

**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)**

Name: Nicolas O'Rourke

Registration Address:

E-Mail:

Home Phone:

Work Phone:

Cell Phone:

HQ Phone:

Fax:

Work Address:

**Campaign Contact Information**

Full Name of Campaign Committee: Friends of O'Rourke

HQ Address: \*

Campaign Chair Name: Cecily Harwitt

Campaign Chair Phone: (818) 631-3454

Campaign Manager E-Mail: \*

**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? \*

Are you the incumbent? \* Yes \_\_\_ No x \_\_\_ If yes, year first elected:

With which party are you registered? Independent w/ Working Families Party

Please list union leaders you seek input from when developing your legislative agenda:  
Working Families Party, my party, has a long history building power in community with labor unions. In Pennsylvania and as our Organizing Director, I've had the pleasure of working directly with leaders from Unite Here, SEIU Healthcare PA, SEIU 32BJ, 1199C, and PASNAP. I've also advocated with members of DC 47 on behalf of Councilmember Brooks' wealth tax proposal and the PA Domestic Workers Alliance for non-union workforces. If elected I want to deepen the ties I've made to these unions while also expanding my support. In addition to DC 47, I'm working hard to earn the support of DC33, PFT, Teamsters, and others to ensure I am informed on members needs in City Hall.

Who are your opponents?

My opponents will be determined by the outcome of the Republican primary. As a Working Families Party candidate, I will be competing directly with the Republicans over the two designated seats for minority parties.

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?

In my last run, I earned over 40,000 across the city coming up just short of joining my Councilmember Brooks in City Hall. Our campaigns were historic, and I am immensely proud of the race I ran. It served as a learning point for this year. Heading into November, I'm working towards building a bigger city-wide coalition to lift me to victory. Unlike 2019, I have worked early to introduce and build support for my candidacy. I've already endorsements from community and labor organizations alike and will be looking to grow that support in the coming months. I plan to have the resources to ensure that we will be able to get out our message through all mediums and will work to build a volunteer network that can both serve as a fundraising and organizing base.

You can see a rundown of the issue I will be emphasizing at my campaign website [www.NicForPhilly](http://www.NicForPhilly). I will be talking about issues that most impact working families – housing security, safe streets, a greener Philadelphia with more community spaces, and raising wages.

## **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?

Yes. The fight against poverty must include the raising of the wage from \$7.25 to at least \$15 an hour. City Contractors have already received this raise and we must identify the best ways the Council can force the conversation in Harrisburg and find creative ways to encourage businesses to honor the need for it here in the city.

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?

Yes. Philadelphia should be leading the way in labor laws and should be enforced by a fully funded Enforcement Office.

## **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?

Yes, I am in favor of indexing the cap to automatic increases tied to salary increase. We must protect and ensure the promise we made to our city's workforce in giving them a retirement with dignity. The chipping away at our municipal, state, and federal pension systems is an opposition with an economy that works for seniors and working families.

## **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)?

Our city has a strong education justice movement with two strong leaders in office now – Councilmember Brooks and Councilmember Gym. When we appoint or elect or nominate people with real life experience in poor communities, in Black and brown communities, we are ensuring that lived experience is part of the equations. That is one of the most important qualities when looking at any appointee and particularly for people who oversee one of the main ways the City and Commonwealth invest in our children and young adults.

In Harrisburg, Philadelphia's School District is often treated as an afterthought and experimental ground for privatization schemes in our education system. It has hurt our underlying public school budgets and we are only just getting out of a decade long disinvestment from our school district. We must focus on what we hear from our teachers, parents, and youth. We need more investment in our school district, take out the lead asbestos many of them are working in, and begin to build out more community wrap around services in some of the most impacted neighborhoods from poverty.

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?

As an organizer in the state funding fight for a fair formula and full funding, I have spent years pushing for a full fair funding formula in Harrisburg. We must utilize the organizing skills to bring the necessary relationships together to build leverage and push on the bills that have already been put in place to get funds to the city. Now that the Supreme Court has ruled the way the

Commonwealth funds Phila as unconstitutional, we are closer to seeing proper funding for our schools.

## **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?

Any funding must always be viewed through an equitable lens first and foremost. Looking at appropriate data, consulting with community leaders, and understanding neighborhood needs will help ensure that is done when looking at city funding. I would support policies like the “Just Services” campaign discussed in City Council.

Our court system is underfunded and is another area where we need action from Harrisburg. Our city also must ensure they are paying their share as well. It’s poor, Black, and brown communities who suffer the most when we don’t have adequate funding for public representation and often compounds the issue at hand.

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.

I have been an outspoken advocate alongside DC 47 and Councilmember Brooks’ for a wealth tax in Philadelphia. The revenue it could bring in would be a great first step in ensuring we have fully funded recreation centers and libraries. I would always be in support of expanding the services of libraries and recreation centers to 7 day services. This how we not only build a just city, but a safer city that will create an environment for families to build community.

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?

Unions help retain people. Good wages keep people in jobs. Good jobs support a family. The shortages our city faces in our workforce should be a top priority. With a strong and vibrant city workforce including our court system, then we cannot deliver the public services people depend on to ensure that lives move forward. If we cannot deliver the support our workforce needs, than we are not attracting more people to Philadelphia. I would work directly with unions to understand how my office could be a resource for recruiting more people into our city work force. We need to think holistically about how our education system feeds into our workforce and how better to connect those two. I will prioritize this.

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

No. Period. Allowing the wealthy to profit off public goods is a non-starter in my opinion.

## **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?

I would require PGW to produce budgets and business plans that match the City's climate goal for rapidly phasing out fossil fuels, with transparent processes that allow full public participation, while guaranteeing that all Philadelphians can afford the energy they need and creating good union jobs. I would support and help fund the Community Health Act, introduced by former Councilmember Helen Gym.

Supporting more community spaces and a greener Philadelphia is a top priority for me. We must enact policies and initiatives to end dumping in our neighborhoods forever and ensure prompt and efficient Citywide waste collection for ALL residents to achieve zero waste, ending the need for incineration or landfills by 2035.

To that end, we must not only invest in communities but also take on structural change like disinvesting from fossil fuels. A greener future cannot be pushed off any further.

## **TAXES**

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

I have long supported PILOTs in this City and would continue to make that case as an elected official. There is no reason for the city to not have made a better deal for itself with some of the mega-nonprofits that call Philadelphia home. It's not only in the City's interest, but those institutions long-term interests as well.

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

Yes, by ending the 10-year tax abatement completely we can ensure that the 55% coming back to the School District goes towards cleaning up toxic schools and the 45% coming back to the city goes to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund and is earmarked for families making less than 30% AMI. I have championed this issue and would use my office to put this back on the city's agenda.

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.

Our taxation system is regressive and the wealthy need to pay more in taxes. That's why myself, my party, and Councilmember Brooks have championed a wealth tax for Philadelphia. I would work with your leaders and members to make sure we win that if elected.

We must put first our city services at the forefront of any reduction in business taxes. Already we have reductions in workforce, limited city services, and are still recovering from a devastating pandemic.

### **PHILADELPHIA HOUSING**

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

Yes.

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

Housing is an issue that that is a top priority for me. If we do not have affordable housing, we don't have an affordable city. As a city councilmember, I'll work to expand programs that public owned housing and return community spaces back to their communities. I will support

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

Yes and Yes. If rent control is demonized as some developers are attempting to make it, we will pursue rent stabilization to ensure tenants aren't exploited and priced out of housing.

### **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?

Yes. We need to end unnecessary police interactions and that is most true for youth in schools. I would work with the new school district leadership to change this policy and ensure that we are approaching our school system with a trauma informed approach to meet the needs of our children. Wrap around community services, mental health counselors, and support staff should be a reality in every school across Philadelphia.

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 was proud to speak in support of legislation that addressed this like Councilmember Thomas' bill for putting an end to unnecessary traffic stops and Councilmember Brooks' initiative to have mental health professionals respond to a mental health emergency. We need to remove unnecessary interactions between law enforcement and our communities. These are the concrete and real proposals I would support as a councilmember.

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

Like many of you, I have felt the effects of gun violence firsthand as it continues to run through my community in Philadelphia. I am concerned about the safety of our community, especially as our youth continue to be impacted by gun violence at alarming rates. We need to take a holistic approach to this and understand the root causes of gun violence. We need to address disinvestment, gentrification, and the structural barriers that keep people in poverty. We need to help build the bonds of community that allow trauma to heal because we know the most well-resourced communities are the safest communities.

Our current punitive carceral system promotes the cycle of recidivism rather than innovating to increase rehabilitation. By recognizing this, we can make our communities safer by ensuring sufficient resources to break cycles of violence and crime and make sure those who do not belong in prison don't end up there in the first place.

From counseling my community as a pastor when impacted by gun violence or trauma, I know that we must take a trauma-centered approach. I will work with all stakeholders necessary to ensure that we are creating an environment in our city where youth can see their dreams come true.

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

If we prioritized reducing recidivism in our returning neighbors, that would mean supporting the foundation of building a better and new way of life. A union job, access to housing and city support services are things we know people can build off and up from. If we treated our probation system through a restorative lens, we can begin to break recidivism rates and stop the cycle of trauma that often compounds from a jail sentence. These are the type ideas I would support and how I would approach funding and staffing proposals.

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?

The staffing crisis in the Department of Prisons is creating unsafe conditions for the workforce and those incarcerated. I support returning elders from prison and jails to maintain safer population levels. I support finding ways to avoid jailtime so that we do not have an overcrowded prison population and the chance for success for those who are incarcerated by creating the chance for a positive intervention. This is part of a holistic approach to changing how we support returning neighbors as well.

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

Harrisburg has done nothing on gun control. It has shackled the city from moving on its own gun safety measures. It's an intractable measure that must be ended because the rampant availability of unlicensed guns means we will continue to see death in our neighborhoods. I will support every effort and use my office to speak out on this issue.

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

The city should ensure that it funds services for victims and any offices dealing with support services. This speaks for the overall need to increase city funding so we can have a restorative approach to trauma a violent crime causes. We must expand restorative justice programs that consider a holistic process that heals trauma rather than builds on it.

## **PHILADELPHIA CORPORATE POWER**

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

Yes.

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.



Yes. It is unjust when corporations generate money by doing business in our city and do not prioritize providing jobs to those who have been in need in our city for generations.

## **RESIDENCY ISSUE**

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

Yes. City Employees help make our city run and their residency in Philadelphia is an important part of that.

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

Thank you for your consideration!

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