



**Queens Central Democratic Club**

Candidate Endorsement Questionnaire 2020

District Leader for the 28th Assembly District

Thank you for applying for the Queens Central Democratic Club (QCDC) endorsement. If you have any questions about this document or the endorsement process, feel free to email us at [qcdcny@gmail.com](mailto:qcdcny@gmail.com). Please email us the completed questionnaire by Sunday May 17th.

Full Name: Maria Kaufer

1. What is the single most important issue to you as a candidate for District Leader? Why?

The single most important issue to me as a candidate for District Leader is the undemocratic, top-down, and cliquish political system and culture of the Queens Democratic Organization. If we are to recruit, support, and elect the best possible political leaders to serve the people, the political structure and culture of our county Democratic party should instead practice and promote participatory democracy by all Queens Democrats for all Queens Democrats!

2. What endorsements do you have from elected officials, political organizations, unions and community leaders?

I have not and do not actively pursue campaign endorsements because, to me, the only endorsements that count are my constituents' votes in the primary election. I would like for AD 28 Part A Democrats to vote for me because, after considering my record of 11 years as a New York City public education advocate, 3-1/2 years as a political activist and organizer not just in AD 28 but across the City, and life-long commitment to serving and advocating for my family, neighbors and community, they have independently and thoughtfully judged that I am the best candidate to serve as their female district representative on the Queens Democratic Organization's Executive Committee. This way, when they elect me as their Female District Leader, my constituents will know and trust that I am fully committed to advocating for democracy at the local level - that I will work tirelessly as an unpaid, lead community and political organizer who will actively engage with, listen to, advocate for, and empower them to work with me and other elected public and party officials to advocate for the civic and political needs of AD 28 Part A's Democrats.

That being said, a national youth political organization, a few Manhattan Democratic Party District Leaders, and many community leaders (within and outside AD 28) have expressed unsolicited, personal endorsements of my campaign and/or have offered to me opportunities to seek endorsements by the organizations in which they are active



members. With the exception of QCDC, many of whose members would be my constituents, I have not engaged in any organization's formal endorsement process nor have I published the endorsements by elected officials and community leaders for my campaign because, rather than use my volunteer time in pursuit of endorsements, I have chosen to campaign by continuing to do what I have actively and organically done for the past 3+ years - acting as I believe a small "d" democracy-committed District Leader should act. I have continued to spend countless volunteer hours organizing, recruiting, educating, and supporting County Committee Member candidates from all parts of Queens to run for office; forming coalitions with grassroots activists and organizers across the borough to organize, recruit, guide, and support State Committee, Judicial Delegate, and District Leader candidates to run for office; petitioning and canvassing for Democratic party and public office candidates; organizing, promoting, and/or participating in press conferences, rallies and other actions to promote a healthy democracy (e.g., December 30, 2019 #LetQNSdecide press conference and rally; March 13, 2020 #SafetyOverSignatures virtual press conference and rally); organizing candidate forums (e.g., November 23, 2019 Queens Borough President candidate forum and May 24, 2020 Queens BP virtual candidate forum hosted by Queens Coordination Council and Queens Community House); facilitating the registration of new voters, helping get out the vote (GOTV), and promoting submission of 2020 Census forms by disseminating information on general election-related matters and breaking news, election dates, and forms submission deadlines in person at a safe physical distance, on social media, and by electronic mail; recruiting new members for AD 28 Democratic clubs; and attending and participating in almost every meeting held by both QCDC and GAF Democratic clubs.

3. If elected, what changes would you bring to being District Leader that may differ from any of your predecessors?

If/when I am elected District Leader, I aim to establish a truly democratic Queens Democratic Party, one that actually practices the democratic values of transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and accessibility. In order to build this democratic, bottom-up, participatory political structure and culture, I will work with my District Leader and County Committee colleagues to make the constructive changes that are listed in my answer to question 5 below.

4. Some district leaders opt to create their own democratic clubs. If elected, do you intend to create your own democratic club separate from QCDC? Why or why not?

I can envision both scenarios, actively maintaining/participating in an existing local Democratic club on the one hand and founding a brand new Democratic club on the other. Before I do anything I will discuss the matter with my constituents and together we will decide what AD 28 Democrats want to do. Since I plan to regularly meet with my constituents (at least once a month), we would likely use existing structures, the existing



Democratic clubs of QCDC and/or GAF, to organize our political activities at the beginning of my term in office. I imagine that the decision to start a new Democratic club in AD 28 would depend on our success in attempting to make the existing club/clubs more functional vis-a-vis our club's mission and goals as decided by members at the beginning of my tenure.

5. What reforms do you believe the Queens County Democratic party needs to institute? How will you help institute them?

As a signatory to Queens County Committee for All's (QCC4ALL) April 4, 2019 open letter to the Queens Democratic Organization's Executive Committee Chairperson Gregory Meeks, I fully support the institution of the letter's proposed 51 specific reforms which were designed to not only redress the deficiencies and abuses of power encoded in the Rules of the Queens Democratic Organization, but to establish and promote a culture of democracy, transparency, accountability, inclusivity and accessibility in the County Committee of the Democratic Organization of Queens County (the official political structure of the Queens Democratic Party). A summary of these constructive changes is listed below. Each topic is explained in detail in the letter along with proposals for how party leaders can help to institute the reforms. I encourage all Democrats to read the letter [Open Letter to Chairperson Meeks - Queens County Committee for All](#)

- **Outreach & Communications** to the Committee membership and general public must involve voter education and engagement across Queens as well as on social media.
- The organization's **Website** must provide Committee members and the general public with information about the County Committee organization, the activities of the Democratic Party in Queens, and empower Democrats to participate in the political process.
- **Queens County Committee** must adopt **Eligibility** requirements and **Term Limits** as specified below.
- **Meetings** of the full County Committee must take place at least once every six months (and not just once a term), and **Procedures** must be amended to facilitate the adoption of new business and to allow for the active participation of membership.
- **Finances** must be reported and an **Ethics Committee** created. Committee Members must participate in **Filling Vacancies for Public Office**. A robust process for **Judicial Nominations** is required with multiple nominees per vacancy.



- **Committee Members** and **District Leaders** must meet regularly to discuss Committee Business. The activities of the **Executive Committee** must be made accessible to Committee Members, along with voting records of District Leaders and officers of the Executive Committee.
  - **Primary Elections** must be conducted in a transparent and fair manner without endorsement of candidates.
6. Do you believe transparency is an issue with District Leaders? If so, what would you do to increase transparency of the position and decision-making process?

Absolutely! Lack of transparency is embedded in the practices and culture of the Queens Democratic Party. My answer to question 5 above states the actions that I believe should be taken to reform the undemocratic culture and modus operandi of our county Democratic party as a whole. In terms of increasing transparency in the District Leader position and decision-making process itself, I think that improving/increasing communication among District Leaders, County Committee Members, and the general public as well as making the activities of the Executive Committee, including the voting records of District Leaders and officers of the Executive Committee, accessible to County Committee members, and conducting primary elections in a fair and transparent manner without endorsement of candidates (bullet points 1, 2, 6, and 7 in my answer to question 5 above) will greatly increase the transparency of District Leader activities.

7. Please identify a time when you have disagreed with the Queens County Democratic party. What did/would you do to work through this disagreement?

There are several examples of specific disagreements but I will focus on the bigger picture. I wholeheartedly disagree with the undemocratic, top-down, and closed/cliqish political system and culture of the Queens Democratic Party, which are codified in the Rules of the Queens Democratic Organization. When a new Executive Committee Chairperson was elected in February 2019, those of us rookie County Committee Members committed to practicing the small "d" democratic values of transparency, accountability, inclusivity and accessibility, saw it as an opportunity to work with a new county leader to establish a more democratic, bottom-up, and open/participatory political system and culture. So we painstakingly reviewed the County Committee Rules, researched and brainstormed solutions, and composed our QCC4ALL April 4, 2019 open letter to Chairperson Meeks. We hand delivered the letter to the Queens County Democratic County Committee offices, right here on Austin Street in Forest Hills, on April 4th of last year.

After almost 3 months of following up to schedule a meeting with Chairperson Meeks, about half of the QCC4ALL signatories were finally able to meet with Mr. Meeks, who



was accompanied by one of the Queens Democratic Party's lawyers, Michael Reich, as well as District Leader Patrick Jenkins (who sat behind all of the County Committee Members) on July 22, 2019 at 6:00 PM. Unfortunately, it became clear that our Executive Committee Chairperson had neither read our letter nor the Queens Democratic County Committee's Rules (to be fair, most Queens Democrats, including District Leaders and County Committee Members, have likely never read the Rules) and "his attorney" Michael Reich kept arguing with QCC4ALL members about what was in the Rules (e.g., after finally finding a copy of the Rules, Mr. Reich was forced to admit that we were right about there being no District Leader responsibilities stated in the Rules).

Despite the frustrating and unproductive nature of our meeting with Mr. Meeks and Mr. Reich, we QCC4ALL members kept the faith and continued to call for reforms. Some of us, myself obviously included, decided that since our Executive Committee Chairperson, District Leaders, and their lawyers (Sweeney, Reich, & Bolz) were not open to hearing what we had to say, we would have to run for District Leader positions ourselves if there was to be any hope that necessary reforms would be implemented. So here I am, working to earn your support in our campaign to gain entry into the room where important Queens Democratic Party decisions are made that greatly impact the lives of each and everyone one of us as well as the lives of our families, neighbors and friends.

8. Why are you uniquely qualified to represent us as District Leader?

I am uniquely qualified to represent the Democrats of AD 28 Part A for the following reasons:

1. My roots in the AD 28 community run deep. I am a 28-year resident of Forest Hills, having moved here in July 1992 as a newlywed. My husband spent the first 4 years of his life growing up in Forest Hills in the mid-1960s until his family moved to Manhattan. My son graduated from our local public schools, PS 101 and Russell Sage JHS 190, until he started attending his current public high school in Long Island City, Academy of American Studies. I worked two part-time jobs when my son was in elementary school, one of which was at LIJ-Forest Hills Hospital, so I could have some flexibility in my schedule. While he was a student at PS 101 and Russell Sage, I was very active in public education volunteer service and advocacy, serving on the PA/PTA Executive Board and/or SLT of his community schools as well as one term on CEC 28 from 2015-2017. I currently serve on the SLT of my son's high school. One noteworthy accomplishment of my tenure as a parent leader was when my fellow parent leaders and I tenaciously fought for 6 years to keep a physically and verbally abusive tenured teacher from returning to teach in a classroom at PS 101. That teacher finally retired last year,



never again assigned his own elementary school classroom after we committed to protecting the young grade school students of PS 101.

2. I very much represent many of my AD 28 neighbors and can relate to their lived experiences. I am a 48-year resident of Queens, having immigrated as a child with my family to Flushing from the Philippines in May 1972 to escape the pending political dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. Since I'm the eldest child and could after one year in the U.S. speak English without a "foreign" accent, my role was to act as the liaison/advocate for my family when any issues came up that needed verbal communication with our neighbors or organizations/agencies, especially if the communication was by telephone. I attended my community public schools until I attended the citywide Bronx High School of Science. Bronx Science was a life-changing experience for me as I was exposed to students and staff from all walks of life who lived in diverse communities all over NYC that were very different from Flushing and Queens. I was fortunate to fund my undergraduate college experience at NYU with a generous student aid academic scholarship. And because I lived in New York City during the 1980s and 1990s, it was fairly easy for me to secure corporate jobs in the investment banking and corporate law industries, at Morgan Stanley and Arnold & Porter, respectively. In 1993, I decided to change careers and went back to school to study Nutrition and Dietetics, and earned my Registered Dietitian credential in 1999. I haven't looked back since! I have thoroughly enjoyed using what I learned in school as well as continuing education classes, to help my patients throughout the life cycle to improve their nutritional and overall health status. Currently, I'm a member of the "sandwich generation" that acts as caregiver for my elderly parents as well as my child.
3. Like many of my middle-aged women peers across the country who were previously less politically engaged due to work, family and civic/community commitments, after the election of Donald Trump as POTUS in November of 2016, my community service and advocacy took more of a political bent as my friends and I knew that we had to do everything we could to make the Blue Wave 2018 and No IDC movement successful. I mastered a lot of steep activism learning curves, and found political volunteerism psychologically and emotionally rewarding. While not 100%, our small "d" democracy movement's successes have encouraged and inspired me to stay the course and continue to fight for a more just and truly democratic Queens Democratic Party.
4. Lastly, because when I commit to a mission I give it my all, I have proven my political leadership bona fides and passionate commitment to the political reform movement. I have been a very active political organizer these past 3 years, serving as one of the Queens Borough Directors of Amplify Her NYC and this year on AH's Executive Board as the Treasurer; one of the founders and core leaders of QCC4ALL that organized, recruited, trained, and supported/continue



to support close to 150 County Committee candidates across Queens this year; one of the founders and organizers of Queens Coordination Council, which serves as a civic and political information and event sharing space as well as event hosts upon request; am not only a New Reformers-supported candidate for District Leader but helped to recruit District Leader, State Committee, and Judicial Delegate candidates across the borough and started serving on the New Reformers Board a couple of months ago. In addition to these official leadership roles in grassroots political organizations, I also personally petition and canvass for individual political candidates and, due to my professional training and career as a Registered Dietitian and Certified Diabetes Educator, I occasionally volunteer to work on projects that address food insecurity and promote health and wellness (e.g., advocated with the Lunch 4 Learning campaign for free universal school meals in NYC public schools; organized with Community Food Advocates and organizer Nuala O'Doherty-Naranjo to advocate for passage of the Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) plan).