



Candidate Questionnaire

Local Candidates Committee NYS Legislative Election - Primary 2026

Name Ryder Kessler

GENERAL INFORMATION

Office Sought (New York State) Assembly

District Number 66

In which primary Democratic

Age 40

Education MPhil (2013) and MA (2011), English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University; AB (2008), Harvard University

Current job, position, or occupation

Executive Director, Abundance New York Fund

Other positions or roles

Member, CB2 Manhattan (2019-2020; 2021-present)

Leader, Hands Off New York – Downtown West (Nov 2025-present)

Lower Manhattan Chapter Member/Volunteer, Open Hearts (2022-present)

Longtime member of the Manhattan Working Families Party, Stonewall Democrats, and Brotherhood Synagogue

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement

Selected Employment –

Co-Executive Director, Abundance New York (June 2024-Nov 2025)

Northeast Regional Voter Protection Director, DCCC (2022)

Voter Protection Director, Maine Democratic Party (2020)

Campaign Manager, Tracy Mitrano for Congress (2018)

DipJar, CEO (2011-2017), Chairman (2017-2020)

PhD Student, Columbia, 2010-2014

Campaigns–

2022 Democratic primary campaign for State Assembly, District 66

Selected Community Involvement –

Member, Blue Hill Troupe (2024-president)

Board Member, Bronfman Fellowship (2019-2023)

Youth mentor at The LGBT Center (2018)

Campaign Contact Information

Website	https://www.ryderfornewyork.com
Twitter	@ryderkessler
Facebook	@ryderfornewyork
Instagram	@ryderfornewyork
Bluesky	@ryderkessler
Other social platforms	@ryderkessler on TikTok; @ryderfornewyork on YouTube

Signature



GOALS AND PLANS

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 actions will you take to achieve them if elected?

My number one issue is affordability, and particularly housing affordability. Median rents in Manhattan are over \$5,000. I will fight to lower rents by building more homes of all types, strengthen tenant protections and right to counsel, and lower costs of ownership and preservation by cracking down on insurance companies and reforming property taxes. Simultaneously, I will champion universal childcare, deployment of clean energy to lower emissions and energy bills, and ensuring the ultra-rich play their fair share to fund critical programs for all New Yorkers.

New York must be a bulwark against authoritarianism while also fixing its own democratic deficits. I will fight to improve voter turnout by legalizing same-day registration, implement Automatic Voter registration, end patronage at the Board of Elections, and use every tool available in the legislature to fight MAGA power grabs.

I also care deeply about the safety of our streets. New Yorkers deserve to walk to school or work without dodging speeding SUVs, tripping over rats and piles of trash, or waiting endlessly for a bus. I will push to mandate speed limiters for reckless drivers, design better streets to protect kids and elders, and dedicate funding to make city buses fast and free. Street safety also includes broad response to weather emergencies through robust climate action and resiliency infrastructure.

How long have you lived in the district in which you are running, and do you have any achievements or involvement in your district you are particularly proud of?

I'm a child of the 66th Assembly District—a gay kid born at St. Vincent's Hospital who played little league basketball at Tony Dapolito and got his Bar Mitzvah cake at Veniero's. I have spent all 40 years of my life as a Lower Manhattanite and have lived in the same apartment in the West Village since 2009.

I joined Manhattan's Community Board 2 in 2018, where I have built consensus on controversial issues to advance the needs of our most vulnerable neighbors. The first resolution I authored declared CB2's support for a bill to raise the cap on street vending permits, which had pushed largely immigrant vendors into exploitative permit rentals. The law passed and was recently expanded. I have also authored multiple

resolutions in support of Safe Haven shelters in the district, and fought for Haven Green, affordable housing for low-income and largely LGBTQ+ seniors.

In 2024, I founded Abundance New York, a community of over 4,500 New Yorkers that has mobilized to protect congestion pricing, help pass landmark affordable housing measures, and elect leaders like Zohran Mamdani. I recently created the Downtown West group for Hands Off NYC, which now has over 80 members coordinating anti-ICE rapid response on our streets—including recent protection of immigrant New Yorkers on Canal Street. I also regularly volunteer with Open Hearts, distributing care packages to New Yorkers experiencing homelessness.

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

There are two things I love more than anything: New York City and democracy. I have spent my career fighting for both to live up to their promise.

I am a voter protection professional, having worked for many cycles at the forefront of the fight against voter suppression and election subversion. In 2020, I was the Voter Protection Director for the state of Maine—building its first team to watchdog election administrators and empower voters, critical during the disruption of Covid. I led ballot cure confirmation during the Georgia senate runoffs in 2021 and oversaw the voter protection across the northeast for the DCCC in 2022.

Bringing this expertise to New York, I have written extensively about our failures on ballot access and voting administration, including Democrats' failure to fund campaigns for constitutional amendments to legalize no-excuse absentee voting and same-day registration. And as an RCV expert from my time in Maine, I have combated fear-mongering and misinformation about RCV here. (See example op-eds here: <https://www.gothamgazette.com/component/contact/contact/2138-ryder-kessler/>). Additionally, I testified before the State Senate in 2022 arguing for full funding of the state public match program (https://www.nysenate.gov/sites/default/files/public_financing_testimony_ryder_kessler.pdf), and I am proudly participating in it in this race.

I co-founded Abundance New York to drive improvements in democracy. Growing to a community of 4,500, we have driven participation in local political decision-making to increase the representativeness of our political outcomes. Specifically, we have uplifted campaigns for better elections, such as endorsing the ballot proposition to move elections to even years.

ELECTIONS AND VOTING

1. Do you support opening up New York City's closed primary system, allowing over 1 million unaffiliated voters that are currently locked out of the election to participate in the primary election?

Yes

Comments (optional)

The exclusion of over a million unaffiliated New Yorkers from meaningful participation in elections that are, in most districts, effectively decided at the primary stage is problematic and undemocratic. At the same time, political parties are organizations that have the right to organize and self-govern—for example, having their members choose their nominees.

The system is broken: it is unconscionable that today—nearly three months before Election Day—it is already too late for an unaffiliated registered voter to join the Democratic Party in order to participate in its June primary (indeed, it's been over a month since the deadline passed).

We can fix the system and preserve both core values of inclusion and self-governance through a “semi-open primary” model like that used in sixteen states. New York would maintain primaries reserved for party members but would introduce same-day registration allowing unaffiliated voters to join a party to participate in its primary on Election Day.

2. Will you oppose any attempt to permanently remove redistricting protections from the state constitution, including existing protections of minority voting rights, population equity, ban on political gerrymandering, and consideration of communities of interest?

Yes

Comments (optional)

Free and fair elections require independent, transparent redistricting, and I would oppose any attempt to permanently undermine constitutional protections of fair districting in New York. Additionally, I will always oppose any attempt to weaken population equity or the meaningful representation of minority voting populations.

At the same time, in the near term—with an authoritarian MAGA Republican party seeking to entrench control of the House of Representatives through their own extreme partisan gerrymandering unchecked in Washington—we cannot allow New York to unilaterally disarm in the fight for an equal playing field for voters across the country.

I will continue to fight vociferously, as I have for years, for national solutions to ban partisan gerrymandering and otherwise re-enshrine rights lost through the weakening of the VRA. With basic national safeguards, New York can fearlessly lead on ensuring our district lines are drawn by nonpartisan experts.

3. Do you support reforming the process of filling vacancies in the state legislature by implementing nonpartisan special elections (like the system used in New York City) instead of giving party officials the power to decide who will run as the party nominee?

Yes

Comments (optional)

Absolutely. A significant portion of New York legislators won their seats through special elections without having to win contested primaries, receiving their party's nomination through the county committee system. This is odious. Party officials should not have the power to hand-pick legislators outside of a competitive electoral process.

I will be a day-one sponsor and champion of a process to reform this system, requiring that state legislative vacancies follow the nonpartisan, ranked-choice special election model used in New York City.

4. Do you support restructuring the New York City Board of Elections to make it more professionalized and transparent, and less dependent on political parties (S699 Krueger/A1852 Rozic)?

Yes

Comments (optional)

The Board of Elections system has undermined New Yorkers' confidence in our elections. As I have written and advocated for years, New York's patronage-addled election administration is far out of step with best practices from other states. I support S699/A1852 and will fight to end cronyism at the Board of Elections and replace the system with one that is led by professional, nonpartisan officials.

In addition to believing in this reform, I have the firsthand experience of having worked closely with election administrators in nine states, from municipal clerks to Secretaries of State. I know what good election administration looks like—and how New York's falls far short. (I spoke about this in a recent campaign video: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DVCS5EBESx9/>)

5. Do you oppose requiring registered voters to show ID to vote in New York State?

Yes

Comments (optional)

Absolutely. Voter ID requirements create unnecessary barriers to the ballot box, disproportionately burdening low-income voters, voters of color, the elderly, and voters with disabilities. New York should be expanding access to the ballot, not creating new barriers to it.

I have significant firsthand experience lowering barriers to access for marginalized voters. For example, leading the voter protection team in Maine in 2020, our team rooted out misbehavior by election administrators across the state who were improperly requiring photo ID to register. I will fight any misapplication of existing protections, and I will never cede ground on ballot access laws already on the books.

6. Do you support providing time extenders for polling place voting hours in cases where an emergency leads to voting being disrupted or shut down? (S4602A Gounardes/A5846A Gibbs)

Yes

Comments (optional)

Yes. Every eligible voter who shows up to the polls deserves the opportunity to cast their ballot. Emergency disruptions to voting should never result in disenfranchisement, and time extenders are a straightforward safeguard for that.

In addition to supporting this bill, I can bring my experience fighting for increased voting hours and demanding emergency relief when voting is interrupted to inform the optimal language and successful implementation of this bill and others like it.

7. Do you support the Democracy During Detention Act (S440 Myrie/A2121 Walker), which establishes the election infrastructure to make voting accessible for all those eligible to vote who are detained in jails?

Yes

Comments (optional)

Yes, voting is a basic right. Detained individuals who are eligible to vote must have a meaningful opportunity to exercise it. Establishing the infrastructure to make that possible is a basic obligation of democracy that takes voting rights seriously.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

8. Are you a public campaign finance participant? If not, please explain why.

Yes

Comments (if needed)

I am a proud public campaign finance participant.

9. Are you a supporter of the state's public campaign matching funds program, and do you commit to ensuring the program is fully funded?

Yes

Comments (optional)

Yes. I testified to the State Senate in 2022 in support of fully funding the state public match program, and I am proudly participating in it in this race. I have already reached the max \$175,000 in matching funds for in-district donations, with over 550 individual grassroots donors as of our March 12 filing. I will continue to advocate for strong public financing while in office.

10. Do you support requiring disclosure of a contributor's employer in campaign finance reports? (S1910 Rivera/A3092 Carroll)

Yes

Comments (optional)

Yes, I believe transparency in campaign finance requires knowing not just who is giving, but where their financial interests lie. Requiring disclosure of a contributor's employer is a straightforward step toward giving voters the information they need to evaluate who is funding our elections.

11. Do you support requiring Independent Expenditure entities (Super PACs) to disclose their top three donors on ads, similar to the requirements under NYC law? (S8445 Fahy/A10097Solages)

Yes

Comments (optional)

Yes, voters deserve to know who is paying for the political ads they see. Requiring Super PACs to disclose their top donors on advertisements is a common-sense transparency measure that New York City has already shown is workable.

12. Do you support applying lower contribution limits to lobbyists and people doing business with the state or seeking contracts from the state? New York City imposes lower contribution limits for registered lobbyists and individuals doing business with the City.

Yes

Comments (optional)

Yes, those seeking to profit from government contracts or influence government decisions through lobbying should face stricter limits on their ability to fund the campaigns of officials who make those

decisions. New York City's model demonstrates this is both workable and effective, and the state should follow suit.

ETHICS

13. Do you support requiring lobbyists to report their campaign contributions and fundraising activity, as well as campaign consulting services they provide?

Yes

Comments (optional)

Yes. Transparency and accountability require a full picture of how lobbyists are attempting to influence our political process, including through campaign contributions and consulting work. Voters and the public deserve to know the full scope of that activity.

14. Do you support including lobbying regarding a nomination or confirmation of a nominee that requires Senate confirmation in lobbying reports? (S374 Gianaris/A7456 McDonald)

Yes

Comments (optional)

Yes. Lobbying around nominations and confirmations is a significant form of political influence that currently happens largely out of public view. Requiring its disclosure is consistent with the broader principle that New Yorkers should be able to see who is trying to shape their government.

15. Do you support codifying sexual harassment as conduct that violates the public officers and employees code of ethics? (Gounardes S4197/Kelles A6201)

Yes

Comments (optional)

Yes. Current law contains gaps that have allowed elected officials and their staff to fall outside the protections against harassment that cover other workers. No public officer should be above accountability. Codifying sexual harassment as a violation of the public officers and employees code of ethics closes that loophole and sends a clear signal that government must meet the same standards it sets for others. I also support banning "no rehire" clauses in settlement agreements and requiring sexual harassment training for lobbyists as part of a broader ethics reform agenda.

POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

16. 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? (S4966 Bailey/A292 Cruz)

Yes

Comments (optional)

Yes, public safety is one of my top priorities, and real safety requires accountability. The CCRB cannot do its job effectively if it is denied access to the records it needs to investigate potential misconduct. Giving the board access to sealed and confidential records in disciplinary matters is a necessary step towards real accountability and restoring public trust in law enforcement oversight.

17. Do you support transferring disciplinary hearings involving police officers from the NYPD to the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH)? (S3927 Myrie)

Yes

Comments (optional)

Yes, I support State Senator Myrie's bill. New York has long struggled to live up to its values of equal justice for all, and self-policing in disciplinary matters is a core part of that problem. Transferring hearings to OATH removes the conflict of interest at the heart of the current system and brings the independence that real accountability requires.

REVISING CITY CHARTERS

15. Do you support banning the establishment of “lame duck” charter revision commissions, established by mayors right before the end of their term? (S8934 Liu)

Yes

Comments (optional)

Yes. The automatic preference for mayoral commissions over council commissions is ripe for abuse, as we saw under the Adams administration. Even when the commissions act with integrity and propose excellent reforms (as was the case in 2025), the system undermines voter confidence. We must resolve this issue—starting with addressing the lame duck problem.

16. Do you support mandating that charter commissions conduct their process over a mandatory minimum timeline of 180 days before issuing recommended ballot questions to a city’s charter?

Yes

Comments (optional)

Yes. The 2019 commission that produced ranked choice voting and the 2025 commission focused on ULURP and election reform both conducted extensive public outreach over many months before finalizing their proposals. A mandatory minimum timeline is a reasonable safeguard against the kind of rushed, bad-faith process we saw from the first 2024 Adams commission, which finalized ballot proposals just two days after their public release.

ADDITIONAL INFO

What else would you like us to know about yourself?

Once elected, I am confident that I will be the most energetic leader of pro-democracy efforts in the Assembly. I will fight tirelessly for improvements to enfranchisement and election administration, both statutory and constitutional, and I will innovate to make New York a true model for democracy nationwide.