

**AFSCME DISTRICT COUNCIL 47**

**2023 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**(City Council District and City Council-At-Large)**

**CANDIDATE INFORMATION**

**Candidate Personal Contact Information (Fields marked with asterisks are required)**

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**Campaign Contact Information**

Full Name of Campaign Committee: \* Citizens For Isaiah Thomas

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Campaign Manager Name: Jackie Golden

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**Candidacy Information**

What office are you seeking? \* City Council At-large

If you are running for a district seat, in which district are you running? \* NA

Are you the incumbent? \* Yes X No \_\_\_ If yes, year first elected: Elected in 2019, sworn in January of 2020

With which party are you registered? Democratic Party

Please list union leaders you seek input from when developing your legislative agenda:

A member of my leadership team, Carmella Green, serves as my Community and Labor Liaison. A primary focus of her role is to ensure our legislation is created in partnership with Philadelphia

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Unions and the Labor community. Any time our office begins work on legislation that may impact a union, we always contact leaders within that union.

Who are your opponents?

As a coalition builder, I don't see the race as having opponents. I have a track record of bringing people together and forming consensus. For the City Council At-Large race, the top five vote-getters (in the majority party) will serve on City Council. I'm not running against anyone - I hope to continue to serve as your Councilmember and look forward to the other four members. As we've seen a historic number of resignations from City Council, there is an opportunity to re-elect us incumbents for stability and continuity while two open slots give us new energy and new voices. I welcome the opportunity and am excited by the diverse field of candidates and ideas.

If there is not sufficient space to respond to the following questions, please attach additional sheets to the questionnaire.

## **CAMPAIGN**

1. Briefly describe your campaign's path to victory. What issues will you be emphasizing throughout your campaign and why?

As an incumbent, I have set my standards for success higher than in my past races. My minimum win number this cycle is 50,000 votes. One of the ways in which my campaign plans to reach this goal is by implementing an aggressive field plan. As a team, my campaign plans to knock on thousands of doors throughout each of the city's 66 wards, and continuing the conversation with constituents through endorsement letters and thank you cards. We have begun a letter-writing campaign that includes hand-written notes to individuals asking for their votes and several high-quality mailers. Our team is also preparing a detailed campaign media communication plan including paid advertising, earned media and digital outreach. In the 2019 primary, I had the privilege to be endorsed by several community groups, political organizations and labor unions. I am hopeful to receive support from the same organizations, and more, this cycle. Finally, with the help of hundreds of individuals, labor/unions, and family/friends, I plan to aggressively fundraise to help turn out the vote across the city, ensuring every voice is heard.

The issues we will emphasize throughout my campaign include education, responsible and community-centered economic development, and re-emphasized support of the organized labor movement.

As City Council's Education Chair, I have focused on a few key issues surrounding school climate, culture and curriculum. One of my goals as Chair has been centered around

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increasing transparency and communication between the city, school district, and private/charter schools. After visiting schools across the city, I drew many concerns surrounding school infrastructure, not only in classrooms, but the dramatically understaffed, underfunded and rundown sports facilities. Our students deserve more within their schools.

In addition, I want to focus on responsible and community-centered economic development. In the Fall of 2020, I introduced the Keep It Local law that requires local business usage and raises reporting requirements in the City of Philadelphia's procurement process. I also want to continue promoting the arts and culture community with financial incentives, similar to the Illuminate the Arts Grants I have spearheaded, giving millions to individuals, non-profits, and small arts businesses.

I want to continue my support for the organized labor movement throughout our city. My previously mentioned staff member, Carmella Green, the Community and Labor Liaison, focuses solely on open communication with unions. Every piece of legislation introduced or voted on from my office has been made in tandem with or in consideration of feedback from the corresponding Unions. In 2021, I introduced our Transparency in Healthcare Bill requiring nursing homes, and other congregate care facilities, to report to the state adequately. This bill was made in collaboration with 1199c, SEIU, 32BJ, and others to ensure our city's workers feel the support and respect for keeping the city running. I look forward to continued work with our unions in my second term.

## **PHILADELPHIA ECONOMY**

2. Do you support raising the Living Wage requirement of employers that do business with the city from its current rate? What would your approach be to promoting a Living Wage requirement for employers not covered by the Living Wage Ordinance?

As the son of a Union member who served our city for over forty years, I know first hand the impact fair wages have on a family. It is imperative that we ensure all employees have access to a fair living wage. When working families are guaranteed the dignity of a living wage, it has profound rippling effects on our city, including, but not limited to increases in rates of home-ownership and more expendable income reinvested in our community.

3. The City requires companies with 10 or more employees to provide paid sick leave. Many states and cities have similar laws with no exemptions. Would you support updating the legislation to put it in line with what other states and cities have passed?

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Throughout the pandemic, as families struggled to balance the rapidly-changing environment, I cosponsored legislation to pass the Public Health Emergency Leave, granting thousands of workers access to paid sick leave. As rounds of this bill have expired due to sunshine laws, I have continuously voted to ensure workers have the ability to prioritize their family, without having to worry about losing their jobs. I believe conversations should be held with other cities and states to learn the impact of their legislation and make an effort to apply their best practices to Philadelphia. I am willing to meet with stakeholders in the business community to hear about how these practices impact their daily operations and hear some of their concerns and solutions.

**PENSION/RETIREMENT SYSTEM**

4. What is your position on the current cap on annual contribution in the defined benefit plan by employees in the stacked hybrid plan of the Municipal Employee Pension system? Should the cap be indexed to include automatic increases tied to salary increases?

Philadelphia's first concern when it comes to city worker pension is ensuring it can pay out committed earned benefits. With the pension currently only about 60% funded, our first concern must be ensuring that full funding is reached as quickly as possible. We must also find the political will to ensure that the pension reforms made don't become a long term liability to current city workers and indexing is the right move for everyone.

**EDUCATION/SCHOOL BOARD**

5. What qualities and experience would you look for in appointees to the School Board? What standards should School Board appointees use to evaluate current or proposed privatization measures (e.g., charter schools)?

A School Board member should possess a foundational knowledge of the School District. Members should have a diverse set of experiences and backgrounds. The makeup of the board should include members from various backgrounds including union, legal, economic, technology, and arts experiences to prioritize the best interest of our city's youth.

Schools in Philadelphia should all be evaluated using clear objective criteria to ensure that quality education is offered to every child in the City. The standards should focus on culture, climate, and curriculum. I support thoughtful and strategic methods to better our system and believe that an examination of the entire system is needed, as seen through my time as Education Chair.

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6. How would you work to support acquiring fair State funding for the Philadelphia School District? What experience and relationships do you have working with entities in Harrisburg that would help accomplish that?

In this fiscal year, Council has allocated more money for the school district than any year in the city's history. However, the state must be held accountable to properly fund our schools, ideally in cooperation with our state partners; like those in the Philadelphia delegation and state senators to commit to prioritize our teachers, faculty, and students here in Philadelphia. We look forward to the decision in the fair funding lawsuit and hope that the courts will recognize that the state funding formula has undervalued school kids in Philadelphia for years. I have also spent time building up state-wide coalitions of electeds to advocate on behalf of public schools across the Commonwealth. However, many aspects of the School District's budget require closer examination, specifically focused on funding to improve school climate, culture, and curriculum.

**CITY SERVICES**

7. What are your priorities for funding City and Court services? How would you ensure that these services are provided equitably throughout the city?

I believe that we must prioritize accessibility in all our city services. During the pandemic, we were able to adjust services that were previously offered only in-person to be offered virtually. This included an increased push to pay bills, file business permits, and even advocate to their elected officials virtually. Additionally, addressing Court services, I introduced a report stating that encompassed a collaborative approach within the criminal justice system and city services, necessary to combat gun violence in Philadelphia. These suggestions involve making changes to entities like the District Attorney's Office, the Philadelphia Police Department, the Attorney General's office, the First Judicial District Court, City Council, Philly Counts, CLIP, and PHS. Through budget hearings, Council is able to hear from different departments on how their processes are going, but I believe we must do more to ensure accountability that all city services are equitable.

8. What level of services should the city support to fully fund and fully staff our Library and Parks and Recreation systems? Please explain your position and how you believe those systems can be funded.

During this past budget cycle, I fought for meaningful reforms and opportunities to further economic recovery of all Philadelphians. With recreation center hours limited to weekdays, the potential positive impacts of these rec centers are diminished throughout our communities. With that in mind, during the fiscal year of 2022-2023, I advocated for \$5,000,000 to shift hours of

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operations and allow recreation centers to stay open on Saturdays and Sundays. Since children are primarily in school when the recreation centers are open, they cannot participate in the programs the city implements for their benefit. During this discussion, significant issues arose in conversations with the administration and the Parks and Recreation Department as we faced one of the most considerable staffing shortages of our time.

9. How would you address staffing shortages throughout departments, including those that are a result of unfilled positions? What initiatives would you put in place to help hire and retain current City / Court workers?

The long-standing issues surrounding hiring have been exacerbated by the pandemic resulting in the Great Resignation. In conversations with labor unions, I have heard issues surrounding hiring, retention, and capacity to maintain all employees. One issue that was prevalent in my work this term was addressing issues with One Philly; A One Philly deduction error within the payroll system had a negative financial impact on countless city employees, including myself. During a transfer ordinance discussion, I argued against putting money into this system without a plan. I pushed for transparency and communication and received little information from the city. Within the city, I have seen hiring processes take upwards of six (6) months from interview to start date. There are bureaucratic inefficiencies in the hiring process that must be addressed. Over the past few months, my staff and I have been working with numerous stakeholders (the Administration, Labor and DHS) to expedite the hiring of staff at the Juvenile Justice Services Center. I saw many issues like jobs posting technical errors, a required pre-employment physical that was taking up to eight weeks to be completed. As a member of the Appropriation Committee, Philadelphia must adapt and innovate to ensure the hiring process is not crippled by antiquated procedural protocols.

10. What is your position on the privatization of City services?

I believe it is in the best interest of our city's workers to discourage the privatization of city services. This city has a long history with the ownership of our own operations. It is crucial that we keep our essential services in-house to make sure we are not taking away good paying union jobs from Philadelphians.

**ENVIRONMENT**

11. What steps do you want the city to take to address climate change and to shift away from fossil fuels toward renewable energy sources? Do you support the City amending its investment portfolio to divest from fossil fuel companies?

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I believe the city can commit to becoming fossil-free in the future. Philadelphia must find ways to achieve this goal in a cost effective way while focusing on communities that have been historically disadvantaged. I look forward to finding ways we can apply the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds to a meaningful energy plan. We are in favor of finding creative ways to divest from fossil fuels and climate damaging practices while ensuring the safety and security of city pension funds for workers who have earned these benefits.

**TAXES**

12. What measures would you support to make sure that wealthy non-profits pay their fair share to support City and Court services?

The State Tax Uniformity clause limits how we can tax Philadelphians and businesses. Due to Council's limitation in taxation, I would continue to strengthen relationships with wealthy non-profits to develop a connection to build a relationship to encourage philanthropic actions and community investment.

13. Would you support any changes to the city's property tax abatement program? If not, please explain why. If so, please explain how?

City leaders are regularly tasked with finding new ways to generate revenue to ensure resource growth. I voted against the 10-year tax abatement, but the burden of taxes must be balanced against the need for good-paying jobs in Philadelphia. Instead of relying on inconsistent tax structures, it is our responsibility to seek alternative avenues for revenue while keeping the focus on high-quality services and tax fairness.

14. How would you reform city taxes to increase revenue? What is your position on the Net Income and Gross Receipts Tax and on the Wealth Tax legislation? If you have other ideas to increase revenue, please explain them.

I am continuously examining alternative tax options to increase stability within our tax base. The city must find ways to meet obligations to its residents while ensuring job growth, also allowing for funding to address historic inequities, and diversifying our tax base, including the net Income and Gross Receipts Tax. Philadelphia must work to get beyond just raising rates to grow revenue, we have to focus on growing the size of the pie as well. My team and I are still exploring the potential impact of the Wealth Tax on all Philadelphians.

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**PHILADELPHIA HOUSING**

15. Do you support increasing revenue for the Housing Trust Fund to help residents avoid displacement in communities currently facing development pressure?

The housing crisis across the city has grown exponentially over the past years, affecting more residents than ever before. Given this information, I believe that with a combination of land bank usage, leveraging pension funds to support rational development projects, utilization of the neighborhood preservation initiative, the Housing Trust Fund, and a more efficient zoning process, we can create affordable housing in neighborhoods across the city. We are always looking for new and inventive ways to add revenue to the housing trust fund that doesn't slow housing production in the city.

16. As a city elected official, what steps will you take to ensure that local government plays a proactive role in expanding permanent affordable and workforce housing in Philadelphia?

The housing crisis in Philadelphia has been a long-standing and deeply troubling issue for many of our residents. The crisis is mainly driven by the lowest minimum wage of any surrounding state and historically low wages for workers. My team has met with and listened to numerous constituents that have struggled with issues surrounding homestead exemption, rental assistance, and inadequate housing conditions. The city has not adjusted to the rising housing costs and the decrease in our homeownership rate in recent years. The lack of housing in the city will require a combination of solutions involving rental assistance, the Neighborhood Preservation Initiative, land bank utilization, and transparency within departments.

17. Do you support extending good cause eviction protections to all residential leases? Do you support rent control measures to protect Philadelphia tenants?

The rental population has increased exponentially in Philadelphia. Given this increase, we must explore programs that aid the stability of all our renters, like the good cause eviction protections. In order to best support this population, we must include the voices of all stakeholders. Our office has heard from many constituents struggling with housing issues related to living conditions, landlord accountability, and fair rent. Having cosponsored the Good Cause Eviction law, I believe that without government protections, bad actors could potentially evict a tenant without providing a valid reason. The city, landlords, and tenants must work together to ensure fair housing conditions for all, which should include the stipulations within the city's good cause eviction protection.



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Rent stabilization programs have had success in other cities, in which our city should examine best practices and tailor tier policies to fit the needs of Philadelphians. We have a responsibility to review all options available and, most importantly, learn from their pitfalls.

**PHILADELPHIA RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**

18. Do you support revising the Memo of Understanding between the Philadelphia Police Department and Philadelphia School District to close the school to prison pipeline? If yes, explain how you would accomplish this. If no, please explain why?

As a former educator, high school coach, and father of a school-age child, I know first hand a parent's concern with a child's safety in school. The Police Department and School District must work together to ensure that childish behavior is managed closely and does not turn into criminal behavior. We want students to get diplomas, not arrest records. As the Education Chair, I know the need to make schools and students safe while not criminalizing childhood is vital. We have the ability to build appropriate relationships between SDP and the Police Department.

19. Do you support additional funding for programs that are alternatives to incarceration for drug addiction, mental health treatment, and other issues? If yes, how would you measure the effectiveness of those programs? If no, please explain.

I absolutely agree that there should be alternatives to incarceration for drug addiction, mental health crises, and other issues. In light of discussions with city departments like DBHIDS, the Health Department, and the Administration, I firmly believe the city must do more to prioritize our residents' safety and health. Organizations, like Self Help Movement and others, serve as prevention/intervention programs for intensive, compassionate treatment for those in recovery to help their specific needs. I have also worked with state partners, including State Senator Tartaglione, to bring in new money to address the addiction crisis. We can measure the effectiveness of those programs by encouraging organizations to produce public data on the number of individuals they work with and cycle back into harmful patterns.

20. What community policing initiatives do you support or propose? Please explain.

One of my largest accomplishments on Council thus far is the Driving Equality Agenda. These two bills seek to address the tension between police and community members by removing negative interactions while keeping the traffic stops that promote public safety and reclassifying eight minor violations that promote inequality. The Driving Equality Agenda reclassifies certain motor vehicle code violations as one of two categories: a "primary violation," which allows an officer to conduct a traffic stop in the name of public safety; or a "secondary violation," in which

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a traffic stop would no longer be used for enforcement. The data bill within the agenda mandates the collection and publication of all traffic stops in Philadelphia. My office will closely monitor the data of reclassified secondary violations to ensure they are not compromising public safety, also using this data to ensure that primary violations are not being used to discriminate against people of color. This approach seeks to redirect the time and resources of the Philadelphia Police Department toward keeping Philadelphians safe. Additionally, as the chair of the Streets and Services committee, I held hearings to discuss the hit-and-run epidemic in the city. Based on the findings of these hearings, I pushed for \$600,000 for the Philadelphia Police Accident Investigation Division to acquire accurate technology to deal with hit-and-run crimes. Additionally, I have continuously pushed for improved street redesign with a focus on the High-Injury network including streets that have 80% of traffic fatalities occur on 12% of Philly's roads.

21. What funding and staffing proposals would you support to enhance probation and parole services for Philadelphians under supervised release?

We know that more than 95% of individuals convicted will be released from prison or some sort of incarceration. It is socially beneficial to structure their time in supervision/confinement in such a way that they can maintain and build positive social ties and relationships, gain meaningful skills for future work, and create lives discouraging recidivism. Utilized correctly, probation and parole can better manage an individual's societal needs. In regards to specific funding and staffing proposals, it would depend upon appropriate classification on parole and probation staff to ensure the individual is preparing a meaningful and permanent return to society.

22. What funding and staffing proposals would you support for the Department of Prisons to ensure incarcerated citizens are best prepared for return to the community from incarceration or from alternative detention programs?

While prisons are primarily funded by the state, I plan to continue working with our state partners to push for adequate funding of all our prisons. Our prisons are in desperate need of additional staffing, transparency, and communication with other city departments. The current economy plays a significant role in recidivism rates we have seen in Philadelphia. In collaboration with other Councilmembers, we are in the early stages of discussing what a prison oversight board looks like. However, without proper investments in job training and technical skills programs, we are not giving individuals impacted by our criminal justice system a real chance and are simply exacerbating issues further. Throughout my time in Council, I have prioritized supporting residents in gaining access to employment, and I know that we as a city have many gaps in our services. I have also worked with alternative solutions-oriented groups like the sentencing foundation to address a multitude of issues. This is why I will continue to fight for resources that align with the real needs of Philadelphians.

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23. What steps do you believe the City can take to reduce the availability of guns in Philadelphia?

I believe one of the most important steps the city can take to reduce the availability of guns in Philadelphia is to fix some of its inefficiencies in the court system. In the collaborative approach I introduced after spending the summer in gun court, I proposed dozens of solutions making changes to several city entities. One of the Court-related proposals I suggested includes recommending modifying prosecutor training with respect to education around firearm-related laws. I observed that Senior Assistant District Attorneys were often responsible for watching younger, newer attorneys who acted as lead prosecutors. We recommend that senior prosecutors argue gun cases while training lawyers to observe in addition to a recurring group of prosecutors rather than a revolving door for varied but similar cases. In addition to victims and witnesses failing to appear in court, the absence of Philadelphia Police officers accounts for the second leading cause of case dismissals. The majority of officer no-shows is a result of administrative and/or human resource clerical errors. We recommend better coordination of officer schedules for court appearances with updated technology, and prioritization of court appearances in a way that does not conflict with other public safety responsibilities, thus reducing the number of gun users on the street.

24. Do you have any plans regarding programs that support and protect victims of crime and other affected members of the community?

One of the recommendations I made in the report I created is to address witness protection. The current perception of lawlessness, combined with the rise in shootings, sends a message to victims and witnesses. We need to better protect victims and witnesses in order to get them safely to and from the court in an effort to clear more cases. We recommend \$3M in victim protection and witness services.

**PHILADELPHIA CORPORATE POWER**

25. Do you support publicly financed campaigns for all City elected offices? If no, please explain.

Nationwide, but especially in Philadelphia, we are currently working to develop consistency in election practices. We are examining new voting methods, including listening to the supreme court to ensure our elections are safe and fair. During this most recent budget cycle, I advocated for the Commissioner's office to receive more resources than ever. Additionally, we have partnered with many local organizations to ensure that the ballot is more accessible through a big push for better language access. We are open to exploring what changes in financing would look

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like for a fairer democratic process. While publicly financed elections are a concept that I support, I am not confident that now is the best time from an implementation perspective.

26. Do you support legislation that enables the City to recover subsidies from corporations or other businesses that fail to provide jobs or other benefits to city residents as a condition of the subsidies? Please explain.

Any time the city provides businesses with subsidies, even when they fail to meet contractual agreements, the city must pursue all appropriate means to recuperate funds and ensure accountability. I am eager to hear from the labor community regarding potential legislation to address these issues. I believe that our corporations must be held accountable to ensure that our workers are treated fairly and within the means of the law. For Philadelphia to be the first class city that we know it should be, it is imperative we have robust public/private partnerships that residents throughout the city can benefit from.

**RESIDENCY ISSUE**

27. What is your position on City and Court employees having the option to live outside the city? Please explain.

My office has been made aware of certain issues that stem from past residency requirements. While I understand the importance of city employees residing within our boundaries, I am open to a conversation with labor unions that represent city employees to implement a flexible waiver process to recruit for specific job classes that have consistently had issues with their hiring practices. Those closest to the problem are often closest to the solution, this applies to city employees.

28. Are there any other issues you'd like to mention about which we have not asked you in this questionnaire?

In no specific order, I am a Council Member, a father and a coach - I wear all hats at all times. Whether on the court, in my house, or in my City Hall office - my priority is always serving the young people in my life. I see my children and Philadelphia's youngest constituents as a priority - not for the future but for today. Every race that I've run and every piece of legislation that I've championed is to further the goal of making Philadelphia work better in a youth-centric way. I've made parks and recreation a budget priority while running a basketball camp for students of all ages. Unions have been a part of my life since the beginning, and through the work my office has done spearheaded by Carmella Green, my Community and Labor Liaison, our lines of communication remain open. As a Council Member (and father and coach), I believe in big

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policies that benefit every neighborhood but also quality time spent in these streets with Philly's finest. I am seeking your endorsement because I know that we share this vision - of working in every neighborhood, with every family, to make Philadelphia better for all.