



**Metropolitan  
Washington**

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

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

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**Metropolitan Washington Council AFL-CIO • 2020 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

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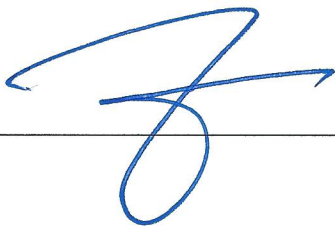
Does your campaign accept PAC contributions? No

Previously elected / appointed office: Yes

Office: ANC 8C01 Commissioner, Chairman Term: 2017 - 2020

Have you ever received labor's endorsement? No If Yes, When? N/A

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_



DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

3/3/20

**Please return your signed questionnaire by Tuesday, March 3, 2020 to:  
David Stephen, MWC Political and Legislative Director, [dstephen@dclabor.org](mailto:dstephen@dclabor.org)  
For questions, please email or call: 202-974-8222**

## Metropolitan Washington Council AFL-CIO • 2020 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

### 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
- 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.<sup>1</sup>

## **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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<sup>1</sup> Economic Policy Institute "Unions help narrow the gender wage gap," Gould, McNicholas April 3, 2017

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## 2020 Candidate Questionnaire

### PLEASE BRIEFLY EXPLAIN WHY YOU SEEK LABOR'S ENDORSEMENT:

I seek the Metropolitan Washington Council AFL-CIO's endorsement because I understand the power and influence of a robust labor union. My father, a Master Electrician, has been active in IBEW and DC Council 20 since he worked at the DC Water and Sewage Authority. It was through him that I saw the power of a union to protect workers and put food on the table for me and my three brothers and sisters. I understand that my father's union kept him employed and provided better wages and benefits that kept my family healthy and comfortable. Labor unions have been the cornerstone of worker and familial stability for generations, and they will continue to help union members provide for their families.

I know that when elected officials support unions, they are supporting families. I would like this endorsement so that there is an established partnership when I become the Ward 8 Councilmember from day one. The union would have an ally on the Council who understands the importance of strong collective bargaining agreements, union fees, safer work environments, and fair pay for everyone. Therefore, the Metropolitan Washington Council AFL-CIO's endorsement would mean a great deal to me and will only solidify the fact that our values align.

### 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):

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

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Additional Comments or clarification:

I fully support the rights of public and private sector workers to organize, have union representation, and negotiate in good faith. This is necessary for employees to have the ability to negotiate agreements, advocate for safer work environments, advance gender equality, and to have a role in policies and laws that impact their livelihood. Unfortunately, federal law only gives private sector, not public sector employees the right to join unions, allow them to negotiate with employers for wages and working conditions, or take group action concerning their employment, including the right to strike. This is unfair and should not be the norm in any state.

Moreover, we need to ensure that there are zero tolerance policies for sexual harassment in all of our work environments. As Ward 8 Councilmember, I will prioritize fostering strong education practices to prevent harassment, steep penalties for retaliation or intimidation -- and above all else, a strong push for every employee to have workplaces where they feel safe and supported by their employer.

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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:

I oppose legislation to bring “Right to Work” to DC, because I believe that employees should contribute to the financial power of a union if they reap the benefits of union activities. Nonunion employees only pay for non-political union initiatives from which all employees may benefit (unless for religious reasons), which is a reasonable limitation to nonunion member fees.



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**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:

After the *Janus* decision, there were consequential impacts that resulted in the nation's two largest public sector unions losing a vast majority of agency-fee payers. The split decision by the Supreme Court (5-4) was too close for comfort and ultimately the consequences were detrimental. I support the dissenting justices’ opinion wholeheartedly. “Fair share fees” with the unions are powerful, because everyone benefits collectively from better wages, and there are benefits and protections that improve work conditions as a whole.

In short, it’s apparent that no one is forced to join a union, *Janus* was about stripping the freedoms of working people to assemble, to voice concerns, and to put food on the table for their families by undermining the ability to establish strong unions. When elected to the Ward 8 Council, I will work collaboratively to find a legal remedy that allows unions to collect a service fee from nonmembers for the cost of union representation.

## HEALTHCARE WORKERS & ACCESS

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

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."](#)<sup>2</sup>
- 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:

Y  No Require the new hospital to hire the workers from UMC in their current position with their current benefits and union representation.

Y  No Guarantee neutrality for workers at the new medical facility to organize.

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

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  Y   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:

As a Ward 8 resident and former United Medical Center (UMC) employee, I understand the dire necessity to deliver a new hospital for Ward 7 and 8 residents. For \$300 million District dollars, the new hospital should have a comprehensive approach to provide the quality care that residents deserve. The dedicated UMC staff, like Ms. Alma, have made UMC a place that employees, community members, and patients can enjoy. UMC staff who have endured the slow repairs and underfunding at UMC should be able to enjoy the new facility to continue providing quality care.

Finally, when UMC closed the Obstetrics Department in December 2017, mothers lost access to neighborhood maternal healthcare for themselves and their infants. The new hospital must have high-quality OB services since so many of our pregnancies are high-risk in Wards 7 and 8. There must also be a holistic focus on providing prenatal care to low-income families. As Councilmember, I will advocate for these priorities that I know are reasonable, but we need leadership that is collaborative, intentional, and hyper-focused on healthcare.

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**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 FY 2020, 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:

**Y** Providing schools that receive a net flow of students throughout the school year additional resources.

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

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

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

**Y** 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)

Additional Comments or clarification:

My vision for public education in the District of Columbia is a system where our Black and white students perform equally, prepares our students for the real world (career or college), has excellent neighborhood schools, funds our neighborhood schools equitably, collaborates with our teachers' union, and provides the wrap-around, mental health, and academic supports our most vulnerable students need.

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One heavily-debated issue that looms over the District's public education system is Mayoral control. One of my biggest frustrations with Mayoral control is the lack of budget transparency. I wholeheartedly believe that there is a better way to fund our schools equitably and ensure that public schools with our most vulnerable students do not experience cuts. Wards 7 and 8 schools have historically been underfunded. In Fiscal Year 2020, more than seventeen schools faced detrimental budget cuts. This is unfathomable. As Councilmember, I would proactively work with the Mayor to close the opportunity gap, collaborate with various stakeholders to demystify school-level budgets, and find the best oversight and accountability structure for our public school officials.

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**ACCOUNTABILITY/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:**

**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 unreported 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:

Yes, I would be willing to support the aforementioned provisions in the DC Code, because public safety should be a priority during special events. Guests and event organizers should not have to worry about faulty equipment or preventable injuries. Requiring special licenses will at least ensure contractors have had the training to properly secure equipment at special events. This can be accomplished by partnering with IATSE Local 22 to establish robust requirements for these professional technicians. The District has to be focused on the health and safety of crews, performers, and audiences, now more than ever as we are a Destination City with plenty of events, rallies, concerts, and marches. If done correctly, an amendment to DC Code Title 47, Chapter 18 will include Arena Riggers, Theatre Riggers, Entertainment Electricians, Portable Power Distribution Technicians, and all the other relevant trades so that the legislation is robust and ensures safety.

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Further, there absolutely must be an OSHA-10 training requirement in place for other employees to reduce the District's liability, reject unlicensed technicians, and maximize public safety.

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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:

Yes, I support funding for community members who are third party enforcers, and a robust public awareness campaign, and accountability program. The *Wage Theft Prevention Amendment Act of 2014* instituted compliance requirements and enforcement schemes, an anti-retaliation provision, and enhanced penalties for violations that were much needed in the District of Columbia. Unfortunately, low-wage employees are often victims of wage theft -- and are denied minimum wage and meal breaks, and are forced to work off the clock without pay. Wage theft issues are particularly critical in Ward 8 since we have the lowest wages in the District, so this will be a top priority. I have been relieved to see the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) prioritizing wage theft, as AG Racine has sent a clear message to employers that this behavior will not be tolerated in the District any longer.

When elected, I will work to add funding for DOES and the OAG to investigate these bad-actors. Finally, I look forward to empowering and funding community groups and advocates to raise awareness about wage theft. Too many low-income residents and immigrants are not aware that wage theft is actually happening, so they may never report; or even worse, they fear retaliation from their employer. So, I look forward to working with the OAG to end wage theft in the District of Columbia.



**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

**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

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Additional Comments or clarification:

I am not in favor of privatizing transportation services. The District privatized the DC Circulator and that did not lead to reliable, streamlined services. Audits commissioned by the District Department of Transportation found that there were troubling safety and operational flaws, which leads me to believe that that privatization does not improve services for riders or benefits for drivers. In addition to safety and operational issues, there are reports of poor oversight, and the private operator's failure to provide proper maintenance.

Furthermore, drivers still have issues with their workplace environment, poor conditions of facilities and buses, and riders still experience delays and service problems. I understand that there is a feasibility study in progress to determine whether the District can operate the DC Circulator. If the study concludes that it is not feasible, I would push to see what steps the District needs to take to make the transition feasible. A government-operated DC Circulator should guarantee better oversight, ensure that there are no labor abuses, and that there is compliance with safety standards.

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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

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Additional Comments or clarification:

I wholeheartedly support DC legislation requiring a minimum two-person crew on all freight rail trains. Safety should be our top priority, particularly when transporting hazardous material. The engineer and conductor play different and critical roles, neither of which can adequately be replaced by technology. Improvements in technology should not compromise safety. As recently as 2016, a freight train derailed in the District, so the city needs to be smart about safety and we need leadership who will take up these issues head-on.

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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:

I support fully funding ERRSD to oversee railroad activity in the District. The Fiscal Impact Statement estimated that the Division cost \$162,836 in Fiscal Year 2017 and \$869,295 over the four-year financial plan. A safety budget need of under \$1 million should be something that the Council is able to fund. I also support assessing penalties and fines for safety and security violations on the railroads in the District of Columbia if it is proven to improve safety and security.

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

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: 3/3/20

Candidate (Please Print Legibly):

*Mike Austin*

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Thank you.