

Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats: 2021 Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Dianne Morales

Office Sought: Mayor

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Name of person filling out this questionnaire: Dianne Morales & team

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

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

1. My top priority would be to begin to address the systemic and structural issues that perpetuate disparity and inequity by race, gender and class. We must center the voices of people who have been systematically disenfranchised by bad policies, some of which go back centuries, especially since we are living in unprecedented times that call for the radical reimagining of what is possible. I am running to create a new social contract that centers and elevates communities that have historically been left behind. I am not promising to get NYC back to status quo, I am promising to help us build an NYC that has never existed, but is urgently needed.

In my first term I would focus on creating a budget that reflects those priorities and values. This includes making deep investments in quality, affordable and accessible housing to address homelessness, increasing mental health counselors in schools, providing job training & internships for youth, expanding the violence interrupters programs to address increasing gun violence and creating a Community First Responders Department to address homeless, mental health and substance abuse challenges in communities. Another critical priority that would provide funding support for these measures would be to significantly divest from policing by both reducing the department's budget and removing police from schools in order to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline.

2) What personal and/or professional experiences do you believe make you uniquely qualified to run for New York City Mayor? Attach resume or CV if desired.

(See attached CV)

I see the role of the Mayor in two parts. First, the Mayor should have shared a vision of the future, and possibilities for the City that New Yorkers can believe in and buy into. A vision that clearly articulates the value that every New Yorker brings to the City, and the connection

between every New Yorker being able to thrive and the City being able to live up to its potential. Secondly, the Mayor should have the management and executive ability to organize, lead and facilitate the City toward the successful implementation of that shared vision.

I was born and raised in a working class family. I am a first generation college graduate. I am a Black Latina. And I am a single mother of two children who attended NYC public schools, struggled with learning differences, have been racially profiled and have navigated the challenges of the mental health system. I have experienced racism in the healthcare system, having been rushed into emergency surgery twice in my life after doctors dismissed or diminished my pain for too long. I am the only candidate in this race whose lived experience most reflects that of the “average” New Yorker. These experiences, in turn, make it possible for me to directly understand the challenges and barriers our neighborhoods face on a daily basis. That understanding makes me a better advocate and leader.

On a professional level, I have worked to create actual solutions to the problems and challenges that our city faces. I have been the CEO of large-scale human services organizations that have provided direct services to the New Yorkers who were struggling the most. That has involved not only managing budgets where the reimbursements were eighty cents on the dollar, but also successfully leading hundreds of staff to work in alignment, with each member feeling valued and understanding the role they played in implementing the mission of the organization. I have created an education model that was adopted by the city and implemented across every afterschool program in every borough. I have created a cross-sector healthcare training program in partnership with the largest employer in the Bronx (Montefiore Medical Center) and Hostos Community College. And, I have built the infrastructure for a national early childhood literacy organization (Jumpstart) that is about to celebrate 27 years of existence in 14 states.

My leadership and advocacy in education, employment, and social justice have improved the lives of New Yorkers in some of the most under-resourced neighborhoods, and created permanent pathways out of poverty for single moms, LGBTQIA youth, the formerly incarcerated and the homeless. By both personal and professional experience, I am the only candidate that can uniquely speak to the lived experiences of New Yorkers while also having the executive leadership ability to manage and oversee the kind of change our city government needs.

3) List all of your endorsements, including but not limited to elected officials, unions, political clubs and community-based organizations.

Shaniyat Chowdhury

The Congress of Essential Workers
Christian Smalls
Our Damn Time
Lauren Ashcraft
Future Steps US
Frederick Joseph
Parents Supporting Parents
Moms United for Black Lives
Black Trans Nation

4) What, if any, groups or industries will you not accept campaign contributions from? If any, please note specifically whose money you will not accept.

Real Estate Developers
Corporate PACs

5) How do you propose helping NYC recover from the COVID pandemic and resulting economic recession, particularly given the projected shortfall in city revenue?

I think we shouldn't negate the people's recovery first. We still have growing food lines, a growing eviction crisis, and the rapid disappearance of beloved small businesses. Whereas economic recovery is top of mind, that recovery means nothing if the people of the city we love don't survive but Wall Street does.

As Mayor, I'd prioritize creating more city funds that will actually bring cash with fewer constraints than the Federal level into the hands of those who need it the most – our excluded workers, our immigrant small businesses, and our Black and Brown communities. I'd focus on rebuilding our social safety net. Ensuring that we see reinvestments back into public hospitals, clinics, and our continual education on COVID-19 to ensure that when future outbreaks and climate disasters occur, we are prepared. If COVID-19 has shown us anything, it's that our foundations around public health and language justice are weak, and it allowed for the deaths of thousands of New Yorkers.

In addressing the budget deficit once the healthcare crisis has been stabilized, NYC needs to first prioritize investing in our small/mid-sized businesses over large corporations and big box companies. We have seen what tax relief can do for large corporations and the stock market.

It is time we prioritize our local economy and the people of our communities. Small & mid-sized businesses employ approximately 50% of the NYC workforce. Instead of focusing on Wall Street as the solution to our recovery, we should focus on providing tax relief, subsidies and low-to-no interest loans to our businesses so they can jumpstart our recovery by bringing the “other” 50% of our workforce back.

Last, but certainly not least, we need to start off by controlling the things we can control. While there will undoubtedly be a budget shortfall post-pandemic, NYC is still the richest city in the country. We can and should focus on reallocating existing funds so as to prioritize the recovery of our neighbors and our city. That means divesting from police so we can invest in the services and programs that really foster safe communities. It also means looking closely at city agency budgets, releasing staffing lines that have been vacant for years yet continue to tie up critical funds, and eliminating bloated contracts with out of state consultants who are engaged to create white papers or policy recommendations that ultimately serve as paper weights. Prioritizing, streamlining and reinvesting the existing dollars in our budget can be a critical step in addressing the needs of our essential, and often most vulnerable, communities.

My administration is prepared for the many challenges NYC must face as we recover from the economic recession and projected revenue shortfall caused by the COVID pandemic. This includes partnering with local electeds and organizations as we push Albany to finally Tax the Rich and bring the funds we need. Some ways to increase municipal revenue include supporting progressive tax policy such as a wealth tax, vacancy taxes, financial speculation taxes, and a land value tax. This would require working towards bringing more tax authority to the city. In addition, the city must be prepared to use alternatives for its investment capacity that does not require revenue but rather fiscal credit generating capabilities. Such ideas include the introduction of a city complementary currency and public banking. Lastly, as Mayor, I will also work alongside a coalition of cities that will pressure the Federal government to use its power of the purse to provide municipalities with automatic stabilizing spending policies as needed.

6) What measures would you take to improve educational opportunities for all students in NYC? How do you plan to ensure that all NYC children are able to attend high-quality, integrated schools? Do you support D15’s integration plan as it has been implemented? What changes, if any, would you make to the current D15 integration plan?

My administration is committed to improving educational opportunities for all students in New York City.

Concrete changes a Morales administration would make include:

- **Fair Screening and Evaluation:** The SHSAT represents a one-size-fits-all standardization that does not adequately represent the ability and full potential of our youth. I would work with the State to change the law and rethink K-12 evaluation so that we ensure equity and opportunity.
- **Empowering Teachers:** The current system constrains teacher creativity and individualization. Teachers need support and resources
- **Inclusive Relevant Curricula:** We will build a curriculum with student voice and choice at the center of the project-based learning taking place within the pillars of Civic, Financial, and Digital literacy.
- **Teaching Methodology** Through communal, project-based learning, students working with local problems will have opportunities to create learning experiences that are explicitly and purposefully relevant to student lives. This will foster the identity development and criticality necessary to understand power, equity, and oppression, and work to dismantle systems of oppression. We will also work to build cross sector partnerships with arts & cultural institutions, businesses and corporations so as to fully integrate the NYC landscape into education through shadowing, job training and internship programs. This will increase student knowledge and choice about the city as a whole, as well as career options available to them in the future.
- **Desegregation of Schools** I will implement a comprehensive citywide school integration plan involving zoning reform and open enrollment. In addition, I will put schools first in line for investment in a budget that centers the goal of ALL our students reaching their full, human potential.

7) How would you have handled the reopening of schools for the 2020-2021 academic year? How would you prepare for a second wave of this pandemic? How would you propose to ensure that the needs of highly vulnerable children with special needs, who are homeless, come from poor families, and/or live in households without adults who could aid their learning are not left further behind when remote learning has to be relied on?

Without a doubt, this current Administration's handling of the re-opening of schools was chaotic, and caused even more hardship for teachers, children, and families during these incredibly tough times. Here are some of the things I would have done if I had been Mayor:

- During the summer, we would have allocated an immense capital budget to ensure that every school classroom had air filters and was properly equipped for both students and teachers in-class safely.
- We would have expanded partnerships with community based organizations (recreation centers, parks, etc) to allow for more outdoor learning opportunities and more space for children to be socially-distanced. Many of the current partners have staff that work in schools who could have played a critical role in bolstering academic and social/mental health support.
- We would have had a clearly outlined plan, properly translated, and distributed across schools for clarity and transparency. We also would have implemented a COVID-19 Task Force full of educators and parents across different communities to help guide us as COVID-19 changed, so we could too.
- We would have ensured that every child had a remote learning device, access to wifi hotspots, and worked alongside libraries and other public spaces (museums) to offer more abilities for students to connect to stronger wifi connections.
- We would have never allowed teachers to go back into classrooms without PPE.
- For remote learning, we would have had intense remote professional development and learning preparation for teachers, and created IT teams to work non-stop to provide training and support for parents supporting their children at home.
- Economic relief and childcare resources for parents who had to stay home from work to ensure the safety and education of their children

What's disappointing is that we knew this second wave would happen. Yet, there are still many schools in NYC that report there are students without remote learning tablets, parents with children of special needs in need of support, and again, the Administration keeps sending out confusing messaging around closures. Right now, with COVID rates as high as 9%, and the second strain of COVID-19 from the UK showing high rates of affecting children, I would not have reopened schools. Especially in the current state most classrooms still are in.

8) Do you support allowing non-citizen New York City residents to vote in City-based elections? Why or why not?

Yes! Nearly one million New Yorkers are unable to vote, despite paying taxes and being impacted by the daily decisions of the City government. Especially in a city like ours, where we know our excluded workers are often our essential workers, they deserve a voice in the system. This is also a great boost to our democracy that no matter who you are, you are able to vote in New York City, and hope this serves as a role model to the rest of the country.

9) Do you support any campaign finance reforms for NYC? If so, please describe.

Yes. Right now there's a lot of conversation around how, even with public funds, there's still a barrier for many people of color, especially women, to run. It was great news in 2018 when campaigns were allowed to cover childcare. I think especially since many candidates, or those who are single parents, might have to quit their jobs in order to campaign, allowing for a small subsidy or salary allotment through the campaign for the candidate, might be more equitable to allow more disenfranchised, impacted candidates to run.

10) Now that the State government has passed the Reproductive Health Act, what steps would you have the Council and City Hall take to increase reproductive healthcare access, including maternal healthcare, and to do so equitably?

The Reproductive Health Act was a start! In New York City, I'm committed to seeing increased public health access, education, and support especially considering maternal health rates for Black mothers. In NYC, we're 12 times more likely to lose a Black mother during pregnancy (worse than the national average), and that's unacceptable. I will ensure funding for programs that continue to increase reproductive & maternal healthcare, especially in our communities of color, and will also continue the funding for the Abortion Access Fund.

11) The MTA is facing a significant revenue shortfall and many parts of the city lack access to reliable public transportation. What measures would you implement and/or enforce, to promote safe, efficient, and accessible transportation options for mass transit users, pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers in Brooklyn and in the City as a whole?

My administration will implement measures to ensure safe, efficient, and accessible transportation for all mass transit users, pedestrians, cyclists and drivers throughout the entire City, including Brooklyn. Issues faced by the MTA have historically disproportionately affected the outer Boroughs, and minority, working class, and low income communities in NYC. Effective and quality transportation is a vital component of addressing the long history of segregation and inequalities. Successfully restructuring the MTA will contribute to reimagining NYC so that it serves the public at-large. I fully support NYC taking municipal control of the city's public transit systems including the MTA under a new city entity ultimately falling under the responsibility of the Mayor's office.

The state of New York must then delegate an expanded degree of taxing authority to the city. Other strategies would include increasing local tax revenue that are Federally deductible on the back end, improving the capital budget process, congestion pricing, addressing climate adaptation, and shifting the regressive fare system away from working class and low-income New Yorkers (and working steadily toward free transportation).

I'll also be heavily committed to seeing street safety issues are handled quickly and timely. It's time for NYC to see redesigned streets that include protected bike lanes, safer crosswalks at busy intersections, and actually seeing a reduction of deaths on our streets versus the current Administration's failed Vision Zero plan. This includes also seeing a reduction of trucks and cars on streets, offering subsidies and tax breaks to those who find alternate means of travel besides cars and congestion pricing. I would love to see full 100% municipal control of CitiBike (since their current structure has seen a prioritization of allowing more comfort for tourists than actual New Yorkers).

12) How would you ensure fairness in employment, salary, workplace conditions, and promotion? What is your position on strengthening and increasing access to union membership?

My administration would take many steps to ensure fairness in employment, salaries, workplace conditions and promotions. Economic growth has too often been tied to wealth accumulation in the hands of elites that has resulted in increasing inequality. We need to adopt a new framework of economic growth that centers the well-being and quality of life of all New Yorkers. Securing good public institutions, child care, and a strong, unionized working class with good wages supports the economic growth of local small businesses. I believe in supporting the growth of the worker- and employee-owned businesses within an ecosystem of "anchor institutions" such as hospitals and universities that invest back into the community and provide training and development. Processes such as participatory budgeting also put decision making around investment into the hands of community members that can also lead to more stable employment levels.

As mayor I would also invest in a youth training and employment agenda around sustainable projects partnering with community organizations and social entrepreneurs, expanding on models I developed as the CEO of youth development and anti-poverty organizations. I would also enthusiastically spread awareness and advocacy for a Federal Job Guarantee bill and work to see what a Municipal version of a jobs guarantee could look like.

13) How would you ensure that underserved communities receive fair and equitable treatment from city government? What policies do you support that would level the playing field for historically marginalized groups?

My career has been dedicated to serving the underserved. I will ensure that all New Yorkers receive fair and equitable treatment from the city government. The implicit bias that pervades our government requires many changes in policy funding, operating culture and attitudes.

My administration will shift resources from arresting and incarcerating Black and Brown New Yorkers to supportive and preventive services. We will create equity and opportunity in the education system. We will provide housing for all. We will champion fair wages and worker safety.

In addition, we need deep collective healing, and a full commitment from all of our community members. It starts with centering a racial justice lens in our education system, and it continues by finding equity in the leadership of institutions who value and understand the urgent need to eradicate white supremacy that flows through so many of our systems.

14) What policy and practice changes are needed for NYC government to ensure sufficient quality housing that actually is affordable for existing residents in Brooklyn neighborhoods?

My "Housing for All" initiative will decrease and stabilize rents. It will also fundamentally reframe the profit-driven, developer led approach to housing in NYC, taking housing development and land significantly off the speculative market and instead prioritizing building needs-based quality mixed-income housing similar to the Vienna model. We would also implement a better use of land and existing space policy that includes a land value tax for vacant and blighted land to discourage speculation. Through the use of land banks, community land trusts, and cooperative housing models, a Morales administration will work to democratize housing to meet New Yorkers' and Brooklynites' needs.

15) What policies would you pass or enforce to ensure public housing/NYCHA repair, upkeep and security, and access to alternate housing and services when lacking essentials such as heat, gas and hot water? What is your position on "privatization" of public housing/NYCHA, and on City government sale of public housing "open areas" (outdoor seating & recreation plots) and air rights to private developers?

Housing for All is not just about a roof and four walls; it's about living in dignity. Public housing, historically, has been discriminatorily underfunded for over 50 decades on a federal level. As incoming Mayor, I will work hard with the incoming Biden administration, and the incoming Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Hon. Marcia Fudge, to ensure that the funding schemes equitably prioritize New York City. Our policies must reflect housing as a human rights issue, and I will work with the New York City Human Rights Commission to design a human rights framework around that. In alignment with the Green New Deal for public housing efforts, I believe in fully funding NYCHA as needed, including employing NYCHA residents in retrofitting and upgrading NYCHA stock as part of a climate adaptation and resiliency program. I am opposed to the privatization of NYCHA and further support the democratization of NYCHA governance by putting more decision-making authority and power in the hands of tenants.

16) Given the City's Covid and post-Covid economic crisis, how would you approach your role in addressing the city's carceral system, including the plan to close Rikers?

Some of our most vulnerable New Yorkers during COVID were those incarcerated within our jails and prisons. In the future, I'd make sure that any pandemic/emergency response includes ensuring the safety of those behind bars, starting with releasing the elderly and those incarcerated for minor infractions.

The current carceral approach to law enforcement creates a simple, material punishment, which creates no path to healing for survivors. In all criminal cases we should identify means to center healing, starting with the survivor, and extending that to the greater community. I would work toward a restorative model for all incidents.

I support the No New Jails movement and ending mass incarceration. As Mayor, I will support the end of cash bail, ending pre-trial detention, and ensuring that no new jails are built. We need to examine the entire criminal code and repeal any laws that reinforce racial targeting by law enforcement. We must also commit to appointing judges who support the decriminalization of poverty and the decarceration movement. We must end the failed war on drugs and direct and encourage substance users to seek treatment, versus criminalization and stigma. We should pursue restorative means of justice, employ trauma-informed practices, as we move away from a racist culture of criminalization, to a higher form of Justice.

I also support ending the inhumane practice of solitary confinement. I believe solitary confinement compromises human rights and has been shown to result in mental

deterioration and illness. If it is still in use when I'm elected, I commit to a timely termination of such practices, instituting more effective research-based methods of promoting safety and reducing violence.

16) Describe your vision for public safety in New York City? What, if any, functions would you like to see removed from the police department? What agencies assume the functions removed from the NYPD?

I would divest from the NYPD and invest in communities. Instead, I would make deep investments in providing quality, affordable and accessible housing to address homelessness, increasing mental health counselors in schools, providing job training & internships for youth, expanding the violence interrupters programs to address increasing gun violence. I would also establish a Community First Response Department to serve as first responders to community public safety issues related to non-criminal public safety issues: homelessness, mental health, substance abuse, emotional distress, and other behavioral health issues. The department would be staffed by professionally trained first responders including social workers, crisis response workers, medics, mental health counselors and others, all of whom would be trained in crisis intervention and de-escalation. They will connect people to healthcare, social services, mental health services and other critical supports.

I would also remove police from schools and replace them with more counselors, nurses, and psychologists as well as restorative justice, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence practices.

17) Do you support changes to the ULURP process and to other NYC zoning mechanisms? If so, what specific changes do you support?

Yes, we know that ULURP and most of NYC's land use laws give an unfair advantage to developers and place an unfair due burden on communities. ULURP reform that I will be supporting includes giving more voice and weight to the community, removing the system that allows for total member deference in the Council, and the scale of large projects being squeezed through a process that was meant for smaller contextual rezoning changes. I also support comprehensive rezoning and believe it's time for more contextualized rezonings that are community-led and focused instead. It's less about economic development and should be more focused on creating livable, affordable neighborhoods.

18) Do you have a plan to reduce and prevent homelessness in Brooklyn and NYC? Explain your plan.

As Mayor, my plan would bring together a commission tasked with providing a pathway to totally eliminate homelessness in New York City within a reasonable timeframe. I will work with the newly elected Super Majority at the state level to renew the ESSHI (Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative) and integrate its services into our Housing for All policy platform. This consists of bringing a substantial part of housing development out of the speculative for profit market and instead centering development for need through a mixed income social housing initiative and adequate rent stabilization and tenant protections to avoid displacement. It will also include assessing current vacant spaces and exploring the possibility of repurposing them to provide housing. I will ensure that the city's supportive housing works side by side with an expansion of public healthcare services including mental health and disability services for the displaced and former homeless. We must also work through economic development policy to support employment programs and other essential supportive services.

The homelessness crisis must be taken very seriously and include a city commission to get to the root causes of homelessness and displacement in order to provide a holistic response to end homelessness in its entirety within 10 years. The many key factors include mental health, addiction, and disability services, and employment programs, in tandem with tenant rights protections and stabilized rents.