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# 2019 Council Questionnaire – Challenger

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## CANDIDATE CERTIFICATION

Candidate Name: Erika Almirón Office Sought: City Council

I have read the attached questionnai information provided is accurate and the opinions stated accurately reflect my own positions

Candidate Signature: Date: 3/5/2019

**Please complete, sign and return this form via email in Word format to:**

**[gmgilman@igc.org](mailto:gmgilman@igc.org) and mail a copy with the signature page to**

**Gloria Gilman**

**121 S Broad St, Suite 1720**

**Philadelphia, PA 19107**

### BACKGROUND

1. What, if any, elected or appointed government office(s) have you held?

None.

2. Background and viability questions:

What community or policy issues have you worked on, and in what capacity? (Please provide the names of two or three individuals who can provide information about your previous work.)

I have spent the last 8 years as the Executive Director of Juntos, a Latino immigrant community led human rights organization based in South Philadelphia doing local, state and national social justice work to end the criminalization of migration and people of color.

Our organization was at the forefront of pressuring the city to implement the most progressive sanctuary city model in the country. Philadelphia's Sanctuary City model, that was shaped by Juntos, has since been adapted by over 200 municipalities around the country.

Prior to serving as the Executive Director of Juntos, I was the assistant director at The Philadelphia Student Union. There I gave high school students the tools and support they needed to lead to school reform campaign. I supported and mentored brilliant young people who were organizing to make their schools safer without relying on suspensions and arrests. We also organized to stop school closings, for fully funded public schools and increased counselors, teachers and nurses.

Prior to working at the Philadelphia Student Union I worked for the American Friends Service Committee with women organizing in sweatshops on the U.S. Mexican border. Prior to that I worked at Planned Parenthood as a counselor supporting women looking to access healthcare.

Caitlin Barry – Professor at Villanova University. Worked on the Sanctuary City Policy. 267-242-4324 [caitlinbarry@gmail.com](mailto:caitlinbarry@gmail.com)

Allison Sprague – ED. Victim Witness Services of South Philly. Worked together to address outbreaks of racial violence at South Philadelphia H.S. in 2009 and worked together during my time at Juntos. 215-551-3360 - [alisprague@aol.com](mailto:alisprague@aol.com)

b. What about your background or experience do you think most qualifies you to be elected? Please attach a brief bio.

I think what makes me a unique candidate in this race and qualified to be on city council is that I have lived through many of the issues that I hope to address on city council and I have a track record of bringing people together to address issues that affect our families, communities and city.

c. What other endorsements have you received?

I have been endorsed by Reclaim Philadelphia. Reclaim Philadelphia has 100's of dues paying members. They knocked on over 60,000 doors for Larry Krasner's campaign for District Attorney.

I am endorsed by the Second Generation PAC which is chaired by Joe Khan. Second Generation PAC's mission is to promote the political engagement of immigrant communities that have not been fully included in the political process where they live.

I have also been endorsed by 215 People's Alliance. 215 People's Alliance is a multi-racial collaborative dedicated to fighting for equity and justice in Philadelphia - at the ballot box, and in the streets.

d. How do you plan to win?

I will answer this question in as much detail as possible without compromising internal campaign strategy.

My campaign will build out a broad-based coalition of volunteers to knock doors in targeted wards and areas in March, April and May. This coalition will reflect the networks my campaign committee and I have build over the last 15+ years of organizing in Philadelphia. My campaign also has gained the support from several prominent

independent field operations that will canvass in person, online and over the phone. Our campaign will focus on the areas of the city in which the independent field operations don't have a base. This setup will allow us to have a citywide reach without having to build a citywide program. We will use the money saved from not having to build out a citywide field program to focus on other outreach efforts.

We will couple this canvassing strategy with an aggressive GOTV strategy, focusing on voters we've previously reached at the door, on the phone and online.

I also have a strong endorsement plan that prioritizes unions, neighborhood groups and progressive organizing groups. Our projections have us getting 65,000 votes, the amount, at this phase, we believe we will need to win handily.

e. How much money have you raised? How much do you expect to raise?

We have raised \$33,842. We're on track to raise \$250,000.

We worked with a fundraising consultant who was the finance director on Jess King's congressional campaign that raised over \$2 million to create a fundraising plan. Former Development Director and small business owner Jacob Winterstein is our finance director.

3. What three things would you most want to accomplish if elected?

If elected to office I would prioritize securing additional funding for the public school system, changes to housing laws that would allow people to stay in their homes and reforming the criminal justice system so that we stop wasting money on locking too many people up and instead invest in our communities.

## ISSUES

Although many of the questions below call for a simple yes or no answer, please feel free to provide an explanation for any of your choices. If you have not yet come to a final decision, please state which way you are leaning and what additional information you would need before deciding, if any.

### I. Economic Development

Would you:

1. Raise the City minimum wage to \$15 an hour, either directly or by imposing an impact fee on businesses paying less than \$15?

Yes.

2. Take \$200 million of City pension funds now invested in the stock market to invest in neighborhood economic development projects?

Yes

3. Require City-funded or tax-abated projects to employ a high percentage of City resident workers, especially low and moderate income City residents?

Yes

4. Create a program to provide technical assistance and start-up funding for cooperative, worker-owned businesses?

Yes

5. Reform PIDC, the City's main economic development funding agency, so that its Board has a majority of public and community members, rather than Chamber of Commerce appointed members?

Yes

6. Require the City to withdraw subsidies from corporations that fail to provide jobs or other benefits to City residents?

Yes

7. Bar or limit privatization of City property and work done by City employees? More specifically are there any circumstances under which you would sell PGW?

I do not support the privatization of any of the city's public assets, including but not limited to, parks, water, PGW, schools, public school nurses, public school substitutes, public school janitorial services etc. I believe that commons should remain public and to the benefit of all of Philadelphia's residents.

8. Sponsor and sign legislation to create a Philadelphia Public Bank?

Yes.

## II. Taxation

Would you:

1. Increase taxes to support City and/or School District services, and if so, which ones?

Yes. A fair tax structure is one of the foundations for a just society. We must prioritize funding the programs that impact people the most; education, healthcare and housing. As an elected leader I will champion a tax structure in which those who profit the most are called upon to pay their fair share. Locally, I believe we should look to raise taxes on the highest earning corporations. I believe we need to stop subsidizing luxury real estate developers and therefore need to end the 10 year tax abatement. That revenue should go to the school district and the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. I also believe our city's mega nonprofits need to pay their fair share through a Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILOTS) program as defined by Rendell's 1994 memo of a rate of 50% their estimated forgone taxes.

2. Reduce taxes as an economic development strategy, and, if so, which ones?

I believe that we need a progressive tax structure that provides tax relief for poor and working people and calls on high earning individuals and corporations to pay their fair share.

3. Support the Soda Tax? Please explain your answer.

I support expanded Universal Pre-K and the Rebuild efforts and what the soda tax funded but feel that the burden of the tax has fallen on the poor and the consumer rather than the corporation. I believe this tax must be reformed so the tax is not on the people but on those who profit off the sales of soda.

4. Support the 10-year Tax Abatement Program for new development as it currently exists? If not, what specific changes would you make?

No. I believe we need to stop subsidizing luxury real estate developers and therefore need to end the 10 year tax abatement. That revenue should go to the school district and the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

5. Bring suit to challenge the nonprofit status of the University of PA and other huge non-profits if they don't agree to make payments in lieu of taxes to the City?

Yes.

### **III. Education**

Would you:

1. Enact a plan that would help regulate charter schools by making their budgetary practices transparent, riding them of conflicts of interest, and stopping them from cherry-picking their student bodies? If so, what would that plan look like?

Even though much of the state charter law lies with the state I will be a tireless champion for increasing charter school oversight and a charter school moratorium as an elected representative of the people of Philadelphia. I will be an advocate in Harrisburg to reform charter school laws so that the city and district can have more oversight over charter school operations, funding and expansion. Locally I will use the bully pulpit to shed light on unfair practices and failures in statewide charter law. Specifically the inability of the district to close failing charter, end the practice of cherry-picking students and the inequitable distribution of funds of students with learning disabilities. I will use city-council hearings as an opportunity to educate the public about failures in the charter school law. I will advocate that the mayor appoints school board members who support a charter school moratorium until state law does a better job at regulating charter schools so that they are not a drain on the entire system.

2. Provide universal pre-k to all 3 and 4 year olds in the City?

Yes.

3. Compute the cost/benefit ratio for the School District of all proposed KOZ zones before they're approved by Council?

Yes.

4. Develop a plan to deal with the bankruptcy facing the School District due to the growth in the number of charter schools in the City, all of whose expenses must by law be paid by the District? Please explain.

Locally we must continue to increase Philadelphia's share of the district's income as laid out in the previous questions. There is not a significant amount of waste to cut from the school district's budget. Therefore I am opposed to austerity measures such as school closings, privatizing school services, cutting nurses etc.

Philadelphia must join with other chronically underfunded districts across the state to demand fully funded public schools.

### **IV. Criminal Justice**

Would you:

1. Grant the civilian police review board subpoena power with the ability to suspend or fire police officers found to engage in misconduct?

Yes

2. Use savings from closing the House of Corrections to invest in job training programs and opportunities for formerly incarcerated people, in an effort to combat mass incarceration?

Yes

3. Bar employers from denying jobs to ex-offenders without a specific job-related basis?

Yes

4. End the stop and frisk program?

Yes

## **V. Housing**

1. Do you think Philadelphia is facing a housing crisis? If so, why? If not, why not? What changes would you make to bring housing policy more in line with your vision?

Philadelphia is most definitely facing a housing crisis. Over 6,000 people a year are living in places not meant for human habitation. And 15,000 people, including families access shelters every year. There are thousands of more people couch-surfing and living in unsafe conditions outside of the scope of homeless outreach work.

Over 50% of our city are renters where their rent goes up astronomically every year and those who have historically owned homes are pushed out of their neighborhoods because of rising property taxes due to over development and ballooning housing costs. The type of development we currently see in Philadelphia will leave many out of our communities and push those who have built this city out. We're rapidly moving toward a Western European model for cities in which the poor are pushed to the outskirts where housing is cheaper but it is harder to access services. All people have a right to the city.

I believe we need to invest more money into the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. We need to implement a policy of rent stabilization so that people are not forced from their homes and neighborhoods. City Council also needs to reform city zoning codes to allow for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) across the city so that homeowners on a fixed income can rent out a portion of their home. ADUs would also increase the affordable housing stock in the city. I believe that councilmanic prerogative is a tradition that must be scrapped. We need citywide plans for the city that are made with community and professional input with aims towards increasing affordable housing. We can't allow these goals and plans to be scuttled by one individual council member's preference or connection to a real-estate developer. I think the city should invest in giving technical assistance to individuals and organizations interested in starting housing co-ops and land trusts that preserve affordable housing.

2. Would you:

- a. Enact a rent stabilization program?

Yes.

- b. Enact inclusionary zoning requirements to compel inclusion of affordable units in all market rate developments?

Yes

- c. Support a dedicated fund to provide technical assistance and start up funding for land trusts and housing co-ops?

Yes

- d. End, limit or curtail Councilmanic prerogative over land disposition?

Yes

- e. Require the land bank to prioritize the disposition of properties for low-income and cooperatively owned developments?

Yes

## **VI. Climate Justice**

1. What, if anything, can the city do to address the fundamental factors driving climate change?

There are a number of ways to reduce carbon emissions in Philadelphia and I believe we need to prioritize emission reduction and elimination strategies that immediately impact people's lives for the better. I support increasing funding to the Weatherization Assistance Program that make homes more energy efficient for long-term home owners who wouldn't be able to afford repairs without the fund. I support making SEPTA a more appealing option than cars by capping daily/weekly/monthly fares, eliminating transfer fees, free rides for children under the age of 18 and bringing the regional rail system's prices and frequency inline with the rest of the system.

I support a public study to figure out a fossil fuel free future for Philly's energy systems. How to transition to a system that create well-paying, unionized work for an energy system that is publicly owned.

2. Do you support a Green New Deal for Philadelphia and, if so, what does that mean to you and what will you do if elected to City Council to implement it?

A Green New Deal for Philadelphia would be a massive public works program that looks to hire Philadelphia residents to work on projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and make our city more sustainable. These jobs would be well paying job that give worker skills. I will support a participatory study funded by the city to formulate a local Green New Deal energy plan to transition Philadelphia to a democratically controlled 100% renewable energy system by 2030, create unionized jobs, and center the decisions and needs of Philadelphia's working class and communities of color.

3. What is your position on the proposal to build a new Liquefied Natural Gas Plant in Southwest Philadelphia?

Greenhouse gas emissions are the fundamental factor causing climate change. It is for this reason that I won't accept any fossil fuel money as I run for city council. I support a public study to figure out a fossil fuel free future for Philly's energy systems. A study that will determine how to transition to a fossil fuel free Philly and creates well-paying, unionized work for an energy system that is publicly owned. I oppose all new fossil fuel project in Philadelphia and as a member of city council will use all zoning and regulatory means at my disposal to stop these projects.

## **VII. Money In Politics**

In light of the recent indictments involving elected officials, what is your position on:

- a. Accepting gifts or services

City Council members makes 10's of thousands of dollars more than the average Philadelphia resident. There is no reason for them to accept gifts or services on top of their already high pay.

- b. Accepting donations from corporate PACs that do work for the city

Philadelphians deserve to have elected leaders that are accountable to the people. It is for this reason that I have committed to not accepting any money from corporate PAC's, the fossil fuel industry and real-estate developers.

c. Public financing of city elections

In order to make running for public office more accessible and make the system less susceptible to corruption we should publicly finance campaigns.

## **VIII. General Statement**

Use this space to provide any further information that you would like us to consider about your candidacy, not covered by the questions above.

### **Erika Almirón Bio**

My parents immigrated from South America with only \$50 in their pockets and a hope for a better future. I saw them work in factories, as house cleaners and then eventually small business owners. They put their entire life savings into a small shoe repair shop. Everyday after school my mom took us to the shop. I took care of my younger siblings, my mother cooked dinner on a hot plate, and my dad repaired shoes. It wasn't easy, but my parents earned enough to buy a home and send my three siblings and me to college. The values I learned in that shoe repair shop still guide me today: When we work together and believe in each other, we can achieve things we never thought were possible. I understand firsthand, the experience of hundreds of thousands of working people in Philadelphia who are doing everything they can to make ends meet.

In college, I worked as a waitress. One day the manager handed out paychecks without our hourly pay. Guided by the values of my family, I organized everyone. We walked off the job and the next day, we all got paid. I found my voice as a community organizer for social and economic justice.

I worked at Planned Parenthood as a translator and counselor. There I met hundreds of brave young women who would travel miles to access the healthcare and supports they needed. Many times they would be walking in for an appointment only to be met by angry mobs outside trying to shame them or scare them away. It was there that I learned the importance of having someone when you walked in that speaks your language, who has shared your experiences and welcomes you in with a smile.

When I was the assistant director at the Philadelphia Student Union, I supported and mentored dozens of brilliant young people who were organizing to make their schools safer without relying on suspensions and arrests. I saw the difference a teacher or a principal can make, someone in power who understands you and is willing to work with you and support you.

For almost eight years, as the Executive Director of Juntos, I've worked alongside some of the most courageous Latino immigrants in Philly, many of who remind me of my very own family when we lived in South Philly. Together, these families and I, worked to build a movement of leaders poised to fight back against the criminalization of migrants, one that fights to keep our families together and to put an end to our city's collaboration with ICE. It is through this work that I have seen how a mayor, a governor, a president or a city council can keep a family together or rip them apart, can help free women and their children from detention centers or leave them to suffer, can force people into the shadows or welcome them into the light.

I am running for City Council because I believe Philadelphia deserves an elected leader who will fight for all of us.

