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 $114K in Ward 6. 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?

With the support of fierce advocates like D.C. for Democracy, the Council has taken significant action recently, and I’m proud of my role. Among other victories, I strongly supported raising the wage to more than $15/hour and passing paid family leave. This past summer, I successfully led the effort to increase income taxes on the District’s highest earners and then directed that revenue into housing for our unhoused neighbors, increasing wages for early childcare workers, and creating a new monthly guaranteed income for low-income workers in the District. The guaranteed income initiative is groundbreaking and will put cash payments directly into the hands of thousands of residents. I was also proud to co-introduce “baby bonds” legislation, which will work to close long-term wealth gaps. But there’s more work for the Council to do, particularly around taking more immediate steps to ensure we narrow and close a wide range of disparities in our city – from the gap between white and Black and Hispanic household incomes to small things like internet access (I introduced a bill for that), making it easier for DC residents to start small businesses and giving them a fair playing field against national brands and changing neighborhoods (I introduced a bill for that as well), and more. And I’m fighting for my Metro for DC proposal to give $100 per month to DC residents to cover transportation costs and invest in reliable transit expansions in underserved communities.

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 completely support expanding guaranteed income programs. In fact, I led the most ambitious effort ever undertaken in the District to provide a guaranteed monthly income for low-income families by ensuring that my push to increase income taxes on high-income
District residents included an ongoing investment in the District’s earned income tax credit (EITC), starting at more than $30 million and increasing to more than $60 million per year. Through my efforts, the Council more than doubled the current local EITC, which goes directly into the pockets of some of the lowest-income families in the District, and then used that increase to make it a monthly payment. The payment amount depends on family size and income level, but at the highest end, families could receive nearly $600 per month. These additional funds generally are not taxable and will not cause families to be disqualified from means-tested programs like SNAP and TANF. It’s simply more money that families can use to help pay bills or cover unexpected costs. My Metro for DC legislation is a more targeted program, but it would also provide up to an additional $100 per month to defray transportation costs. Programs like these - that are targeted by income or by how the funds can be used - are the path to ensuring that all District residents have the means they need to afford what they and their families need to thrive. Looking at the Council Budget Office’s award-winning study on UBI, which concluded likely it would be prohibitively expensive, I think these approaches help us make big progress much faster.

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?

Yes. And we also need to recognize that housing is out of reach for many of the working families that want to call DC home and would otherwise be called “middle class.” The starting salary for a librarian at a DC public school is $51,000, and that job requires a master’s degree (which likely comes with student loans). The starting salary for a firefighter with FEMS is $56,000. Whether as individuals or combined into a family with children, both would find it difficult to afford living in the city, yet neither would be eligible for much of the housing the District subsidizes. The city must focus its efforts on the deepest affordability levels, and also do more to create and sustain workforce housing so that we do not create a situation of housing at two extremes and nothing in the middle. That’s why, for example, I passed legislation to expand the District’s Employer-Assisted Housing Program for DC government workers, with an additional bonus for first responders who commit to staying in their jobs while living in the communities they serve.
I also think that our conversations about affordable housing for families at all income ranges—from 30% AMI up to even 80% of AMI—also needs to more explicitly center the need to build family-sized housing. If we are subsidizing affordable housing development, but it is all 1- and 2-bedroom apartments, then we’re not getting what we need from our investment, and we’re not building inclusive communities. We need to ensure that as those librarians and firefighters grow their families, we have housing stock they can afford and that fits their family’s size. We’ve spent billions of dollars building great schools to help keep families in the District, and we don’t want families to leave because they can’t afford the extra bedroom they need.

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 agree that we need to keep looking at new ways to create housing. In Southwest Ward 6, where development has created extreme housing pressures, the District must both safeguard low-income and public housing that already exists, and also expand affordable housing using all available tools. One such site is the future redevelopment of the FEMS repair shop. Located on M Street SW and adjacent to Lansburgh Park, it’s positioned to be a central site with great community amenities nearby. This is why I sent a letter asking DMPED to explore using a Community Land Trust (CLT) model, similar to the Douglass Land Trust, to rethink the housing possibilities on this site. I wasn’t totally satisfied with the answer, but I will continue to push DMPED to consider a CLT at this site, and I will work with leaders across Ward 6 to identify other areas where something like a CLT makes sense.

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 6 residents?
Reducing violence - and particularly gun violence - has to be a both/and approach. As in, we need both accountability for harm committed and we need to make very targeted investments in communities through violence prevention, intervention, and interruption, which includes addressing those root causes. As the Chair of the Council’s Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, my approach is to fully fund public safety, which to me, means much more to me than just traditional policing and strong gun laws - although those approaches play a key role. For example, DC has one of the highest levels of spending on our police per resident of any state or city, and we also have one of the highest incarceration rates. If only policing and incarceration were the solutions, we would be one of the safest places in the country, but we know that many of our neighbors still feel unsafe and experience violence.

So, what does fully funding public safety mean? It means investing in accountability and also seriously committing to building stronger communities, including through a public health framework and by focusing on those most impacted by gun violence. It also means supporting victims and survivors of violence to seek justice through the criminal justice system rather than endless cycles of retribution. I can point to years of investments in this space as examples of my leadership. I’ve funded hospital-based violence intervention programs that work with victims while they’re at the ER. I’ve effectively transformed the juvenile justice system through major funding for restorative justice programs at the Office of the Attorney General. And I’ve exponentially grown the resources of the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement and the Office of the Attorney General’s Cure the Streets initiative, which have reduced violence through violence interruption in priority communities.

Fully funding public safety also means using a whole of government approach to address hot spots – the neighborhoods where the data tell us gun violence is most likely to happen. Early last year, the Mayor launched an effort known as “Building Blocks DC”. While I think the idea was on the right track, we need a lot more from Building Blocks DC before we can call it a success. We truly need the whole of government - and, importantly, community – to focus on what leads to gun violence. That looks like strategic place-based solutions like repairing streetlights, activating abandoned spaces and vacant lots, and dramatically investing resources specifically in those communities. It also looks like a person-based approach that targets our resources on the small number of people who commit most gun violence.
Two years ago, I created and funded a Gun Violence Prevention Director position in the City Administrator’s office to move the District toward this whole-of-government approach. The Director’s task is to be exclusively focused on gun violence prevention and reduction through access to all the tools of government. In this budget, I also funded a citywide strategic gun violence reduction plan to help give the Director a road map to achieve that goal. We have a long way to go to realize the potential of that position and get the strategic plan underway, and both are top priorities in my oversight. These efforts are still new, relative to the well-established role of policing in reducing crime, but under my leadership, the District has been steadily growing this framework. In the coming year, I’ll be primarily focused on how these various initiatives can be better coordinated into a comprehensive strategy and used to reduce gun violence dramatically.

Lastly, I’ve also addressed gun violence through legislation, including strengthening our gun laws around the possession of extended clip magazines - which only exist to fire more bullets - and the emerging threats of ghost guns and firearms coming to our communities from other states. These are important pieces to improving community safety.

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?

Yes. I voted against overturning the last ballot measure in 2018, and I promise to respect the will of the voters once again.

7. Thank you for co-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?

I have supported the Local Resident Voting Rights Act for several Council Periods - as well as numerous other measures to expand voting and make it more safe, secure, and accessible. I believe this legislation can be a valuable tool to expand local voting rights and
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ensure all local residents can have their voice heard through the electoral process. Currently, the bill does not have majority support in Committee. But I am committed to continue building support for this measure, including showing that jurisdictions like New York City and others can successfully implement this type of expansion.

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?**

Absolutely. I led the Council’s effort to make DC the first major jurisdiction in the country to allow 16-year-olds to vote in local and federal elections. For many young people, 18 is a time of change and transition, no matter what your next steps are. So, starting civic participation earlier at 16 makes perfect sense – you likely still live in the same community where you grew up, and you likely still live at home with your family. It’s also an easier time to learn the mechanics and habits of voting. Voting at an early age would create an opportunity to take the whole family to the polls - and based on the percentage of young people in DC that are people of color, it also means expanding intergenerational voter participation among Black residents East of the River.

Young people in DC are leaders in their communities, but they don’t have a strong voice in electoral politics. Candidates for office tend not to court young people or meet with them regularly simply because they can’t vote. Working with DC’s young people as a Councilmember and through the fight for Vote 16 only made me more firmly believe in the power of the youth vote. I was extremely disappointed when the Council narrowly defeated my bill several years ago, and I will continue working to change my colleagues’ minds.

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

Not only do I support it, I created it. This proposal achieves a number of goals. First, it would guarantee a $10 million annual investment in increasing transit equity in the District with a focus on making bus service more convenient and reliable for those who depend on it the most. That could mean everything from building bus shelters to provide shade and cover from rain to creating dedicated bus rapid transit lanes and creating or expanding bus lines to serve the most transit-dependent District residents.
Second, it would provide a monthly stipend to help DC residents, including low-income, transit-dependent riders afford their daily commute and encourage more residents to get out of their cars and choose transit. This is an additional investment in transit equity, but it’s also an important investment in our climate change policy - it would help get the District closer to its goal of having 75% of commuting trips by some mode other than single-occupancy vehicles.

Third, it would help our regional transit system recover from the pandemic, to ensure that it is in place for those who need it most. We saw during the pandemic that many essential workers continued to rely on the bus to get to and from jobs they didn’t have the luxury or ability to do from home. My Metro for DC proposal is intentionally targeted toward improving bus infrastructure, because bus riders are disproportionately low-income and people of color. And the proposal would achieve these goals by ensuring that as the District’s revenues increase, we reinvest that economic growth in transit equity and our climate – rather than by trying to identify the funding (likely more than $100 million annually) from somewhere else in the District’s budget.

10. Thank you for co-introducing the VOICE Act. What will you do to ensure that it is passed next year?

I support the VOICE Act and was proud to co-introduce the bill. As Chair of the Committee with jurisdiction over the legislation, I scheduled a public hearing on it shortly after it was introduced - and there were a variety of views expressed at the hearing. I heard some with concern and anxiety about change, but I also heard many diverse voices outlining how ranked choice voting can expand voter engagement and choice. Keeping that in mind, I’m currently reviewing the feedback we received and working with my colleagues to answer their questions and gain their support to determine the next steps.

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?
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The HPTF is probably the most efficient tool we have to subsidize housing for extremely low-income families, and it’s troubling that the Mayor has in the past not hit the statutory requirements for affordability levels. The Council needs to engage in more forceful oversight to ensure that HPTF dollars are used first to subsidize housing affordable for families at extremely low-incomes, while layering other tools to subsidize housing at higher income levels. If oversight isn’t working, the Council may need to take matters into our own hands. For example, working with affordable housing developers and advocates, I led an effort to ensure that the Mayor actually uses the local low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) program that the Council created in 2015. For years, the Mayor ignored this tool for funding low-income housing, so I added language to the law that removed much of the Mayor’s discretion in issuing the local LIHTC, guaranteeing that it will get to affordable housing projects that can use it. The local LIHTC can be used as gap funding for projects around 60% AMI, which are already getting federal LIHTC funding, leaving more HPTF funding for 30% AMI projects. We need more solutions like this to free up the HPTF while still ensuring we encourage affordable housing at a range of income levels.