's funding of fossil fuel polluters via tax credits and other subsidies through our economic development programs. I am proud to have taken a leading role in supporting criminal justice reforms, the expansion of affordable housing, environmental justice, single payer health care, and women's rights, including reproductive rights, and student debt relief. In the area of education, I have fought for early identification of children who are at risk for dyslexia, screening for incarcerated folks and reforms to teacher education programs. In fact, I passed the first dyslexia law in NYS and continue my work to increase literacy and institute the science of reading in our schools and our colleges of education which have been teaching their students according to an ineffective playbook, resulting in stagnant and poor reading outcomes for NY's children. See, for example, my articles: <https://www.nydailynews.com/2017/09/06/finally-getting-serious-about-educating-kids-with-dyslexia/> and <https://www.gothamgazette.com/130-opinion/12008-new-york-literacy-kids-read>. In addition, I host an annual Dyslexia Awareness Day in Albany. Each year, we engage more kids, parents, reading specialists, legislators, and policy makers. On March 14, we will hold our 9th Dyslexia Awareness Day. I also serve on the Steering Committee of New York's recently launched initiative, "the Path Forward," which will fundamentally change the way

we educate the teachers of tomorrow how to teach reading, opening up a whole new world of opportunity for all our young people. For decades only 35-38% of our fourth graders can read proficiently, but our educators have been taught to use methods that have no evidence supporting their efficacy. With a State Action Plan due out in June, we will set a course for changing that picture.

Early in my legal career, I volunteered with GMHC to draft wills for people living with AIDS. So many young people in need of wills was heartbreaking, knowing that few could rely on their families to respect their wishes and even fewer would survive. The stigma associated with HIV/AIDS impacted everything. Many who survived the loss of a partner, but weren't on their lease, would then face eviction, even if - and with some landlords, especially if - they also had AIDS. I am proud to have secured the first succession rights to rent stabilized housing for a surviving partner.

These experiences also showed me the awesome impact that citizens and non-profits could have, and how often they were ahead of elected officials in what needed to be done to address certain issues. COVID has led to the creation of mutual aid groups that provided food and other help to community members and that model has continued to assist the increasing numbers of people who are in shelter, including the massive numbers of migrants who are new to our City, by providing food, clothing, suitcases, etc. I have always been proud of the people I represent and even more so now.

If you have any further questions, you may contact us at candidates@citizensunion.org.