

**At Large Councilmember Candidate Questionnaire**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the 2022 Ward 7 Democrats Candidate Forum for candidates in the Democratic Primary for the **At-Large Councilmember**. Below is a pre-Forum questionnaire that will give you the opportunity to expand on your position and goals in depth and afford our membership the opportunity to truly understand your positions.

Please respond no later than 11:59pm on Friday, February 18, 2022. **Timely completion and submission of this questionnaire is a prerequisite to participate in the Candidate Forum.**

**Candidate Information**

Your responses will be posted on the Ward 7 Dems webpage. Please provide a headshot of the candidate.

Candidate Name: Nate Fleming

Candidate website: NateforDC.com

Candidate Twitter: https://twitter.com/NateforDC
Candidate IG: NateforDC

Candidate Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/nathanbennettfleming

General Questions

1. What makes you the right selection for the Democratic nomination for At-Large Councilmember

I am the right choice for the Democratic nomination for At-Large councilmember because I have a combination of background and experience that uniquely qualifies me for the position. I was born and raised in Washington, DC and DC is very close to my heart. I have also been trained to become a public servant through my educational pursuits. I attended Morehouse College and then went on to attend law school at the University of California at Berkeley. I also studied at the University of Pennsylvania in pursuit of my doctorate in higher education and I studied public policy at the Harvard University Kennedy School. My educational background has equipped me with the knowledge and skills needed to serve effectively as a DC At-Large Councilmember.

Additionally, I have more than a decade of experience working professionally in the interests of the residents of the District of Columbia. From 2013-2015, I served as the United States Shadow Representative to Congress for the District of Columbia and for the past five years I have worked at the DC Council as a Legislative Director and as a Committee Director. These experiences have allowed me to gain a deep understanding of the inner workings of the DC Council and will help me to be more effective when I am elected as councilmember.

1. As an At-Large Councilmember, what steps would you take to ensure that you are able to meet the needs of the residents of Ward 7?

I am especially sensitive to the needs of Ward 7 because not only do I live in Ward 7 currently (in the Deanwood neighborhood), but I also lived in Ward 7 for the first half of my childhood. To make sure that I am able to meet the needs of the residents of Ward 7, I am talking to the residents and leaders of Ward 7 directly. I firmly believe that Ward 7 residents know their needs and how those needs can be met better than anyone else. So far, Ward 7 residents have expressed concerns about public safety, housing affordability, and education. These are some of the same issues that concern residents in other parts of the city, but these issues deserve more attention in Ward 7 in particular because Ward 7 is sometimes overlooked when resources are allocated and initiatives are launched.

1. How can Councilmembers better connect with communities that have lost faith in the ability of the government to solve problems?

Councilmembers can better connect with communities that have lost faith in the ability of the government to solve problems by working hard to regain public trust. This means being responsible, honest, and accountable to the people of DC. It also means delivering tangible results that people can see making a difference in their daily lives. When I knock on the doors of DC Residents as part of my campaign operation, I listen to the reasons why some residents have lost faith in the ability of government to solve problems. Washingtonians have lost faith in the ability of the government to solve problems because they are experiencing unnecessary hardships that could have been prevented through appropriate government action. As councilmember, I will push for the kinds of government reforms that will ultimately restore public trust in government.

***Invest in place-based programming and services.***

* Create a series of community events that create safe outdoor events in areas by reclaiming public spaces impacted by violence that are accessible for all community members. Events occur weekly to promote community cohesion and provide positive activities during evening and weekend hours.
* Engage with communities to identify use cases for vacant parcels in neighborhoods impacted by violence, either for targeted investment (e.g., parks improvements or additional lighting, etc.) or for redevelopment in the form of tree planting, sustainable clean-up, community programming, etc. to help revitalize some of the city’s most underserved communities.
1. How would you describe an effective relationship of the Council Chair and other At-Large members with Ward 7?

An effective relationship of the Council Chair and other At-Large Councilmembers requires a highly skilled and responsive constituent services department. Sometimes councilmembers get sidetracked working on legislation or become so wrapped up in politics that they neglect the day-to-day concerns of their constituents. I think this can especially be an issue for At-Large councilmembers because their constituent base consists of DC residents from all wards. As Councilmember, I will ensure that my constituent services team pays close attention to inquiries and complaints from DC residents living in all eight of DC’s wards, and underserved wards in particular.

Education

1. Do you believe the per pupil formula is adequate? If so, why? If not, how would you modify the per pupil formula to ensure that all schools are sufficiently funded and facilitate equitable outcomes in communities in Ward 7 and Ward 8?

I believe the per pupil formula can be improved upon. The idea of ensuring that every student has an equal amount of money from the government for their education is a good base concept. However, as the formula already recognizes, some pupils need more resources than others due to coming from families that are struggling financially or other reasons like needing assistance with limited English proficiency. The other issue is that the formula needs to provide a solution for schools that experience drops in enrollment. Many schools that lose funding on account of enrolling less pupils using the per pupil funding formula need additional resources to fill the gaps left by the departure of certain students.

1. What legislative tools would you advance to improve the ability of the Council to recruit and retain quality teachers?

Teacher recruitment and retention is largely an issue of teaching and learning conditions inside schools. Of course, providing teachers with adequate compensation and generous bonuses when warranted is also an important part of demonstrating our appreciation for their hard work and sacrifice. During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers have been faced with many new obstacles to overcome. For example, the COVID-19 virus itself presents a danger inside classrooms to the health of teachers, students, and their families. Therefore, if we expect to recruit and retain teachers, we have to make sure classrooms are safe and proper precautions are in place to prevent transmission of the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools should be following public health guidelines regarding indoor mask wearing, frequent testing, social distancing, and quarantining after testing positive.

1. How could the Council exercise more effective oversight over DCPS?

More effective oversight of DCPS could be achieved by relinquishing mayoral control over the Office of State Superintendent of Education. This would prevent executive mayoral decisions from overriding the voices of parents and students when making decisions for DCPS Schools. The Council could also implement more compliance and auditing requirements to ensure that student progress is being tracked routinely.

1. How could the Council exercise more effective oversight over the Public Charter School ecosystem?

The Council could exercise more effective oversight over the Public Charter School ecosystem by holding more meetings of the Council committee that oversees public charter schools that are specifically dedicated to problems uniquely faced by charter schools.

1. Are there any intervention programs you believe should be enhanced or expanded? Are there any that should be curtailed or terminated?

Early intervention initiatives directed at children younger than 3-years-old need to be expanded, and this is particularly true for students with developmental disabilities as research shows that early intervention can make a tremendous difference in life outcomes of these children.

Economic Development and Housing

1. Ward 7 hosts a disproportionately high percentage of vacant and dilapidated buildings and vacant lots. How would you address this issue without inadvertently depriving middle income families of a rare asset?

Grant programs can be used to revitalize these vacant and dilapidated buildings and provide spaces for entrepreneurs to open businesses and restaurants. Grant programs can also be used to transform these properties into affordable rental properties. None of these grant programs would deprive middle income families of their assets.

1. The DC Housing Authority and its Board faced significant challenges in 2021. What changes, if any, are needed to sustain and increase affordable and public housing in DC? Are there any decisions on the allocation of affordable units that deserve closer scrutiny?

The funds in the Housing Production Trust Fund are not being properly allocated. These funds are currently being used largely to support the development of housing for individuals and families with incomes up to 80% of DC’s median income. However, these funds were intended to expand housing stock for individuals and families earning less than 30% of DC’s median income. In addition to redirecting the funds of the Housing Production Trust Fund to Affordable Housing, we also need to expand rent control by increasing the number of properties covered under rent control.

Public Safety

1. The District of Columbia is experiencing a general decline in crime, but a spike in murder. What would you identify as the core causes of this spike and what legislative tools would you suggest that could stop the increase and address the root causes?

The core cause of the spike of crime is the crisis facing youth and young adults who are native to Washington. Below are risk factors and mitigating factors for violence:

**Risk Factors and Factors that Reduce Violence:**

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| **Risk Factors for Violence** | **Factors that Reduce Violence** |
| High Concentration of Poverty | Economic Stability |
| Communities that have high concentration of poverty and unemployment are likely to deal with violent crimes at a higher rate, which increases the risk of violence for neighboring residents. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased unemployment rates in Washington, DC and especially in Ward 8, which has exacerbated the issue. | Availability of quality employment options and skill building trainings, access to capital, and opportunities to earn a living wage can help stabilize the economic structure in many communities, promoting healthy living and wellness, and decreasing rates of poverty. |
| Exposure to Trauma and Violence | Access to Comprehensive Support Services |
| Exposure to violence or other traumatic experiences, especially during childhood, can have significant long-term developmental effects. Exposure to trauma increases the likelihood of perpetuating or being victimized by violence in the future. Traumatic experiences can have a negative impact on the person’s life, including their ability to focus, maintain a job or relationships, or meaningfully participate in society. | Higher proportions of trauma-informed support services in communities at highest risk of violence have been shown to be vital in improving life outcomes, including decreased exposure to violence. The impact of trauma can be mitigated in part by offering pathways to healing and more fruitful opportunities. People who have direct access to resources and tools that are necessary to cope with trauma are more likely to find alternatives to behaviors that may lead to violence. |
| Unsafe Community Environment | Enhanced Positive Community Connections |
| Residents of communities that have high crime rates, an active drug trade, easy access to firearms, and/or strained relationships with law enforcement are at increased risk of violence. Communities that lack investment or opportunities to form connections with neighbors can also experience an escalation in violence. | Enhanced positive connections, involvement, and cohesion in one’s community may increase overall safety. Furthermore, communities with decreased proximity to firearms may experience decreased rates of gun violence. |
| Physically and Financially Unstable Housing | Access to Stable and Affordable Housing |
| Housing instability, insecurity, and lack of affordability has a significant impact on risk of violence as reliable and cost-effective living is a necessity to maintaining a safe and healthy space to live and thrive. With the advent of gentrification, this issue has been exacerbated by a decrease of affordable and public housing, which has contributed to segregation, displacement, and unstable communities. | Access to safe, stable, and affordable housing can increase the quality of life for individuals and communities and enhance the connection between individuals and their communities. Improving housing standards and options can work to decrease high rates of violence. |
| Lack of Social Networks and Support Systems | Positive Social Networks and Support Systems |
| Negative peer relations, including being bullied, being socially isolated, or having a social circle that engages in delinquent, illegal, or violent activities can increase one’s risk for violence. The social isolation can also result in individuals seeking out negative peer networks, such as neighborhood-based crews. The isolation and lack of in-person peer interactions due to government shutdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this issue. In addition, prior contact or involvement in the legal system can prevent many from creating positive social networks and support systems. | Involvement in strong social peer groups that avoid violent behavior can lead to greater stability, as can having mentor-protege relationships that can serve as both a space of enhancing positive interpersonal development and further exposure to new and positive opportunities. |
| Lack of Quality Healthcare Services | Access to Quality Healthcare Services |
| The Ward 8 community suffers from a lack of access to healthcare, including having just one hospital and not enough mental health facilities. This prevents people from having a direct connection to necessary care after experiencing illness or injury and makes it difficult for those who need care to seek it. When physical and mental health conditions go untreated and undiagnosed, it deteriorates community health overall and can lead to an increase in violence in the community. | Access to various quality healthcare services and treatments can promote healthy living and wellness. In addition, an increase in hospitals and other medical care treatment centers, especially centered around behavioral and mental health, can promote a higher standard of life for communities and neighborhoods. |
| Lack of Quality Educational Resources and Activities | Access to Quality Educational Options |
| Lack of access to quality educational options and disengagement in school and extracurricular activities correlate with increased risk for violence. Lack of education can limit access to jobs, living wages and other resources, which may be associated with involvement in engaging in illegal activities for profit and potential violence. | Access to quality educational options, activities, and resources, along with strong connection and relationship building between students, teachers, counselors, and administrators can improve stability and culture. This access can provide students with necessary skills, abilities, and spaces to have positive and healthy life outcomes. |
| Negative Household Environment and Family Relationships | Positive Family Structures and Relationships |
| These risk factors can contribute to low levels of family involvement or support, neglect, or abuse, which can have long-lasting negative developmental effects. Many additional household environment factors such as a family member’s involvement in the legal system or having parents with low education levels can also affect risk level for violence, which contributes to emotional, financial, and community instability. | Nurturing and secure family structures and relationships are vital to decreasing the risk of violence in communities. Families can provide the personal and emotional support needed for people, especially for those dealing with trauma, to lead healthy lives. It helps maintain positive connection to their communities and creates safe spaces for expression and development. The definition of “family” can include not just biological, but also neighbors, mentors, peers, teachers, and other trusted and supportive community members. |
| Systemic Racism | Equity-Focused Investments |
| Systemic racism is at the center of various issues that affect Ward 8 as seen through many issues, such as disproportionately high incarceration rates, slow service response times by police, concentrated areas of high poverty, and lack of quality education. The historical context of systemic racism plays a vital role in the disengagement and lack of access to many important resources needed in communities like Ward 8 and play an overarching role in the aspects that cause violence in communities. | Investments into communities that are focused on equity can be key to providing a better overall community and works to fix the inequities due to structural racism and discrimination. These investments on a program, community or individual level can enhance the stability of those directly impacted and can be targeted to meet the specific needs of those that it encounters. Further investment, be it financial or programmatic, can decrease violence by offering more opportunities and more concern to the well-being and development of the community and its stakeholders. |

1. What would you recommend that the Committee on Public Safety and Justice do to improve oversight over MPD?

Bridging the gap between the community and law enforcement is crucial in ensuring public safety. DC maintains a Police Complaints Board (PCB), which oversees the Office of Police Complaints (OPC) and is empowered to conduct periodic reviews and make recommendations to the Mayor, the Council, and the Chiefs of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and DC Housing Authority’s Office of Public Safety (OPS). I recognize the importance of the PCB and will enhance and increase the responsibilities of the board to better improve of the citizen complaint process or elements of the two police departments’ recruitment, training, evaluation, discipline, and supervision of police officers.

We plan to increase intervention activities that focus on interrupting the cycle of violence and focusing on those who are at highest risk of violence either as a perpetrator or a victim and including those who are returning from incarceration. A comprehensive street outreach network and victim support network are key elements of intervention. We want to include key intervention practices such as behavioral health services, living wage jobs, and most importantly, relentless engagement with those who are at the highest risk of violence involvement, all of which can support them in living safe and productive lives.

***Increase a relationship-based approach to policing***

Relationship-based policing that sees community as true partners in crafting safety is necessary to build trust and ultimately strengthens police legitimacy which in turn contributes to reducing violence. From responding to violent incidents to solving crime, effective policing is rooted in community-police partnership. While each neighborhood is unique in its combination of assets and needs, which requires a tailored approach, each of the four key components must be present at a scale that meets the needs of the community. To reach scale, each component must be available and accessible for each and every neighborhood impacted by violence. This plan points out ways in which all public, private, and community stakeholders and resources must be organized and mobilized to bring change. It is a call to action that we must set aside our differences and find ways to connect and seek solutions. Nothing less than an “all hands on deck” effort will bring peace to the streets, hope for our children, and a brighter future for the ward.

***Increase opportunities for DC born residents to serve in Metropolitan Police Department***

A key element of increasing relational policing in the District can be met if we increase opportunities for DC born residents and residents from communities at risk of violence can serve as members of the MPD. We currently have the cadet program that we suggest should be doubled and the investments into high school cadet programs must be fully funded and realized.

 ***Increase capacity and service quality of gun violence, domestic violence, diversion, and victim services programs***

* Building on best practices and coordinating with street outreach services, we must invest $1.5 million in developing a network of trauma-informed victim services organizations to ensure individuals impacted by violence have access to resources and supports they need.
* Street outreach expansion and capacity building for smaller community-based organizations.
* Create an RFP for an opportunity to fund up several organizations to expand access to high-quality, trauma-informed mental health services in communities of high need.
* Expand opportunities for youth-designed programs and campaigns, and youth-led advocacy related to gun violence and domestic violence.
* Improve and expand the support services to which youth are connected at Department of Youth and Rehabilitation Services (DYRS)
* Expand investments in violence prevention services to ensure that the footprint of violence interventions in the community match the scale and scope of the problem and need.
* Current diversion programs should be streamlined and coordinated so that residents with severe mental health challenges can be identified to inform the response to incidents in which these residents are involved in.
1. What legislative tools would you create or modify to reduce recidivism and reintegrate Returning Citizens into our communities?

***Reducing recidivism through the incarceration to incorporation program***

Fifty percent of the District’s returning citizens are unemployed. Additionally, fifty percent are back in prison within three years. The [Incarceration to Incorporation Entrepreneurship Program](http://lims.dccouncil.us/Legislation/B21-0463) (IIEP) Act is one way the District could constructively address this important issue. The program will educate, train, and assist returning citizens in becoming socially responsible entrepreneurs through the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Greater Economic Opportunity, Department of Employee Services (DOES), and the Department of Small and Local Business Development.

Jobs and Employment

1. What legislative tools would you create or modify to increase the percentage of District employees that reside in the District of Columbia?

We must ensure that the city is affordable for District employees. I would expand homeownership assistance for DC employees who purchase in DC and expand outreach so employees are aware of the program. We should also create living and working villages for our District employees including teachers, police, and DC FEMS personnel so they can live in our communities and serve simultaneously.

1. The unemployment rate in Ward 7 is 14%. What legislative tools would you create or modify to improve the ability of the District to restore these residents to the workforce?

***Create a new year-round employment program for youth and young adults***

We need a transformative jobs program for young adults that will be a key part of our public safety strategy. We should create a program where we create government projects that we can put our young adults to work to accomplish. We can create an infrastructure training program that will certify the young adults to participate on private construction projects but we can mandate that anyone that uses government funds to build must use workers that are trained from this program. In house-work and maintenance that is contracted out by agencies such as DGS can also be done by these workers.

We could create an arts-based track for young adult jobs from our program. I also think we should create mentorship/youth work, recreation, and education jobs with this program. Finally, we can have workers that are disbursed out to local nonprofits to supplement and strengthen the work of our community groups and nonprofits.

***Secure funding for the St. Elizabeth’s Opportunity and Innovation Hub to connect Ward 7 residents to high quality jobs***

We need an Opportunity Center and Innovation Hub that will provide Ward 7 residents access to an array of job-related services, resources and training in one convenient location in Ward 7. At the Opportunity Center, residents will be able to obtain career counseling and planning, resume assistance, direct job placement, information about local and national labor markets, and unemployment compensation.

The innovation center should contain co-working space and resources for entrepreneurs and small businesses. In addition, a nonprofit incubator should be on the site to increase the capacity of Ward 7 nonprofit organizations.