



Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats: 2020 State Candidate Questionnaire

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Please answer each of the following questions to the best of your ability:

1) Why do you seek an endorsement from CBID?

I seek CBID's endorsement because I would find it particularly significant to have the support of a group that represents so many of my constituents, and conducts invaluable work to engage citizens in the democratic process. I am a long-time member of CBID and have worked with its leadership and members for many years. I have been honored to have CBID's endorsement in the past for State Committee/District Leader, City Council and Assembly.

My experience as a grassroots community leader has given me an uncommonly deep level of familiarity with my district and its people. I have lived in my district since 1981 and have witnessed the strong community ties that bind the people living and working in the 52nd together for nearly 40 years. While there has been tremendous change in the district, the heart of the district remains its people and their relationships to each other and to our environment. I began my activism fighting against a land use boondoggle and continue to take an active role in development projects and rezonings, transit and transportation issues and education. In 2003-2004, I coordinated 10 neighborhood and community-based organizations to respond to the Downtown Brooklyn Plan, which issued a Contract with the Community and Statement of Needs that was unanimously agreed to by organizations which had often previously disagreed bitterly. I led the effort to create a stewardship group to re-engage community to improve a dilapidated NYC park (Thomas Greene Park) in Gowanus.

As president of the Boerum Hill Association, I created the community planning effort that led to the Hoyt Schermerhorn plan, a model for community-based development. When community is at the table from the onset, they don't spend the next 20 years fighting amongst themselves. I also led the Gowanus Expressway Stakeholder Group and litigated against the state and federal governments to plan for an environmentally and fiscally just tunnel to replace the aging elevated Gowanus Expressway, which has divided and polluted predominantly poor communities of color along the western Brooklyn corridor. I fought against the closure of Long Island College Hospital and have advocated for a better and more environmentally sensitive rezoning of the Gowanus area, and fought to close Rikers Island and revamp the Brooklyn House of Detention.

My experience as Democratic State Committeewoman and District Leader has given me insights into the political workings of our communities and the borough of Brooklyn. I also was one of the few people who stood up to party boss Vito Lopez, and I also worked hard for rules reform and to create the independent judicial screening panel. My career as a teacher of deaf and deaf-blind children and as a disability civil rights lawyer has given me an opportunity to serve and make a real difference in people's lives.

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. I fight tirelessly for my constituents to address their quality of life issues in the district, and I have had some key legislative wins this year. In the 2019 State Budget, I have ensured funding for a NYS Firearm Violence Research Institute to be housed at SUNY. I ensured design-build procurement for the repair of the triple

cantilever of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. Last session, I sponsored the campaign finance reform bill to close the LLC loophole and a gun violence prevention bill to establish Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO) a/k/a "red flag" law. The Governor signed both those bills within weeks of their passage.

I am also a staunch supporter of criminal justice reforms, the expansion of affordable housing, environmental justice, single payer health care, and women's rights and am pleased that the legislature instituted landmark reforms in each of those categories.

My vision is to ensure a vibrant community where people have access to affordable housing, accessible transit, quality education, child care, and good-paying jobs. I also envision a society where diversity is celebrated, and does not divide us. I have been a strong voice to ensure equality for women, people of color, immigrants, the LGBTQ community, and particularly the disability community.

2) If elected, what would be your top legislative priority in your first term?

My top legislative priority this year is to pass my bill to ensure that people who are incarcerated are screened for dyslexia and learning-related disabilities. People who are in prison and people of color have a higher rate of undiagnosed dyslexia. I have developed an excellent relationship with Ameer Baraka, who was diagnosed with dyslexia while he was in jail, learned to read, and is now a thriving activist and actor and has partnered with me on dyslexia advocacy. This bill would require that those persons incarcerated who do not have a high school diploma or GED are screened for being at risk for dyslexia. This bill is patterned after a similar provision in the federal First Step Act. In a similar vein, I will continue to fight for universal screening of children PreK - 2 for being at risk for dyslexia and to ensure that our colleges of education teach our educators how to teach reading.

I am also working to pass my bill which would require community notification and coordination when a hospital, emergency room, or maternity center plans to closes. A few of my other top priorities include automatic voter registration, ending solitary confinement, improving street safety and ensuring a more sustainable transit system. I have also been working very hard to build support for a new bill (A08064), sponsored by Assemblymember Harvey Epstein, that protects home care workers and their patients from unfair labor conditions and prohibits a 24-hour workday, splits up shifts, and caps hours at 50 hours a week so that home care workers and the people they care for are better protected.

3) What measures would you support to improve educational opportunities for all students in New York City? Please include how you would address the continued drop in Reading and Math scores and efforts to desegregate NYC schools.

I have long advocated for the full implementation of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) decision and for full funding for Foundation Aid. The state must uphold its obligation to ensure adequate funding to provide all students with a quality education. A sound education benefits students, their families and communities alike.

I believe strongly that class size matters a great deal and well-trained teachers make a huge difference in promoting learning. I also support quality professional development so as to support teachers, help them hone their skills and retain them in the system. A successful school system requires the development and retention of teachers. Otherwise we will lose good teachers from the system, which can only have a negative effect on student learning, educational outcomes, and college and career readiness.

When services and programs aren't adequately funded, students suffer and students in struggling schools and students with disabilities who require additional support suffer the most. I pioneered an annual Dyslexia Awareness Day at the Capitol, which has included a town hall speak out where we have heard from students, parents, teachers and advocates about their concerns. In 2017, I passed my dyslexia bill into law (A.8262), which helps more children learn to read because when children's learning disabilities are clearly defined, educational interventions can be tailored to meet their needs. I sponsor three bills that would go a long way to improving the literacy of our students and stop the school to prison pipeline: A.5259A which

provides for universal screening of PreK-2 in order to identify children who are at risk for dyslexia, A.6450 which would re-make teacher preparation at the college of education level by ensuring that preservice teachers are taught structured multi-sensory methods of teaching reading that align with the National Reading Panel's findings and recommendations; and A.7822 which would require that those persons incarcerated who do not have a high school diploma or GED are screened for being at risk for dyslexia.

While much of the efforts to desegregate schools must come from the city level, I have actively pushed to end segregation, including participating in the CEC District 15 middle school diversity planning process. I have also been an outspoken advocate to repeal the SHSAT test for specialized schools, since that is one of the few areas of school admissions for which the state does have oversight. Throughout my career as a disability rights lawyer, I have represented many individuals who have been denied reasonable accommodations for standardized tests, and have gained a significant understanding of these tests. The SHSAT is not a valid test and disproportionately impacts African American and Latinx students, and girls.

I also support Senator Montgomery's bill to ban suspensions for grades K-3, reduce suspensions for all grades, and use supportive interventions as a first resort.

4) What is your position on National Grid and the Williams Pipeline?

I have aggressively fought against the expansion of fracked gas pipelines, including the Williams Pipeline. I have encouraged DEC to disapprove it, testified at the NYS Public Service Commission (PSC) hearing, and have been vocal in the press. I also pressed the National Grid president directly in a meeting about their lack of notice on the moratorium, their focus on lobbying for a pipeline rather than planning and implementing efficiency measures, and the absurd bullying tactics they used to deny gas to residential customers and small businesses, in an effort to get customers to put pressure on state electeds to support the pipeline. I joined my colleagues to request that the PSC investigate the legitimacy of this moratorium, and I also asked the state Attorney General to investigate.

5) NYS passed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act this year. What is your position on the \$1 billion allocation which activists are requesting be put into the state budget this year?

I support this request wholeheartedly.

6) Do you support universal voting in NY? Do you support codifying Governor Cuomo's executive order granting a conditional pardon to people on parole, thereby restoring their right to vote?

I have been a vocal supporter of codifying his executive order into state law and cosponsor a bill to do so. I am also a proponent of voting reforms to make it easier for people to enroll and to vote. I am certainly open to discussing universal voting and what that would look like in New York.

7) What, if any, groups or types of people will you not accept campaign contributions from? If so, please note whose money you will not accept.

I have never taken money from the real estate development community. I did this long before it was fashionable. Since I first became a Democratic State Committee member (2004) and since I was elected to the Assembly five years ago, I have not taken donations from real estate development, corporate PACs or charter schools.

8) Do you support the work of the state's Public Finance Commission? Do you support any campaign finance reforms in NY State? If so, please describe.

I have long been a supporter of campaign finance reform and public financing of elections. I was also the main Assembly sponsor of the bill to close notorious LLC loophole, which finally passed last session. However, I have several concerns about the PCFC's recommendations, including campaign contribution limits (which were rightly lowered, but not enough) and their new restrictions on ballot access for minor parties.

I am extremely disappointed in the PCFC's recommendation to require 2% return for minor parties to have a ballot line, which would empower the Conservative party and eliminate or threaten other minor parties' ballot access.

Another feature in their proposal was to restrict matching contributions only to those coming from a candidate's district. However, in districts where the majority of constituents are people of low to moderate income, the likelihood of contributions from in-district donors is greatly decreased. In the City's public financing scheme, contributions from all New York City resident donors are matchable, so City Council candidates representing low to moderate income districts are not limited to contributions from their districts in order to qualify for matching funds. I had proposed a regional approach that more closely resembled the New York City approach.

9) The Census determines how critical resources and political power are distributed. NYS and NYC have historically been undercounted. What action can you take to ensure that New Yorkers, and in particular, members of immigrant communities, are counted? What outreach and educational activities do you have planned?

I have met with staff in the U.S. Census Bureau and staff in the Mayor's Office of the Census to coordinate outreach activities, featured the census at my recent Java with Jo Anne coffee talk series, published information in my newsletters, and am working with several community based groups and civic groups to get to hard to reach residents and plan follow-up for folks who do not first respond. Even though I conduct few mailings to save on paper and costs, I am planning a mailing on this effort as I believe it is warranted for folks who don't have email access or connections with CBOs.

10) The Supreme Court ruled in June that state legislatures can gerrymander political districts along partisan lines. How and by whom should political districts be drawn?

In my mind, political districts should be drawn by independent commissions and seek balance in the demographics of a district as well as a geographic cohesiveness. When one looks at the oddly shaped districts that exist in various places, it is clear that apart from the likely racial and economic considerations, where districts are oddly shaped, the people will be less able to develop a natural community connection within the district. Just look at the length of Sunset Park between 3rd - 4th Avenues in Sen. Myrie's district. It is designed to split the community between Senate districts.

11) Now that the Reproductive Health Act has passed, what is your next priority in increasing reproductive healthcare access and gender equality?

I am strongly pro-choice without restriction, believe that abortion is health care and worked for several years (1979-1981) as an abortion counselor at a clinic in Washington, DC.

I am currently working to expose fake "crisis pregnancy centers" including one in my district in the same building as Planned Parenthood (and I co-sponsor a bill in this area). I have been working with WHARR, NIRH, Planned Parenthood, and others on this effort.

Another priority is to pass the comprehensive sexuality education bill (A6512). I also cosponsor the New York Health Act, which would be critical for ensuring coverage of maternity care and reproductive health

care. I also cosponsor A8681 to create a public fund to financially assist low-income New Yorkers with abortion care expenses by allowing taxpayers to voluntarily contribute to the fund on their personal income tax returns.

I have fought Trump's gag rule on reproductive health care to change the Title X Family Planning Program and defund Planned Parenthood. I have been a leading voice to ensure that the state covers the loss in federal funding to our health care centers, including Planned Parenthood. I am also an active member of the Bipartisan Pro-Choice Legislative Caucus (BPCLC).

12) What actions would you take to promote safer and more efficient transportation options for pedestrians, cyclists, mass transit users, and drivers in Brooklyn?

The State has invested more in mass transit this past legislative session and passed congestion pricing (which I supported for over a decade), but we still need to invest much more to fix our subways and bus systems to encourage people to rely less on cars. I have been an advocate for two-way tolling on the Verrazano to reduce unnecessary traffic flow through Brooklyn. I am an avid supporter of speed camera expansion, expansion of bike lanes and increased cycling infrastructure, expansion of car share if the pilot proves successful, and responsible and safe street re-designs.

I carry a bill that would impose additional surcharge for cars parked in bike lanes. I also co-sponsor A7828 to require instruction in pedestrian and bicyclist safety as part of the drivers pre-licensing course. I am also a cosponsor of Assemblymember Carroll's bill (A3414) to suspend the registration of a vehicle which has been documented for traffic violations multiple times within a certain time period.

I recently joined transportation advocates to fight for more transparency from the MTA to build up trust with straphangers through the Build Trust Campaign. This campaign recommends four points for the oversight of the MTA capital program: to set the right, achievable priorities, get costs under control, be transparent and accountable, and make legislative oversight work for straphangers.

I also actively participated in the MTA NYCT's Brooklyn bus re-design, encouraged my constituents to participate, and also have advocated for bringing back the B71 bus line. Linking the transit-starved neighborhood of Red Hook to Crown Heights (and even lower Manhattan) through a new East-West bus route would provide a solid and accessible option for riders to go to work, school, medical visits, local businesses, or cultural institutions.

In addition, I am working with community members to bring issues of pedestrian safety to the fore. Stay tuned.

13) What policies do you support to ensure fairness in employment and workplace conditions, as well as strengthening and increasing access to unions?

Unions have been at the forefront of improving workplace standards, and I have regularly shown support for union organizing drives, contract campaigns, and strikes. I supported the fight for \$15 and I support the One Fair Wage Campaign to close the tipped minimum wage loophole in New York State. I am also currently working with a group of yoga instructors in my district to support their efforts to unionize. I am also very concerned about the misclassification as independent contractors in an attempt by employers to get around hourly wage requirements and to avoid providing workers with benefits and other protections. I cosponsor a bill to address this, but I am also in communication with freelance workers who wish to remain independent contractors and have raised legitimate concerns about this issue and I want to ensure that their concerns are

addressed.

I am a cosponsor of "safe staffing for quality care act" (A02954) to address the understaffing at hospitals and nursing homes. I also support a livable wage for part-time adjunct faculty; I was an adjunct professor for nearly two decades and understand their concerns well.

I have also worked hard to fight discrimination in the workforce in all its forms. I worked very closely with legal advocates and the bill sponsors to pass A8421, which expanded New York's laws to ensure that justice can be served when employment discrimination, including sexual harassment, occurs in the workplace.

14) What would you do to ensure access to affordable and quality housing for everyone in Brooklyn and statewide?

I was a co-sponsor of the Housing Stability Act, which enacted sweeping changes to our housing laws. I also cosponsor the good cause eviction bill.

I support setting aside a higher number of affordable units in new developments, and ensuring that units are set aside for homeless families and individuals. The state needs to end tax breaks to corporate developers like 421a and 485a, and fully fund repairs in NYCHA.

I have been on the most vocal legislators about the need to include real affordable housing in new developments. Too often, developers promise the community a benefit or a pathetic nod to affordable housing so they can build out of scale developments that line their pockets and end up increasing the rents in the area, pushing out people of color and people with low incomes. I have stood up to these developers time and time again, from Atlantic Yards to the recently approved 80 Flatbush skyscraper. I am not anti-development per se, but believe strongly that the community must not only be involved, but their voices must be heard and addressed, and they should be at the table from a project's inception, such as the Boerum Hill community was with the Hoyt Schermerhorn project.

15) What are your views on criminal justice reform issues, such as (but not limited to) police accountability, legalization of marijuana, and ending solitary confinement?

I have been an active supporter of criminal justice reforms and an end to mass incarceration. I supported the package of criminal justice reforms that were included in last year's budget, and I remain committed to our bail reforms, despite calls to chip away at them.

I cosponsor the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (A1617B), the HALT bill to end the atrocious policy of solitary confinement (A2500), and a repeal of 50a of the civil rights law that prevents the public from accessing law enforcement records of misconduct and discipline. I also cosponsor the Police Statistics & Transparency (STAT) Act (A05472) which would make statistical information regarding interactions with police available to the public, the Fair and Timely Parole Act (A4346A), and the Elder Parole Bill.