



**Metropolitan Washington
Council AFL-CIO
Committee on Political
Education (COPE)**

**2020 District of Columbia
Primary Election
Candidate Questionnaire**

Metropolitan Washington Council AFL-CIO • 2020 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

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GENERAL INFORMATION:

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Candidate for: DC Council

Campaign Committee Name and Address:

Committee to Elect Janeese Lewis George

6400 Georgia Avenue, Suite 9, Washington, DC 20011

Campaign Website: <http://janeese4dc.com>

Campaign Manager: Michelle Whitaker

Campaign Treasurer: Latifah Lyles

Campaign Chair: Zach Teutsch (zach@janeese4dc.com, 202-599-0915)

Does your campaign accept PAC contributions? No, due to participation in fair elections, but DC resident contributions are matched 5:1.

Previously elected / appointed office:

-
- DC School Board, 2005-06
- DC State Committee, 2018-present
- Office of Attorney General (2016-2019)

Have you ever received labor's endorsement?

No. 2020 marks my first time as an individual candidate seeking endorsements. I have so far received the endorsement of WTU, and labor-adjacent grassroots groups, including Jews United for Justice, DC for Democracy, MDC DSA, and more.

SIGNATURE: _____



DATE: 3/2/2020

Please return your signed questionnaire by Tuesday, March 3, 2020 to:

David Stephen, MWC Political and Legislative Director, dstephen@dclabor.org

For questions, please email or call: 202-974-8222

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Overview:

As the voice of working people across the United States, the Washington Metropolitan Council (MWC), is the heart of the American labor movement.

By uniting labor unions from across the region and mobilizing the local community, the MWC plays a critical role in local, state, and national issues.

The Council's affiliated unions represent over 150,000 area union members across the labor spectrum, from service and hospitality industries, retail sales, and communications to transportation, manufacturing, construction and building trades, and, of course, the public sector at all levels, including DC government.

Our priorities include:

- Creating family-sustaining jobs for all
- Investing in education, infrastructure, healthcare, and transportation
- Improving the lives of workers through education, quality job training, career advancement and livable wages with good benefits
- Ensuring fair, progressive tax policies
- Making high quality, affordable healthcare available to everyone
- Holding corporations and government accountable to ensure that taxpayer dollars serve the public good; and
- Ensuring that workers universal right to organize and to bargain collectively for wages, hours, and conditions of work are maintained and enforced.

CORNERSTONE ISSUES OF LABOR

ALL WORKING PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- **A Good Job with Fair Wages**
- **Quality Health Care**
- **A Safe Job**
- **Paid Time Off and Flexible, Predictable Scheduling**
- **Freedom from Discrimination**
- **Retire with Dignity**
- **Fully-Funded Public Education**
- **Freedom to Join Together**
- **A Voice in Democracy**

Better Wages and Benefits

When people negotiate through collective bargaining, they gain better wages and benefits. Decent raises, predictable schedules, and family-friendly policies do not just happen without working people coming together and advocating for better workplaces.

Workplace Safety

The labor movement has led the charge to protect working people from workplace injury, illness, and death. Working with allies, labor has won strong protections against hazards and stronger rights for workers. Through organizing and collective bargaining, unions have gained robust protections and a real voice in safety and health at the workplace.

Pay equity

In 2016, women in unions made 23 percent higher wages than those not in a union. Moreover, unions have narrowed the gender wage gap to just 6 percent (compared to 16 percent for non-union). In addition, unions are also more likely to have various types of paid leave to balance work and family.¹

Building Power for Working People

Union members work together to negotiate and enforce a contract with management that guarantees things like decent raises, affordable health care, safer workplaces, job security, and a stable schedule.

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¹ Economic Policy Institute “Unions help narrow the gender wage gap,” Gould, McNicholas April 3, 2017

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PLEASE BRIEFLY EXPLAIN WHY YOU SEEK LABOR'S ENDORSEMENT:

I'm seeking the endorsement of the Metro Labor Council for the only reason any candidate should: I believe our city owes its prosperity to the workers, especially union members, who build, maintain, and service it, and that anyone who holds power in District government should exercise it for the benefit of those working families. Organized labor has the power to shape DC into a fair and just city/state. What it lacks is enough Councilmembers who share its values, who are willing to fight hard to advance a working class agenda. As the daughter of a 34-year APWU member and a former AFGE member myself, I'm unapologetically pro-labor. That's the way I'm running for office, and that's the way I intend to govern.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Collective bargaining is the process in which working people, through unions, negotiate contracts with their employers to determine the terms of employment, including pay, benefits, hours, leave, job health and safety policies, ways to balance work and family, and more. Collective bargaining is the heart and soul of the Labor Movement. Collective bargaining is a way to solve workplace problems, and is also the best means for raising wages in America. Indeed, through collective bargaining, working people in unions have higher wages, better benefits and safer workplaces.

Do you support for the District of Columbia (please respond Yes or No):

- Yes The rights of public and private sector workers to organize and have union representation.
- Yes The right to freely exercise workplace rights free from harassment, intimidation and/or delays.
- Yes The right to bargain collectively with a legal obligation on both sides to negotiate in good faith.
- Yes The right to resolve differences in a fair, impartial and timely manner, including a timely resolution to binding arbitration.

Additional Comments or clarification:

I not only support these fundamental labor rights but believe that the DC Council - as well as Congress and the Executive branch - should be expanding these rights to make organizing easier, union elections quicker and less onerous, hold contractors to higher labor standards, and more.

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RIGHT TO WORK

“Right to Work” laws prohibit workers from negotiating a “union shop” or “union security” clause in their contracts. Such a clause obligates those in the bargaining unit to pay their fair share of the collective bargaining representation costs. By wiping out that protection, “Right to Work” legislation, actually weakens the rights of working people and dismantles unions. Would you commit to:

Opposing legislation to bring “Right to Work” in DC?

Yes

No

Other (explain below)

Additional Comments or clarification:

To paraphrase Dr. King, “right to work” simply means the “right to work for less.” *Right to work* tips the scales in favor of employers who want to bust unions, pay workers less, and deny them their fair share of the revenues they generate through their labor.

UNION DUES AND JANUS V. AFSCME DECISION

In 2018, the Supreme Court issued what is probably its single most consequential ruling in *Janus v. AFSCME*. The ruling was a devastating blow against public-sector unions barring them from applying “agency fees” to the public employees for whom they negotiate pay increases and benefits if those employees decline to join the union as full members. Would you commit to:

Working with labor to find a legal remedy to allowing unions to collect a service fee from nonmembers for the cost of union representation as long as there are protections for those who object on religious grounds.

Yes

No

Other (explain below)

Additional Comments or clarification:

There is no freedom without freedom from poverty, without economic justice. In the United States, we know that union members earn more, are better protected, and less likely to live in poverty than nonunion workers. That’s what made *Janus* so egregious. In the name of “individual freedom,” the Court in fact undermined the economic freedom of all individuals by striking down one of the fundamental pillars of American labor law, that those who benefit from collective bargaining should reasonably contribute to its costs. I will always fight with labor to find a way to uphold that principle.

HEALTHCARE WORKERS & ACCESS

Universal Health Services Inc. (UHS) hospital (background):

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Mayor Muriel Bowser's administration has been negotiating with UHS to be the operator of the new hospital in Ward 8. The deal with UHS is expected to be announced to the public early this year.

Community groups, labor groups, and residents of Wards 7 and 8 have serious concerns about UHS as a bad actor because the company puts profits over patients.

- George Washington University Hospital has just sued UHS because ["Instead of investing" in GWU's mission, "UHS has paid itself" with "outsized dividends from artificially inflated, excess profits."](#)²
- UHS was found to violate labor law by the National Labor Relations Board in 2019. The Court found they attempted to illegally bust the union at George Washington University Hospital.
- A \$127 million judgment was levied against UHS by the Department of Justice after being sued for defrauding Medicare and Medicaid services.
- UHS understaffs its facilities across multiple states, putting patients and workers at risk.
- UHS refuses to create an independent committee to protect rights and health of patients and workers. This secrecy threatens patients' health and workers' jobs.
- UHS does not have plans to build a level-1 trauma center nor a high-risk obstetrics unit or neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), despite great need East of the River.
- UHS and Mayor Bowser's office will not give any guarantees that staff from UMC will have jobs at the new hospital. The deal has no plan for these devoted caregivers, some of whom have worked at the hospital and lived in the community for decades.

Community and labor groups have been left out of this process and the deal has been secretive and rushed, thus leading to a lack of critical services and labor protections. This lack of services and protections will affect the whole city. The labor community believes that DC residents deserve a world-class hospital East of the River. Will you support efforts to:

YES Require the new hospital to hire the workers from UMC in their current position with their current benefits and union representation.

YES Guarantee neutrality for workers at the new medical facility to organize.

YES Ensure high level quality of services needed for the Ward 7 and 8 communities including high-risk obstetrics and a minimum Level 2 trauma unit.

Additional Comments or clarification:

Healthcare doesn't begin and end at the borders of a ward. That's why, while I'm running to represent Ward 4, I stood with DC nurses against Ascension's devastating elimination of Providence Hospital in

² GWU sues corporate hospital partner, leaving fate of Southeast project uncertain, Washington Post, Peter Jamison, Dec. 10, 2019

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Ward 5 and why I'm standing with residents and workers in Wards 7 and 8 who are fighting for a hospital that includes a level-1 trauma center, high-risk maternal care, and unionized workers. UHS has been investigated and sued for union-busting, federal fraud, mismanaging funds, and dangerous under-staffing. I'm proud to have signed the DC Health Justice petition demanding just that and to stand with 1199 and all of organized labor as they fight for world-class healthcare.

EDUCATION:

Affiliates of the MWC represent teachers, bus drivers and other school related personnel in DCPS. Despite an increase in Mayor Bowser's education budget for FY2020, 20 public schools, including 17 schools in Wards 7 and 8, saw significant budget cuts for the current school year.

Overall funding for DCPS has not kept up with rising costs, leading to cuts in many schools. Additionally, the Labor Movement believes that regardless of where a student attends school, they are entitled to the same rights as a student, including transparency and adherence to local laws. To serve the best interest of education in the District, will you commit to:

YES Proving school that receive a net flow of students throughout the school year additional resources.

YES Working with teachers through their union to implement methods to close the opportunity gap of schools in lower-income communities.

YES Working with the community and labor union representatives to address gun violence and student safety including enforcing trauma informed practices and screening.

YES Supporting the right of all public sector unions and DCPS to collectively bargain on teacher evaluation standards and procedures?

YES Ensuring that all Local Education Agencies (LEA) are subject to FOIA, Open Meetings and transparency laws.

Would you support ending Mayoral control of schools and educational policies and placing them in the purview of an elected School Board?

Yes

No

Other (explain below)

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Additional Comments or clarification:

The Public Education Reform Amendment Act diminished the previously autonomous Board of Education and puts the control of DCPS under the Mayor with a new State Board of Education that advises on education policy. As a former student member of the school board (pre-PERAA), I know first hand how the Board provides critical community input and educational independence.

The State Board of Education should have strong oversight and collaboration with the Council to make sure that funding is used appropriately and programs and curricula are implemented fairly across the District. Under the current system of *Mayoral Control*, there are no longer adequate systems of checks and balances when it comes to the governance of our public schools. This has a chilling effect on educators' open advocacy at council hearings and is an affront to democracy. Elected officials, like State Board members, should play a greater role in the governance and oversight of our education system, particularly relative to the Superintendent of Education. I would introduce and/or support legislation that returns the power of oversight and hiring of a superintendent for DCPS to the State Board of Education.

ACCOUNTABILITY/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

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Entertainment

Accidents in the event/entertainment industry are far too common. Thankfully you would have to go back in time over 20 years to the last fatal accident in Washington DC when a lighting supervisor working for upstaging fell 90 feet from the catwalk of the DC Armory and died the night before a Marilyn Manson concert, but it has happened, and without regulation it could happen again. Look at what happened to the deputy Mayor this past March, a speaker falling on a person attending a rally should never happen. Unfortunately, accidents like that go un-reported far too often. This is a public safety issue that needs to be taken seriously.

Would you be willing to support DC legislation that would amend [Title 47, Chapter 18 of the District of Columbia Official Code](#) to ensure:

- 1) that a person or party responsible for the staging and operation of a special event in the District holds a basic business license and an Entertainment endorsement to such license and
- 2) to establish a safety qualification program for technicians employed in the staging of special events by requiring that at least one member of the staging crew hold a rigger's certification issued by the Entertainment Technician Certification Program, and that all persons employed in such operations complete a minimum safety training course (OSHA-10) prior to working on the event?

Yes

No

Additional Comments or clarification:

When it comes to safety at events, an epidemic of ignorance and austerity has swept through the minds of a lot of civic and business leaders. Their imaginations seldom extend beyond bag checks and door security. Many are simply unaware of the decades of health and safety advancements made by workers in the entertainment industry or the tragedies that catalyzed those changes. DC is an events-heavy city, with conventions and conferences and stagings happening dozens of times every day. The cost of good, certified, union labor is far less than the cost of losing lives to electrocution, engineering failures, or corners cut on safety protocol.

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Wage Theft

While wage theft is pervasive and highly damaging, there is some good news: the problem is not unassailable. To be most effective, anti-wage theft laws must be meaningfully and effectively enforced, and must be accompanied by other legal provisions that empower victims to speak up against their abuse, such as strong anti-retaliation laws.

Will you work with community groups, city administration and other advocates to support proven programs that combat wage theft??

Yes

No

Will you commit to supporting an increase in funding in the departments and programs that work to ensure that workers are paid correctly, including the Department of Employee Services (DOES), as well as securing funding for community members who are third party enforcers, and a robust public awareness and accountability program?

Yes

No

Additional Comments or clarification:

In a city where working families are nickel-and-dimed for victimless code violations of every kind, it's unconscionable that employers can engage in widespread and mass theft of employees and often go with little to no consequence. The tide seems to be turning, as more people become aware of wage theft and agencies like the Office of the Attorney General expand programs to investigate and hold accountable violators. As Councilmember, I'll absolutely support more funding and program expansion to combat wage theft. I'd like to bring OAG's sense of urgency and strategic approach to this issue to DC Council. My colleagues in the Office of OAG, and my mentor Karl Racine have been more successful at fighting wage theft than DOES, who has primary responsibility. Imagine how much safer workers wages would be if OAG, DOES, and the Council were all committed and successful in a collaborative effort to combat wage theft.

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Transportation: (Please provide your response on a separate sheet).

Transit Worker Assaults

There are dozens of incidents where bus and train operators, as well as station managers, have been spat on, slapped, tased, stabbed, and even doused with urine. Transit worker assaults are not only a danger to the workers, but also to the riding public, who are also placed in harm's way when these incidents occur.

Following the urine-dousing incident on a Metro bus operator in 2018, unions began calling on the respective legislatures of District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia to increase the penalties for transit assaults. Will you work to ensure the District of Columbia raises the penalty of assaults on transit employees?

Yes **No** (see below)

Privatization

Will you support efforts by transit workers in preventing privatization of future services at WMATA?

Yes **No**

Likewise, will you support efforts by to prevent privatization of future services by the District government at the DC Streetcar and DC Circulator?

Yes **No**

Uber and Lyft represent one of the largest threats to public transit in the country. Do you support laws, similar to AB5 in California or New York City's 2019 Rideshare Law, to clarify the rights of rideshare workers?

Yes **No**

Additional Comments or clarification:

I support ATU's efforts to improve protective barriers and workstations on buses to ensure our bus operators aren't victims of random acts of violence in the first place. I do not believe that increased penalties are the solution, because evidence shows many of the offenders suffer from drug addiction or mental health conditions and are not deterred by post-assault penalties and would be better served by non-criminal sanctions that deter them from repeating offenses. As a Councilmember, I would advocate for greater funding for mental health treatment to address the unmet needs of this population. Operators must be safe on the job and the best way to make sure they are is to focus on stopping these attacks before they occur, not incarcerating offenders after the damage is done.

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Freight Crew Size Legislation

The District of Columbia is a major gateway for north/south and east/west freight railroad traffic. By 2040, freight railroad traffic is projected to triple from 15 to 48 daily freight trains.

Today, the average freight train is 1.5 – 2 miles long and three (3) stories tall. The size, length, and commodities, including hazardous material transported by these freight trains, pose significant public safety risks for the communities adjacent to the rail corridors.

Currently, freight trains in the United States are operated with a minimum of two crew members: locomotive engineer and conductor. The coordinated efforts of the crew ensure the safe movement of the freight train. In the event of an accident or incident, the crew coordinates immediate assistance and provide critical information to fire and emergency responders.

The freight railroad industry based on new technology and operating paradigm are seeking to reduce the crew size to just the locomotive engineer.

A reduction of the crew to only a locomotive engineer would create a major public safety risk for the District of Columbia. Locomotive engineers and conductors each have different specific responsibilities they perform to ensure the safe movement of a freight train.

More importantly, the major functions for safely moving a freight train can't be performed by a single crew member.

Single-man railroad operations have been proven unsafe and directly contribute to several horrific accidents, including the 2013 disaster in Lac Megantic, Quebec - Canada.

Seven (7) states: California, Illinois, Colorado, Nevada, Wisconsin, Arizona, and West Virginia, have enacted legislation requiring a minimum two-persons crew on all freight railroad trains.

QUESTION:

To protect the communities adjacent to our rail corridors, would you support legislation requiring a minimum two-person crew on all freight rail trains operated in the District of Columbia?

Yes NO OTHER

Additional Comments or clarification:

The elimination of the two-man crew is, frankly, terrifying, and further evidence that, left unregulated, corporate employers will put all of us at risk to save a little bit on labor costs and maximize their profits. I would gladly champion legislation requiring a two-person crew on all freight trains in D.C.

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Rail Safety Inspections and Oversight

In 2016, D.C. Law 21-254 authorized the creation of the Emergency Response and Rail Safety Division (ERRSD) within the Department of Energy and Environment. ERRSD is the State Rail Safety Office responsible for monitoring and overseeing all railroad activity in the District of Columbia. ERRSD is comprised of an Associate Director and Rail Safety Inspectors trained in specific railroad disciplines. Unfortunately, ERRSD has been underfunded each fiscal year since it's creation.

QUESTION 1.

Would you support full funding for ERRSD in the FY 2021 and future budgets?

Yes NO OTHER

QUESTION 2.

Would you support an amendment to D.C. Law 21-254: "Rail Safety and Security Amendment Act" authorizing the District of Columbia to assess penalties and fines for safety and security violations on the railroads operating in the District of Columbia.

Yes NO OTHER

Additional Comments or clarification:

Laws without enforcement are mere suggestions. 21-254 must be amended to ensure we can put teeth into our regulations.

I certify that the responses in this questionnaire are mine and reflect my political positions for consideration by the MWC.

SIGNATURE:  DATE: 3/2/2020

Candidate (Please Print Legibly): Janeese Lewis George

Thank you.