



Queens Central Democratic Club
Candidate Endorsement Questionnaire 2021
New York City Council District 29

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. Please email us the completed questionnaire by Friday, March 12.

Full Name: Eliseo D Labayen

1. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a large number of businesses closed their storefronts in our district. As Council Member for CD29, what is your plan to bring back businesses to our storefronts? Additionally, how do you plan to support the storefronts that already exist?

If elected, I first plan on a revival and expansion of the Love Your Local grant program. Originally this program gave a total of 40 struggling small businesses \$90,000 each across the city. I want to expand that program 100x so that we provide 4,000 struggling small businesses \$90,000 each. Our small businesses employ hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers; we need to provide a real commitment to these businesses who have suffered through no fault of their own.

Second, I want to pursue an expansion of the DSBS budget. It is one of the least funded agencies in the city receiving less than \$250 million a year in a budget of over \$90 billion. Going forward, we need to ensure that this agency has the capacity to carry out its mission of "creating stronger businesses and building thriving neighborhoods across the five boroughs". As of now, this Department and its capability are in name only.

Third, I want to pursue an office of small business liaisons within the DSBS. We need an office that can shepherd small businesses away from unnecessary penalties and fines that prevent them from investing in capital upgrades and their workforce. Under an expansion of the DSBS budget, this office will be properly staffed to give individual businesses the attention they deserve. Any office that mirrors that function today has clearly failed to deliver in that role.

Finally, President Biden's American Rescue Plan was just signed into law. The billions of dollars that will be set aside for small businesses in addition to the robust expansion of funding for vaccination distributions will provide a boon to our local economy this spring and summer.

2. The Mayor and DOE Chancellor just announced that they will be disbanding the gifted and talented program in NYC Public Schools. Do you agree with this cut? Why or why not?

I disagree with this decision by the mayor and DOE chancellor. Our next mayor and DOE chancellor need to focus on expanding G&T program seats and admissions criteria so that more children have access across the city. Our focus needs to be on providing every student with a rigorous education that will prepare them for college and beyond.



In addition to expanding G&T, and honors programs we need to do better on a brick-and-mortar level. There are still numerous schools that suffer from lead exposure in their water and paint. In the summer of 2019, an investigation by WNYC and Gothamist led to the eventual discovery that dozens of schools across Queens tested positive for dangerously high levels of lead exposure putting children at risk of anemia, damage to the nervous system, and brain damage. 0 should be the acceptable level of lead found in our school's water; not 15 ppb, not 5 ppb, zero. If elected, removing lead from all our district schools would be a top priority.

Renewed investments are also needed on college accessibility and readiness. I propose the hiring of two full time college access counselors for every high school that does not already have them. These full-time counselors will ensure that the next graduating class has the attention they need in vital areas like

- Visiting college campuses & speaking with professors
- Choosing a major in a highly sought-after field
- Constructing a manageable course-load in their field of study
- State & Federal tuition assistance requirements
- Filling out FAFSA forms
- The dangers of student loan debt

I believe in expanding access to programs like CUNY ASAP, empowering the Office of Postsecondary Readiness within the DOE, and expanding access to the gifted and talented program. Cutting honors programs, the forced busing of students, and reducing academic standards is not the answer.

3. We have seen our neighbors suffer from food insecurity unlike any other point in recent memory. How will you work with NYC to provide emergency food services to our neighbors (particularly seniors) and support to our food pantries such as Masbia, Queens Community House, and Commonpoint Queens?

Throughout the pandemic I have had the pleasure of volunteering with Masbia, Queens Community House and Commonpoint Queens. These organizations and their dedicated volunteers are truly essential.

Originally, I proposed that the city convert its existing senior centers into food distribution hubs like it had done with schools. For the entirety of this past year, our senior centers had to be vacated for the safety of our seniors. During that time, we should have transitioned and staffed those sites with laid off food service professionals to increase meal output at a dire point in the pandemic. As our vaccine rollout continues to gather speed and our seniors continue to get inoculated, I expect that by this summer our seniors will be able to return to our existing senior centers.

Going forward, I want to pursue an expansion of the budget for the Department for the Aging. Like the DSBS, DFTA has one of the smallest budgets in the city at less than \$400 million a year in a city budget of more than \$90 billion. DFTA oversees our 250+ senior centers, home delivered meal programs, home care and other vital services our seniors depend on. We must commit additional funding so that the DFTA, community food pantries, and other service providers can meet the challenges of food insecurity head on.



4. We have a couple of citywide races coming up - if a citywide candidate wanted to see some of the best food and shops CD29 had to offer, where would you take them on a tour?

For breakfast, I'd take any citywide candidate to T-Bone Diner right off of Queens Blvd. and 70th Rd. While we digest, I'd recommend a stroll down Ascan Avenue for some fresh air and a look at some of the shops on Metropolitan Avenue. As we get to Metropolitan and Selfridge, I would show this candidate the abandoned stretch of railway that should serve as the green infrastructure project known as the Queensway.

Lunch & dinner are tricky with all the different options particularly on Austin Street. Agorna Tavera, 5 Burro Café, Sushi Time, Cabana, and Forest Hills Station House are my first options in Forest Hills if I had to pick. Otherwise, we'd take a quick ride to Tu Casa further down on Metropolitan and Lefferts. For dessert, we'd stop at a local favorite of mine which is Bonelle's Pastry Shop on Austin and Ascan. Bonelle's is a beloved fixture of the community, like so many other small businesses, that I intend on helping if elected.

5. Business is a lifeblood to any community, and that also translates to jobs. If a major commercial business (i.e. Target or Key Food) wanted to come and open shop in CD29, what requirements would you ask of them in order to bridge them into our community?

I would ask such a major business to keep the potential for noise, traffic, and pollution to a minimum. I would also ask a Target or Key Food for example, to set up shop in other parts of the district like Rego Park, Kew Gardens, or Richmond Hill. Forest Hills already has a Target and three Key Foods. My chief concern will be supporting the struggling small businesses that comprise the unique character of our district. I will also prioritize job growth through infrastructure investments in everything from the Queensway to our parks, playgrounds, roads, schools, and housing.

6. In your view, what are the biggest criminal justice concerns in CD29? What changes, if any, need to be made, and how?

The biggest criminal justice concerns in CD29 would be the Kew Gardens borough jail, homelessness & untreated mental illness, and the increase in violent & hate based crimes.

First, if elected, I will revoke support of the borough jail being built in Kew Gardens. I believe the entire process revolving around closing Rikers and creating 4 new borough jails has been done in a haphazard and frankly irresponsible manner. The process had very limited community involvement, the location is entirely unsuitable, and there is a lack of continuity when it comes to the long-term impacts this will have on Kew Gardens and the city at large. I will go into more detail when asked about this again at question 14 below.



Second, our homelessness crisis and untreated mental illness have met and metastasized so that community residents no longer feel safe on our subway stations or near our busy intersections. The previous councilmember and her staff have failed to comprehensively tackle the slow but steady increase in homeless across the district. That effect is now compounded as many of these individuals suffer from an untreated serious mental illness. These mentally ill homeless pose a danger to themselves and the public. I propose an overdue expansion of Kendra's Law to get these people the treatment they need while at the same time keeping our public safe.

Third, there has been an increase in violent crimes and hate based crimes across the district and the city at large. Our communities must work hand in glove with the NYPD and the NYPD Hate Crime Task Force. This specialized unit is experienced in and dedicated to bias-crime prevention.

7. Forest Hills Hospital provides front line, life saving work on a daily basis, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. What reforms need to be implemented for our healthcare workers, and what recommendations would you provide to help streamline vaccine distributions?

A larger share of the city budget needs to go to H & H to address the shortfall of healthcare supplies, staff, and programs. We need our healthcare workers to be further involved in the decision-making process when it comes to determinations of what is needed in city hospitals for them to excel in taking care of our fellow New Yorkers.

As for better vaccine distribution, I don't have any serious recommendations. There are mass vaccination sites across the city from the Javits Center to Yankee Stadium to Citi Field. Supply is finally catching up to demand in pharmacies, hospitals, colleges, and mobile vaccination units across the city. In a matter of 6-8 weeks all of our most at risk populations, (seniors, immuno-compromised, essential workers) will be fully vaccinated. I strongly believe an overwhelming majority of the rest of the adult population across the 5 boroughs will be vaccinated before the 4th of July. Additionally, with the recent passage of President Biden's American Rescue Plan, vaccine distribution will only accelerate in the coming weeks.

8. CD29 has a large senior population, and Queens as a whole has one of the fastest growing senior populations in NYC. How would you work with the Department for the Aging to provide more resources to our district and support our seniors?

One of the first things I want to get done for our seniors is tackle transportation particularly AAR. For far too long, AAR has overcharged and underperformed for New York City. I want to follow Comptroller Stringer's recommendations to install and enforce the use of GPS technology in all AAR vehicles, end the self-reporting of AAR contractors, and change pickup time windows so that riders have more time to arrive at pickup and drivers have less time to be considered on time. Currently, riders have little more than 5 minutes to arrive at their pickup time or they are considered late. If riders are marked down as late enough times, they are suspended from service. Drivers on the other hand, have up to 30 minutes to arrive at pickup; only after 45 minutes of being late are they hit with penalties. Riders refer



to this dilapidated and unfair service as Stress a Ride for good reason. If elected, I will tackle this service head on to provide a better service for our seniors and disabled.

9. According to the Bowery Mission, there are nearly 80,000 homeless individuals in NYC, with over 60,000 of those individuals utilizing a public shelter and 4,000 that live on the street. How would you as a Council Member help stem the tide of homelessness in New York City?

If elected, I'd start with an expansion of Kendra's Law for those homeless with serious mental illnesses. Kendra's Law allows the courts, after extensive due process, to order certain individuals with untreated mental illnesses into treatment for up to a year while continuing to live in the community. Simultaneously, it allows the courts to order the mental health system to provide treatment, overcoming a history of reluctance to treat highly symptomatic individuals. It is less expensive, less restrictive, and more humane than the alternatives; in-patient commitment or incarceration. Kendra's Law is only for those with untreated mental illnesses who have already suffered multiple bouts of homelessness, arrest, or hospitalization due to their failure or inability to accept treatment that was offered to them voluntarily. Left untreated, these homeless individuals in particular pose a threat to themselves and the public. We must provide treatment to these individuals and keep the public safe in our subways and street corners.

I'd also push for an expansion of the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing program. Currently it is too limited to make a significant impact on those that are in danger of losing their housing or finding affordable housing in the first place. We need to expand the qualifying incomes to those earning below \$36,000 for a family of three for example and increasing the mandatory minimums of new affordable housing from 10 – 20% to 30 – 40%.

In addition, I want to push for \$500 million for the creation of low-income senior housing as proposed by Metro-IAF. That housing will create space in under-occupied NYCHA apartments for those families living in the shelter system. Currently 1/3 of NYCHA apartments are underoccupied. 50% of that 1/3 are headed by a senior citizen. By creating that senior housing, we can create space in NYCHA and create space in the shelter system for those living on the streets. We must also push for the long overdue investments in NYCHA and our shelters so that 580,000+ New Yorkers can live with dignity free from violence, lead, mold, and rodent infestations; so that they can live with heat, hot water, gas, electricity, and WIFI.

10. Our district is one of the few in Queens without a homeless shelter. What are your feelings on homeless shelters to address NYC's growing number of homeless individuals? Should a shelter be developed in this area?

If elected, I will stand against a homeless shelter being built in this district. More homeless shelters are not the answer; affordable housing and public housing are the answer. Shelters across the city suffer from enough violence and disinvestment that over 4,000 homeless New Yorkers choose to live on the street for their own safety. I stand absolutely opposed to a new shelter in this district.



11. Our community boards are considered the first line of local government interaction. Similarly, the Council Member has a say in nominating community board members. If elected, how would you work with our community boards and strengthen them?

I'd work to increase awareness and engagement between our youth in our middle and high schools and our community boards. My office would conduct outreach to small businesses and the larger community to keep them informed of what is being discussed at community board meetings. My office would also coordinate with the local board on need and access when it comes to technology, events and staff training.

12. Bike lanes were installed along Queens Boulevard as part of Vision Zero, resulting in the removal of parking spots. Are you in favor of extending bike lanes along Queens Boulevard?

The bike lanes were never finished. Phase IV of the Vision Zero modifications were never completed. I am in favor of bike lanes, pedestrian plazas, extended crosswalk times, audible pedestrian signals, protected bus lanes, and an array of other street safety measures that will forever close the chapter on the boulevard of death and prioritize the safety and well being of community residents.

13. The City Council reviews certain parts of the ULURP process, including housing and urban renewal plans and zoning map changes. What are the factors that would lead you to go against the recommendations of the local community board in the ULURP process? How do you view the tradeoffs between the affordable housing that new construction can bring against the impact of potential overdevelopment?

Community Board 6 and 9 are dedicated to the well being of the district as I am. I foresee us working together on a wide array of projects as we emerge from the Covid recovery. My view is that 1 out of 3 residents of the district are severely rent burdened meaning that they pay at least 50% of their income just on rent. The need for low-income senior housing has only increased as has homelessness in the district. Affordable housing is a concrete need.

14. What is your long-term plan for the Kew Gardens jail?

My long-term plan is that there will not be a Kew Gardens jail.

If elected, I pledge to revoke support of the borough jail projects. I believe the entire process revolving around closing Rikers and creating 4 new borough jails has been done in a haphazard and frankly irresponsible manner.

First, the process to close Rikers and build 4 new borough jails was railroaded through City Hall. Instead of having 4 distinct ULURP processes to cover each of these new super-structures, the city only conducted 1 ULURP to cover all 4. This decision significantly limited public input and involvement. Queens Borough President Melinda Katz said no, our community board said no, community residents at large said no.



Second, the location of these new facilities has drawn the ire of each one of the communities affected. If we take a specific look at the proposed location of the Queens Borough Jail in Kew Gardens, it is evident that the jail is within walking distance of 4 different schools, P.S. 99, the Kew Forest School, Ezra Academy, and Archbishop Molloy High School. No account was taken by the city to ensure these locations were not within walking distance of any school children. A jail, like a hospital for example, is a 24-hour operation that requires proper planning and infrastructure to accommodate its operations without placing a burden on the corresponding community.

In Kew Gardens, this proposed location is within walking distance of four major intersecting roadways, Queens Boulevard, Union Turnpike, the Jackie Robinson Parkway, and Grand Central Parkway. Each one of these roadways already experience a high volume of traffic and congestion. A borough jail added to the mix will significantly impair transportation across central Queens.

Finally, there is a lack of continuity when it comes to planning. These borough jails are designed with a certain number of detainees in mind. Altogether, the city is looking to house about 4,000 individuals, at a cost of tens of billions of taxpayer dollars, with no backup in mind if crime rises in the years to come. There is no concrete plan to break the culture of violence that made Rikers so notorious. There is no regard given to the elderly population, at risk of health complications, that will be exposed to construction related pollutants for years to come. There is no commitment to fund the maintenance and upkeep of the structures themselves decades down the road. I fear the borough jails will be allowed to decay as with any other example of our city building stock whether that's our public housing, our schools, our homeless shelters, our hospitals or our current jails.

The borough of Queens has space to accommodate a borough jail that is not within walking distance of any schools or residences. The borough of Queens must provide alternate locations to host such a site with meaningful long-term planning and investments. Reshuffling the population around the city will not fix the underlying issues that made Rikers notorious.

15. What are your three priority budget items for our Council district?

Sanitation, Green Infrastructure, & Public Safety.

16. How would you propose closing the City's budget gap?

Eliminate wasteful spending on government programs that lack measurable or objective metrics like ThriveNYC.

17. How will you use your position to initiate a district-wide conversation about race and racial injustice?

I plan on tackling the tangible effects of racial injustice through my platform on lead free schools, access to green space through the Queensway in historically underserved communities, expanded access to free menstrual products, fully accessible sidewalks for the disabled, and more. I plan on fighting racial injustice through investments in education, transportation, and infrastructure; through clean air, clean water, and access to opportunity.



18. When filling out your ranked choice ballot, which candidate will you rank second and why?

I haven't decided yet.