1. DC has a deep-seated problem with income and wealth inequality that falls along racial lines. Median income in Ward 8 is $39K versus $110K in Ward 1. Worst of all, there has been no significant progress in reducing inequality, and the growing wealth of the city is concentrated increasingly at the top. Do you think the Council’s work has been sufficient? If not, what should the Council do differently?

We are living in a time of prosperity for the District, but far too many of our residents struggle with housing, homelessness, and displacement. Unless we preserve and build new subsidized, affordable housing, the District’s growth will come at the expense of pushing out low-income families and people of color, particularly the communities that have made Ward 1 so vibrant and resilient. I’m fighting to create new affordable housing and preserve the affordable and family-sized housing we already have, through increased subsidy and increased legalization of housing, with a focus on our lowest income, most vulnerable families.

I believe in a “Yes, and” approach to housing. Legalizing more housing capacity and Inclusionary Zoning units that come with it are one piece of the puzzle, but an incomplete solution. I’ve voted to expand funding to the Housing Production Trust Fund and tenant-based vouchers, and I support Community Land Trusts, strengthened rent control, limited-equity cooperatives, and unique tools like the Tenant and District Opportunity to Purchase Act. All are essential components of our housing vision.

I have also been the Council’s main champion of using publicly-owned land to meaningfully expand our stock of deeply affordable housing. There is no reason the public sector should only be managing a stable or shrinking stock of social housing, rather I believe DC should use its significant resources to acquire properties and scale up a robust social housing program.

Here are some, but not all, of the things I have done as Councilmember to increase affordable housing:

- Introduced the Public Housing Preservation and Tenant Protection Amendment Act, which would protect public housing tenants from displacement in the event of renovation of a Housing Authority property.
- Co-introduced the Rental Housing Source of Income Amendment Act, which would prevent discrimination against housing voucher holders in accessing rental units.
- Introduced the On-Site Services Act of 2019, which provides services like healthcare, legal services, food and nutrition, childcare, after-school care to multifamily buildings occupied by tenants that receive housing assistance.
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- **Introduced a bill** that would move the DC Housing Authority from an independent agency to one under Mayoral and Council control, making the agency accountable to city government and better prioritize the needs of public housing residents.
- Supported the passage and funding of the Rental Assistance for Unassisted Seniors Amendment Act of 2018, which provides a rental subsidy to low-income seniors who are rent burdened up to $600 a month to help them stay in their homes.
- **Introduced the Land Disposition for Affordable Housing Amendment Act of 2019**, which establishes the same affordable housing requirements on land owned by quasi-governmental entities (like WMATA and DC Water) as those that exist for District-owned land.
- **Opposed a bill that eroded the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act** – one of the only Councilmembers to do so.
- **Introduced the Mixed-Use Affordable Housing Property Tax Exemption Act**, which ensures that buildings which would otherwise be eligible for tax relief for providing affordable housing are not prevented from receiving such tax relief simply because a portion of the building is used for a community purpose such as a dental office or medical clinic.
- **Co-introduced the Affordable Cooperative Task Force Act**, which would establish a task force to provide policy recommendations to improve affordable limited-equity cooperatives and assist in the formation of new cooperatives.
- **Co-introduced the Home Purchase Assistance Program Amendment Act**, which increases the maximum amount of down payment assistance for the lowest income homebuyers.
- Introduced and funded the Relocation Expenses Recoupment and Lien Authority Amendment Act, which allows the DC Office of Tenant Advocate to seek reimbursement from a landlord when the landlord’s negligence was responsible for displacement of a tenant.

I spend a lot of space in this answer talking about housing, because as with other areas I believe in a “housing first” approach to closing the racial wealth gap. Beyond housing, I believe my words and actions go against the economic development orthodoxy that has been so damaging to US cities and to people of color specifically. If we want DC to truly thrive, our budget is better spent supporting our residents, and on bold solutions to income and wealth disparities — not on more subsidies for stadiums or fretting about capital flight.

In 2019 and 2020, I successfully cut the ineffective Qualified High Technology Company (QHTC) tax incentive program and reinvested over $40 million in revenue towards critical needs like Permanent Supportive Housing, School Based Mental Health, and Immigrant Legal Justice Services.
For another example of my work on equitable redistribution of DC’s overall prosperity, see my next answer on guaranteed income.

2. There is a growing national movement for guaranteed income, and in DC the Mothers Outreach Network is leading the local campaign. What are your views on guaranteed income?

I am proud that DC is at the forefront of the conversation on a universal basic income. The DC Council’s budget office released an award-winning study on what it would take to establish UBI in the District; while there were “sticker shock” concerns, I am undaunted by the task of ensuring economic stability for every resident in DC. As part of the Hearts and Homes Amendment I co-authored, Councilmembers Allen, Lewis George and I created a new basic income program based on the Earned Income Tax Credit. The amendment incrementally increases the amount of the federal credit that the District will match from 40% at present to 100% by 2026. Upon implementation, qualifying families will receive their tax refund in monthly installments rather than one lump sum at the end of the tax year, providing them with a steady source of cash throughout the year. We still need to do more to establish a true basic income, but this investment lays the groundwork.

3. Our affordable housing programs target families earning up to 80% of median family income, or $103K for a family of four. This statistic is based on the wealthy suburbs of MD and DC, as well as wealthy areas within DC. By way of comparison, the median income in Ward 8 is $39K. Should we take a different approach to defining affordable housing?

Whether it’s Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), HUD subsidy, or funds from private lenders, nearly every affordable housing project in DC is subsidized by funds that require the use of the federal AMI definition. What matters most is what we can control, which is where we focus our attention and local subsidy. The AMI definition itself is less important than building and preserving housing for those in the lowest income bracket. Truly, deeply affordable housing for those making less than $40,000 per year is my biggest focus. I have supported this by passing legislation requiring that housing built on publicly-owned land meet the needs of lowest-income households, by supporting expansion of the Housing Production Trust Fund — and by modeling strong oversight of how the HPTF is used.
4. DC for Democracy members are increasingly skeptical that the real estate industry can be relied on to build the appropriate number of affordable housing units needed for low-income families. That's why some are very interested in alternative housing models, such as community land trusts, limited equity co-ops and social housing. What role, if any, do these models play in your housing platform, and what scale of public investment should be made in them?

I have never relied upon the private real estate industry to solve our housing crisis on its own. Non-market or non-financialized housing models are essential. We are lucky — in DC, these models are not a niche alternative or emerging field.

For decades, DC has been a leader in limited equity cooperatives. However, establishing and sustaining a coop is incredibly challenging, and something that the government can assist in only so far — cooperatives after all are still private enterprises even if they are publicly subsidized. As Amanda Huron notes in her 2018 book on tenant organizing and cooperatives in DC: “For all the difficulty of reclaiming a commons, the greater challenge, it appears, is maintaining it over time.” (Carving Out the Commons, p. 111)

What many don’t see is that my office spends a lot of time behind the scenes providing support to Ward 1’s existing limited-equity cooperatives to ensure their longevity, and to tenants working on negotiating TOPA deals or organizing their own cooperatives. While it may not be as flashy as a new bill introduction or major press release, this is work I’m incredibly proud of.

DC also has the established and growing Douglass Community Land Trust. Last year, I voted to approve a budget that invests $2M of public dollars in Douglass CLT, and will continue to support its expansion. In 2019 I launched the Lower Georgia Avenue Equitable Development Plan, modelled after the very process that established the Douglass Community Land Trust.

While there are barriers to scaling up a social housing program — like the oft-cited Faircloth Amendment that places a cap on federal spending for public housing — DC is actually 3,000 units below its statutory Faircloth limit. There is much more we can do to not only repair our current stock of public housing but to expand the availability of dignified public housing for DC families.
I have been a strong champion of growing established programs like our Local Rent Subsidy Program (LRSP) to build upon our publicly-supported housing.

However, we don’t need to rely solely on HUD and local subsidies to build out a social housing program. The “Vienna Model” of social housing is structured on government ownership of the land itself. We can and should leverage land and properties the District owns to emulate that success. This means developing public properties through land leases instead of dispositions, growing our stock of public land through programs like the District Opportunity to Purchase Act (DOPA), and yes, building dense and tall housing on that public land that meets the needs of low-income residents. This is work I’m modeling at public sites in Ward 1 like the Reeves Center and the 3D Headquarters/Engine 9 site. I hope to work with advocates to establish a path forward to creating more social housing in the District.

5. There is a highly charged debate about community safety. Some say the answer is to invest in more police. Others say we should address the root causes of violence by investing in housing, education and basic needs, as well as alternative approaches, such as violence interruption services. What policies or budget changes will you prioritize for the safety of Ward 1 residents?

In Ward 1, we continue to grapple with gun violence and community safety. What I have learned as a white elected official representing our diverse community, is that for many people of color, more police does not equal greater safety. This compels me to continue to press for more accountability from our police, de-militarization of police forces across the country, and deeper investment in the community partners who can focus on lasting solutions to violence.

From my first day as Councilmember, and before it became common practice in DC, I fought for and succeeded in bringing violence prevention resources to Ward 1. I became a champion of the Neighborhood Engagement Achieves Results (NEAR) Act, helping pass and fund it. And now, as a government and community we are working to take a holistic public health approach to safety. We treat violence like a disease that infects not just the person who picks up the gun, but their friends, family and whole community. Rather than patching over the problem, we are doing immediate and deep interventions that will ultimately put an end to violence. This is a paradigm
shift that has been happening all over the country, as we’ve come to the realization that our approach to criminal justice has torn apart families and communities while not achieving sustainable outcomes. But this paradigm shift is still ongoing; until recently, we haven’t invested enough in these programs to see the results we need. With the significant increase in funding for these programs in the FY22 budget I am hopeful that we are finally investing enough to address conflicts in all the neighborhoods that need additional resources. However, we have also seen in the past that such a large influx of funding has not necessarily resulted in strong implementation. Oversight of these programs is critical to their success. I will remain engaged to ensure the resources are getting to the people and communities that need them most.

6. In the 2018 election cycle, voters overwhelmingly voted to raise the minimum wage for tipped workers, but the Council overturned the voters’ decision. In 2022, voters may again be asked if they support raising the minimum wage for tipped workers. If Initiative 82 (One Fair Wage) makes it to the ballot, will you pledge to respect the will of the voters?

In 2019 I proudly voted to uphold the will of the voters, and would do so again if it came before the Council. I heard the voices of our tipped workers fighting for a fair wage back in 2018, and the need for one minimum wage for all sectors, despite efforts to drown out those voices. What we have seen during the pandemic was that workers just could not survive on gratuity-based work, and do not wish to return to it. It’s time to resolve this long-standing inequity.

7. Thank you for introducing the Local Resident Voting Rights Act to grant those members of our community voting rights in local DC elections, such as Mayor, Council, School Board, and ANC. What will you do to ensure that it is passed next year?

With any electoral reform, the most difficult hurdle in the Council right now is getting it out of committee. Councilmembers Allen and Pinto joined me introducing this bill, which means we need 2 more members of the committee to support it - Bonds, Gray or Cheh. I will continue my efforts to gain their support, and it would be helpful to have grassroots advocacy around the bill at the committee level. The bottom line is that we have thousands of permanent residents of the District of Columbia whose voices are not being heard in the electoral process. Many of them
live in Ward 1. While I have always worked to represent our immigrant residents regardless of their ability to vote, they deserve this right.

8. Do you support lowering the voting age to 16 years old, as a way to instill the habit of voting in young people and increase turnout?

Yes, I co-introduced the Youth Vote Amendment Act of 2018, and was planning to vote in support in the Committee of the Whole before it was tabled. I have worked with the Vote16 coalition since that time to discuss new strategies for getting the bill passed. I regularly speak with students about the importance of becoming civically engaged, through neighborhood associations, ANC meetings and advocacy before the Council. Research shows that voting is a habit, and the earlier it starts, the better chance we have that young voters will become lifelong voters.

9. Do you support the “Metro for DC” proposal to provide $100 of free Metro ridership each month for every DC resident?

Yes, I co-introduced this legislation in 2020 and 2021 and I look forward to helping it advance to becoming law. Having reliable, affordable transit is critical for DC workers, students and families. During the pandemic, it was clear that our essential workforce could not do their jobs without it, and the deepest impact on any service disruptions has been felt by our communities of color. A survey by WMATA found that 18 percent of Metrorail customers were still riding metro to get to work under the stay-at-home order, and almost half of Metrobus customers kept riding. In the survey, WMATA found that 82 percent of Black riders continued to use Metrobus, and 70 percent of regular users made less than $30,000 per year. For these riders, WMATA was able to make the bus free, mainly as a safety measure to avoid riders boarding on the front of the train and touching the farebox. Congress is finally taking notice of this and considering subsidizing transit across the country. That would help us with the costs here and perhaps make the bill more palatable to Councilmembers who are hesitant to support it.

10. Thank you for co-introducing the VOICE Act. What will you do to ensure that it is passed next year?
I am proud to be a co-introducer of the VOICE Act, which is desperately needed to bring more voters to the polls, make elections more competitive, and lift up historically marginalized candidates. Jaqueline Castaneda on my campaign team is a board member of the Ranked Choice Voting Coalition and provided strong testimony before the Council in the legislative hearing. Unfortunately we are hearing troubling opposition from DC political establishments that clearly need more education on how this would be implemented in DC. Councilmembers will need to hear from the grassroots on this legislation to overcome that, which means it is essential to educate voters writ large, beyond the political establishment. I look forward to working with the coalition on strategy for this and to help get the message out with DC voters.

11. Recent reports were critical of the misuse of the Housing Production Trust Fund, including the failure of the administration to target funds for extremely low income residents, as required by law. If elected, what will you do to ensure that the HPTF is used to produce deeply affordable housing in all wards of the city and that the Department of Housing and Community Development is held accountable for doing so?

While DC has had the largest per-capita housing trust funds in the nation for some time, the HPTF has almost never met the target for most deeply affordable housing for as long as it has existed. I am glad that the OIG report, media, and advocacy attention has continued to shine a light on this issue and hold DHCD accountable.

The answer to this question is simple but critical — it’s robust Council oversight. The main causes identified for misuse of HPTF funds were DHCD’s failure to follow its competitive project selection process, and failure to submit waiver requests to the Council should DHCD determine there are “not a sufficient number of viable housing proposals to produce and preserve affordable housing units for [extremely low-income] households.” (Office of the Inspector General, Sep. 2021)

These are not problems that can be easily solved by additional legislation or new funding, because they deal with policy that is already in place and funding that is already present.
I had looked forward to engaging in this oversight work — and passing other critical measures, like an expansion of rent control — but in 2020 I was removed from the Housing Committee, as was my Ward 8 colleague Councilmember Trayon White. Despite that, I insist on being a strong advocate for housing on the Council, and will not let up in that fight should I be returned to the Council for another term.