



2017 District Attorney Candidate Questionnaire

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

Name	Eric Gonzalez
How long have you lived in Brooklyn?	I have lived in Brooklyn my entire life, except for when I went to college and law school.
Preferred campaign contact information: name, email address, phone number	[REDACTED]
Why do you want to serve as Brooklyn DA?	<p>I knew I wanted to be a prosecutor from an early age. I grew up in Williamsburg and East New York when these were largely Black and Latino neighborhoods and considered 'rough.' For part of my life, my mom was a single mother. We lived in Section Eight housing. We received food stamps. I mention these things to say that I know what it's like to be a young man of color in a poor family living in a dangerous neighborhood. I know what it feels like to deal with violence or the threat of violence as a daily reality. And I know what it feels like to be the target of unfair police scrutiny. I understand - more than anyone else in this race - just exactly how the decisions I make as a prosecutor impact individuals, families and communities.</p> <p>As a young person, I wanted to be a prosecutor because I saw that as a way to help make my community safer, and to help make the criminal justice system fairer. Today, having worked my way up in the DA's office to being Ken Thompson's number two and his partner in a number of groundbreaking reforms, and having served for the past seven months as Acting DA, during which time I instituted a number of progressive initiatives on my own, I want to serve as your District Attorney to make the Brooklyn DA's office a national model of progressive criminal justice reform that delivers both safety and justice to our communities. I am proud to say that Brooklyn is the safest it has been in its history - and this has been achieved while sending fewer people to prison and jail in the past few years. I want to continue the reforms that have allowed us to achieve these remarkable results in just a short time, and to move further with innovative measures to reduce our reliance on incarceration as the principal response to problematic behavior.</p>
What have you accomplished in your legal career that you are most proud of?	I am most proud of the Young Adult Court I have established in Brooklyn to divert cases of young people up to age 24 out of the criminal justice system. I am passionate about my commitment to helping young people with their first criminal justice system involvement to get the attention and services they need to get their lives back on track and avoid being lost to a lifelong cycle of arrest, imprisonment, and lost opportunity. I believe this is the key to sustainable efforts to keep our communities safe while reducing mass incarceration and rebuilding communities devastated by the consequences of over-criminalization. Brooklyn's Young Adult Court is one of only two in the United States (the other is in San Francisco) to handle cases of youth as old as 24.
Why do you want New Kings Democrats' endorsement?	I appreciate NKD's commitment to criminal justice reform. I have read the criminal justice platform you adopted in April and it is very much in line with my own vision of reform. As the District Attorney I appreciate having knowledgeable community-based thought partners to help me develop and implement policy, and I look forward to continued engagement with the members of NKD with whom I share a commitment to progressive reform.

Of the following 9 questions, choose at least 5 to respond to based on your priorities.

What will you do, as DA, to meaningfully reduce mass incarceration?	My number one priority is and always has been keeping our communities and our people safe. I grew up in a neighborhood where there was a lot of violence and I know first hand what it means to have to live without a basic sense of safety. But I also know that communities don't want to be over-policed, with young people being constantly stopped by the police and arrested
---	---

	<p>for minor crimes. The balance between safety and fairness is one that I have been thinking about my entire career.</p> <p>Earlier in my career in the Brooklyn DA's office, as the head of the Green Zone, my priority was going after individuals who were committing serious crimes of violence, rather than low-level offenders. This is a big part of why Ken Thompson reached down and chose me to be first his policy counsel, then his number two: he knew that I shared his vision of making the criminal justice system more fair and reducing mass incarceration.</p> <p>Since I have been in a position to make decisions about policy, I have worked with the NYPD to shift law enforcement priorities in Brooklyn from low-level cases to the more serious ones. As a result, we no longer have "sweeps" in Brooklyn, where the police go in and round up dozens of people in a housing project, or arrest a large number of people on a street corner and charge them all with various drug crimes. Instead, I get together with the police and we strategize about what is the most effective way to reduce violent crime, reduce shootings, and keep our neighborhoods safe. We focus on identifying and going after specific individuals we consider drivers of violent crime. As a result in this shift in strategy, both homicides and shootings are at record lows in Brooklyn, <i>and</i> we are sending fewer people to jail and prison.</p> <p>It's important to understand the importance of this shift: in the past, the police would make arrests according to their priorities, which were determined at One Police Plaza without input from the District Attorney, and the DA would then prosecute the cases the police brought. Ken Thompson and I changed that. I don't work for the police; I work <i>with</i> them to decide on a law enforcement strategy that I believe will continue to keep our communities safe while reducing reliance on incarceration as a response to every instance of problematic behavior.</p>
<p>How will you use your prosecutorial discretion to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in charges, bail, and plea offers?</p>	<p>I have been in touch with researchers from Harvard to design and implement a study of possible racial disparities in the practices of my office. I believe it is important to subject my office to this scrutiny so that any problems found can be corrected.</p>
<p>How will you work to reduce pretrial detention? Do you support the expansion of supervised release programs?</p>	<p>I have introduced a policy of presumptive release in misdemeanor cases, and have disseminated the new policy to my assistants. The policy contains exceptions for certain cases, for example if the defendant is on parole or has a recent history of violence, but in the vast majority of cases, the presumption is that my office will ask for release on recognizance at arraignment in misdemeanor cases. ADAs are specifically instructed that bail is not to be used to coerce a guilty plea.</p> <p>I do support the expansion of supervised release and believe that Pretrial Services should receive additional funding for staff to supervise more people with pending cases.</p> <p>I am in support of the effort to close Rikers, which will require a 50% reduction in the number of people housed there. Between fewer pre-trial detainees and fewer people receiving jail sentences for low-level crimes, I believe we are on track to achieve that reduction in Brooklyn.</p>
<p>How will you use your prosecutorial discretion to minimize the harm caused by broken windows policing?</p>	<p>See my answer above regarding reducing mass incarceration. In addition, I will expand pre-charge diversion programs, in which individuals who do get arrested on low-level offenses can be diverted out of the criminal justice system before they are even charged with a crime. My office already has one such program, Project Reset, which diverts young people in the program out of the criminal justice system without a charge, and I have received funding from Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito to start an additional pre-charge diversion program called Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion, or LEAD. This program, which began in Seattle and which now exists in a handful of jurisdictions around the country, will allow my office, working with the Police Department, to divert people with low-level drug cases out of the system without a charge and into treatment or other services.</p>
<p>How will you address the destructive consequences of court fines and "surcharges" levied against defendants who do not have the ability to pay?</p>	
<p>How will you use your prosecutorial discretion to implement true "Raise the Age," for 16- and 17-year-olds charged with</p>	<p>I was an early supporter of Raise The Age, and I of course intend to implement it fully. But I didn't want to wait until the legislation was passed to begin dealing in a different way with the cases involving young people, so I started a Young Adult Court, where young people ages 16-24 can be diverted out of the system and receive extensive services like counseling, drug and</p>

nonviolent and violent felonies?	mental health treatment, education and job training. This gives them the opportunity to get their lives back on track at an early point, and to avoid being caught in the cycle of arrest, imprisonment and lack of opportunity that has ruined the lives of so many people in our communities. Brooklyn's Young Adult Court is one of only two in the country (the other is in San Francisco) to handles cases of young people up to age 24.
How will you work to support successful re-entry, following incarceration?	
How can the DA's office better support survivors of sexual violence while securing justice?	<p>I began my career as a prosecutor in the sex crimes bureau of the Brooklyn DA's office. I was trained to use my initial interview with a rape survivor to build a criminal case against the perpetrator. The entire goal was to build that case and convince the survivor to go forward with the prosecution. We weren't trained to focus on what the survivor might need, or to inquire about how she (or he) wanted to handle the case. Over the years I learned better. I learned that most cases of sexual violence involve people known to each other, and in many if not most cases, someone experiencing a crime of sexual violence does not have prosecuting as the first thing on her (or his) mind. They have a lot of other immediate needs that come first in terms of dealing with the trauma of what happened to them. In my office, the ADAs and social workers are trained to be survivor-focused, not prosecution-focused. In the old days, if someone didn't want to move forward with a prosecution, the DA's office would have no further contact with them. In my office, we provide counseling and access to other services to survivors regardless of whether the case is prosecuted or not.</p> <p>In some cases contact with the police can be re-traumatizing for a survivor. I would like survivors of sexual violence to be able to contact my office directly and be put in touch with our social workers and counselors, either before or instead of calling the police. I would welcome input from survivors and their advocates on how to implement and publicize this.</p> <p>I recently started a Campus Sexual Assault unit in my office - the first in the city. Brooklyn is home to many colleges, and I saw the need for a unit to deal specifically with these cases. The ADAs and social workers from the Campus Unit have begun reaching out to administrators and student advocates at the colleges in Brooklyn. My office is working in partnership with the national It's on Us campaign, the only DA's office in the city to do so, and we are planning a conference on Campus Sexual Assault for October.</p>
What do you see as the DA's role in protecting Brooklyn's immigrant community from President Trump's policies?	<p>I have created an Immigration Unit to make sure that our immigrant neighbors do not live in a perpetual state of fear and anxiety. The current national administration has created a climate of fear in immigrant communities, and my office is the first in the state to hire full-time immigration attorneys to work on cases involving immigrants. I have instructed all the ADAs in my office to consider the potential immigration consequences in their cases, and our immigration attorneys will consult on cases and provide training to our ADAs to ensure that no Brooklyn resident is subjected to unfair deportation as a consequence of a conviction in a low-level case. A low-level offense shouldn't result in a family and community being torn apart. This policy is meant to help immigrants, but it will make all of us safer by making sure that immigrants who are witnesses to crimes or victims of crimes, such as domestic violence or fraud, feel safe coming forward.</p>
What funds have you raised for this campaign? What are the major sources of your campaign funds?	<p>My campaign reported over \$850,000 raised in the initial filing in January; some of the other candidates didn't file at all. I have raised substantial additional funds that will be reported in July, and I am confident that my campaign will have the funds it needs to be successful in the primary.</p> <p>My campaign has raised funds from many different communities across Brooklyn, with major support coming from criminal justice reform advocates, Labor, the Latino community and the legal community.</p>
What endorsements have you received from publications, electeds, community leaders, or political organizations?	<p><u>Elected Officials:</u></p> <p>Tish James  Scott Stringer  Brad Lander  Bobby Carroll  Rodneyse Bichotte  Tremaine Wright</p>

Latrice Walker  
(Many more to come that haven't been publicly announced yet)

Democratic Clubs:

Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats  
Lambda Independent Democrats  
Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club  
Muslim Democratic Club of New York  
Vanguard Independent Democratic Association  
Stars and Stripes Democratic Club  
Progressive Democrats Political Association  
Bay Dems  
United Progressive Democratic Club  
Shore Front Democratic Club  
Thomas Jefferson Democratic Club  
41st AD Democrats Club  
57th AD Democratic Organization

Unions:

United Federation of Teachers (UFT)  
Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 32BJ  
Transit Workers Union (TWU)  
Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU)  
United Court Officers Association  
Council of Supervisors and Administrators (CSA)  
(More to come that haven't been publicly announced yet.)

Organizations:

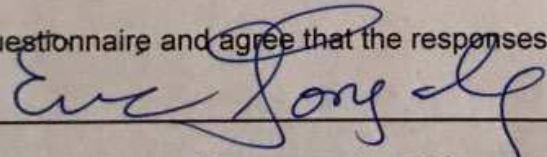
Working Families Party  
New York Immigrant Action Fund (the 501c4 arm of the NY Immigration Coalition)

What is one fun fact about you?

My first TV appearance, at ten years of age, was with my dad on a show called Bowling for Dollars.

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

Candidate Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

6/16/2017

***You must sign this questionnaire!***