



2019 Public Advocate Candidate Questionnaire

Completed questionnaires will be public documents available on our website, so put your best foot forward. If we ultimately hold an endorsement vote in your race, your questionnaire will be circulated to our membership before the vote.

Candidate name	Michael Blake
Preferred campaign contact: name, email address, phone number (we won't publish this)	
What New York City civic and political organizations are you involved with?	New Leaders Council, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc, 100 Black Men and Northwestern University Alumni
How long have you lived in NYC? In what neighborhoods?	I have lived in New York City for my entire life, with the exception of college at Northwestern, my years in President Barack Obama's White House and in his 2012 re-election campaign.
What have you accomplished in public life that you are most proud of?	I am proud that I have spent my adult career in public service. In addition to my accomplishments for Black men and boys and Women & Minority Owned Businesses in the White House, as the Assembly Member for the 79th AD of the Bronx, where I grew up, I am proud of fighting for and delivering \$250 million for NYCHA to provide the resources to make necessary repairs for the health and welfare of families. I am proud of making NY State the first and only "My Brothers Keeper" state delivering \$56 million in grants to support education and training for our young men & criminal justice reform through "raise the age" legislation. I also championed reforms that ensure women and minority-owned businesses get paid by the state in half the time, in order to stay in business and continue to create jobs for New Yorkers.
Name a current/past city elected official you admire, and tell why.	Tremaine Wright, as an attorney and as the incoming Chair of the NYS Associate of Black and Puerto Rican Legislators- Tremaine has regularly stood up for local residents, especially homeowners, young leaders, and residents of color. Her advocacy has been inspiring to see.
The Public Advocate (PA) does not have clearly defined powers and responsibilities, compared to other executive positions. Name one way Letitia James (or a previous PA) has been effective.	The Public Advocate has some important defined roles, including service on the NYCERS board, the ability to introduce legislation, request information from cities agencies and, critically, serves in the capacity of Mayor if the Mayor is unable to do so. Tish James expanded the use of litigation and legislation. For example, she introduced and secured the passage of Equal Pay legislation, prohibiting public and private employers from seeking salary history of applicants, which often discriminates against women of all races and men of color.
How have previous PA's missed opportunities to influence city leadership?	The Public Advocate is a critical position for transparency and accountability, but also for leveraging its seat on NYCERS and demanding additional seats to advocate for jobs, transportation options, and criminal justice reform, among other things. The Public Advocate can do more the support the power of the purse strings at NYCERS to create jobs and affordable housing. I would also demand a seat on the MTA Board to create more accountability for transportation equity and resiliency.
NYC faces problems with no immediate or obvious solutions that require balancing needs of many stakeholders. Name one "hard problem" and describe how you'd help solve it.	New Yorkers are used to challenges and we rise to them. We have many, from jobs that pay enough to sustain our families, affordable housing, a fair criminal justice system, affordable and fair public transportation options, reducing carbon emissions and making our communities more resilient. A current example is the tension on the Amazon deal. Some believe it will bring needed jobs and others worry it will undermine their livelihoods and communities. With stakeholder engagement and discussion, and a demand for data projections,

	<p>transparency and greater government oversight, we can work to make the Amazon deal one that works for New Yorkers and brings us together around accountability and transparency.</p>
<p>What are the top three issues you would focus on as PA? Have you drafted any legislative proposals?</p>	<p>As New York City's next Public Advocate, I will focus on JOBS AND JUSTICE for the people in a very specific ways: Public Transportation, Housing and Jobs and Justice in all forms. There are many policy components we have developed for these and related issues, including criminal justice reform and education. The core of my proposals include rent regulation, preserving affordable housing, taking back tax credits from landlords who fail to make good on their affordable housing commitments, making public housing healthier, demanding a seat on the MTA board to ensure an increase in transportation options where needed, making transportation more affordable for low income people, support for women and minority-owned businesses, who are the fastest job creators in the country, and whether our residents are getting jobs as a result of city contracts and deals like Amazon.</p>
<p>What metrics should we use to evaluate your success as PA?</p>	<p>A Public Advocate should be judged based on legislation that improves the lives of New Yorkers, the accountability in the form of publicly available data and information that holds city agencies accountable to their mission of health, safety and well-being of our residents, and the engagement of community residents on identifying and solving problems. It is an ombudsperson, as well as a watchdog. Additionally, I will seek, at a minimum, a 5% increase in investments to Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprises as these organizations employ people within our communities and help drive local economic empowerment.</p>
<p>Do you see yourself as working mostly in partnership with Mayor DeBlasio, or in opposition?</p>	<p>As Public Advocate, I will work to hold all elected officials, particularly the Mayor, accountable to our residents. That is the job. That is not always a position of opposition. Done right, the position can and should elevate problems that city agencies are either failing to solve or are creating that the Mayor may not be focused on. But I also believe, like on lead paint in NYCHA, which is criminal, and the lack of transparency and accountability in the Amazon deal, requires an honest, informed and principled reckoning with the Mayor and his administration.</p>
<p>What city agencies do you think are most in need of oversight from this office?</p>	<p>All agencies need oversight. In particular, agencies with roles and authority over housing, jobs and small businesses, transportation, criminal justice, education authorities but in particular, NYCHA. What is happening at NYCHA, is criminal, inhumane and corrupt. Given the likely \$2Billion settlement that must be enforced to help residents, it is critical that oversight of funds is managed effectively. Additionally, the following agencies require oversight: Housing, Preservation & Development, Department of Buildings, Economic Development Corporation, Department of Corrections, NYPD, Department of Education, Small Business Services and Human Resource Administration, and Administration for Children's Services.</p>
<p>What changes in powers of the PA should be made in the City Charter? What's your response to calls for the elimination of the PA position?</p>	<p>Public Advocate, as a city-wide elected position, makes it significant as a check and balance on city agencies, particularly in ensuring that issues and solutions from an independent and city-wide elected official hold the Mayor accountable. It matters. I believe that even the greatest city in the world needs a watchdog that goes after broken promises and fights to make them right. When the City Charter was amended in 1989, it created the position because it was eliminating the Board of Estimate and made the President of the City Council position ceremonial after creating the City Council Speaker role. Without the Public Advocate, there is no other independent and accountable elected official representing the entire city. But it was also intended to create more opportunity for people of color of all gender identities to serve the public.</p>

	<p>I also believe that the Department of Investigation should be within the Public Advocate office and the Public Advocate office should have subpoena power to strengthen oversight of government agencies, lead by the counsel within the Public Advocate's office.</p> <p>Additionally, as Public Advocate, I will fight for a seat on the MTA board to better advocate for a fair and resilient public transportation system for New Yorkers. This could be accomplished by a change in the City Charter to require the Mayor to appoint the Public Advocate as one of the four Mayoral appointees (who the Mayor nominates for appointment by the Governor). As an elected official, this would essentially give the people of New York an elected seat on the MTA board.</p>
Should the PA have subpoena power?	Yes. See above.
What is your position on Amazon HQ2? What would you do for people of Long Island City and nearby if the project goes forward?	I will demand projection of the number and type of jobs to be created by Amazon, a tracking of how many residents receive those jobs by type. I would demand assessments, environmental assessments, be made public, that the impact on transportation and affordability be tracked and that consequences for failing to make good on promises be created and kept.
PA special election is non-partisan. Do you see yourself as a Democrat, or would you consider running as a member of another party in the future?	I am a Democrat who will serve all New Yorkers in creating a local government accountable to all the people, native-born or immigrant, transgender or no gender, male or female, straight or gay, young or old, and from all boroughs, no matter their party.
What reforms would you advocate for in the local and state Democratic party?	I would increase training on the County committee process to ensure that more new voices get involved along with best practices on how technology and field are interacting across the country so that it can be replicated here in New York.
What is your base of support in a citywide election? Describe the coalition that gives you a path to victory.	As the primary candidate from the Bronx, along with my West Indian background being a lay minister, and coming from a union family, the base of voters that are aligned with my background is diverse, moreover, as an alumnus of both President Obama's campaigns and White House, along with being a brother of Alpha Phi Alpha, and as the honorary National co-chair of New Leaders Council we begin with a city-wide organizational foundation. Our support from local leaders on Central Brooklyn to having endorsements in all parts of the city equally gives us a confidence to a path to victory in a competitive.
How much money have you raised? What are your major sources of campaign funds? Are there any types of donors you won't accept contributions from?	To date we have raised, we have raised more than \$100,000 to date, not including how much of that total will qualify for public matching funds. The major source of our campaign funds will be city matching funds. We do not accept contributions from Corporate PACs or major landlords.
What endorsements have you received from publications, elected officials, community leaders, or political organizations?	<p>We have secured the endorsements of Former Lt. Governor Dick Ravitch, Assembly Members Tremaine Wright, Rebecca Seawright and Jeff Aubry, the United African Coalition. Moreover, we have at least three local affiliates of unions who have committed to our campaign but they are waiting for final internal processes before publicly endorsing us. Terry Melvin endorsed our campaign in his individual capacity of the President of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists.</p> <p>We also have a coalition of additional elected officials who are ready to endorse our campaign but are finalizing conversations with other candidates out of respect.</p>

What is one fun fact about you?	I am a great Karaoke singer!

I have reviewed this questionnaire and agree that the responses set forth in this document are accurate:



Candidate Signature:

Date: 12.14.2018

You must sign this questionnaire! When complete, please e-mail your signed and scanned questionnaire to politics@newkingsdemocrats.com and info@newkingsdemocrats.com