

Thank you for agreeing to complete the South Central Brooklyn United for Progress AD51 candidate questionnaire. Your answers to these questions will be made available to the public on our website, <http://scbkunitedforprogress.org/>, and will be promoted on our Facebook page and twitter feed.

**Answers are due by end of day February 20 if you want to be considered for endorsement!**

## Campaign Information

**What is your name?** Katherine Walsh

**What office are you running for?** NY State Assembly, District 51

**Who is the point of contact for your campaign and what is the best way to get in touch with them?** Matthew Moll, Campaign Director: [matthew@katherineforassembly.com](mailto:matthew@katherineforassembly.com), 917 557 0092

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**What is your campaign email?** [info@katherineforassembly.com](mailto:info@katherineforassembly.com)

**What is your campaign website?** <https://www.katherineforassembly.com/>

**Is your campaign on social media? If so, what platform(s) and what are the names?**

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/Katherine4AD51/](https://www.facebook.com/Katherine4AD51/)

Twitter: [@Katherine4AD51](https://twitter.com/Katherine4AD51)

Instagram: [@Katherine4AD51](https://www.instagram.com/Katherine4AD51)

## Campaign Issues

### **What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing New Yorkers and those in your district regarding health care and what would you do to address them?**

I view healthcare as a human right, and any attempt to undercut this right as a direct and life-threatening assault on the poor and working class. I will fight relentlessly not just to prevent coverage decreases but to ensure that all New York residents have quality health insurance and don't go bankrupt due to health crises. I will push to pass the New York Health Act, which would create a comprehensive and universal single-payer system of access to health insurance statewide.

Legislators have to stop just plugging holes and start planning long-term for the realities we face in New York, which include an aging and shrinking population as well as the highest income inequality of any state in the nation. Long-term care is hugely costly, and is poorly covered across New York State as is; we are certainly not prepared for the 1 million additional New Yorkers who will be over the age of 65 by the year 2030. The New York Health Act would provide long term care coverage. It was designed in consultation with healthcare providers, patients and their advocates.

New York faces an enormous budget gap due to Governor Cuomo's mismanagement of our state's finances, and now he wants to use this as an excuse to cut Medicaid funding. We cannot let that happen. The Medicaid "shortfall" that the Governor wants to use as an excuse to make cuts was created by Cuomo's own arbitrary spending cap.

Moreover, healthcare is not simply about access and costs; communities across New York face numerous public health challenges as well. The children of our district suffer from higher than normal rates of asthma, exacerbated by local air pollution from the BQE, freight trucking through and near residential areas, and other sources. As an asthma sufferer myself, I have personally experienced this challenge. The current **Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act** (CLCPA) works to cut emissions, but it doesn't address the local air pollution hurting our kids and negatively impacting health in our community. The incumbent has not fought hard enough on this issue for the children and families who breathe this toxic air. As Assembly Member, I will use my professional expertise in environmental policy to write new legislation that will decrease local air pollution, and I will work relentlessly to get it passed.

### **What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing New Yorkers and those in your district specifically immigrant rights and access to resources and what would you do to address them?**

Our district is composed of many different thriving immigrant communities, but that diverse beauty is increasingly threatened by the white supremacist policies of the current federal government. For instance, a majority of the ICE raids that have happened in the city have happened in our district and targeted our undocumented population. I will work to protect all

undocumented residents of the district and beyond by advocating for New York to become a sanctuary state and working to pass the Liberty Act, which would prevent ICE from entering state courts.

My family instilled a fierce sense of justice in me -- a belief that all people deserve a fair shot. When I look around my district, I see families from Mexico, China, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Peru, and many other places pursuing the same American Dream that my great-great-grandparents did after they fled the Irish Potato famine and moved to Red Hook in the late 1800s.

But in many ways, it is much harder for immigrants today than it was for my great-grandparents to pursue that all-American pathway to prosperity. Today's immigrants face restrictions to good housing, jobs, schools, and overall stability in their lives. That's why I am running for office: to make sure this district is still a place where people from anywhere can make a home and build a better life. My focus in the Assembly will be to ensure that immigrants in our district and across the state have access to affordable housing and healthcare, and safe schools and streets.

**What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing New Yorkers and those in your district regarding civil rights and criminal justice and what would you do to address them?**

Our criminal justice system is deeply broken and ultimately unjust, particularly in light of how it disproportionately impacts low income and communities of color. New York needs to move away from a system that is punitive to one that is focused on rehabilitation. We need to decriminalize low-level drug offenses and MTA fare evasion, and ban for-profit private prisons. We need to invest more in our crumbling schools, as well as in drug treatment facilities, and generally to stop treating addicts like criminals. I will work to reform the criminal justice system to remove white supremacist practices and ensure actual fairness.

The drug war has wreaked havoc on too many New York communities. I support the legalization, taxation, and regulation of marijuana sales, and support passage of the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act. This legislation will allocate revenue to the communities most harmed by the drug war. This is an important step toward the kind of restorative justice that is needed to recognize and begin to amend the damage that has been done to poorer and largely minority communities as a result of the war on drugs.

There has also been an alarming rise in hate speech and crime in our country since the election of Donald Trump. We've seen a troubling trend of this in New York City too, even in my own community, against our Latino and Chinese-American residents. Therefore, I support legislation to criminalize membership in white supremacist groups. Any act of white nationalist terror must be met with the same kind of rapid law enforcement response that other acts of terror receive. By enforcing anti-terror laws uniformly, we can curtail white supremacist terrorism.

Other criminal justice reforms I support include:

- Reducing the needlessly high prison population, through:
  - The Fair and Timely Parole Act (S497A/A4346A), which will ensure that the parole release process is based on who people are today and their accomplishments while incarcerated, and not solely on the crime that led to their conviction.
  - The Elder Parole Bill (S2144), which allows for the consideration of parole release for all people aged 55 and older who have served at least 15 consecutive years in prison.
  
- Increasing police accountability, through:
  - Providing the Attorney General with the authority to investigate police brutality and deaths involving police officers.
  - Statewide public reporting of disaggregated data related to police interactions -- I fully support the STAT Act, and repealing CRL Section 50-a.
  
- Ending solitary confinement, through the HALT bill, which I support. Solitary confinement is a cruel form of punishment and has been defined as a form of torture by the United Nations. I will fight against it.
  
- Decriminalizing sex work.
  
- Protecting immigrant communities from ICE by restricting access to court records.

**What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing New Yorkers and those in your district regarding public schools and education and what would you do to address them?**

Politicians in Albany have failed to fulfill their promises to the students, parents, and teachers of New York. The schools in my district alone are owed over \$26 million from the State of New York. In 2006, the New York State Court of Appeals ordered a \$5.5 billion increase in basic operating aid (Foundation Aid) statewide by 2011. It's 2020, and our schools have STILL not received the money they are owed! This is unacceptable. We are not investing in the future of our district.

Governor Cuomo doesn't want to fully fund our schools and has repeatedly used tactics like attempting to change the Foundation Aid formula and enforcing an unnecessary 2% spending cap on the entire state, just to avoid complying with the court's decision. Assembly Member Felix Ortiz has been in the Assembly since before the 2006 court decision but has not been able to get Foundation Aid done.

To comply with the 2006 court order and truly invest in New York's schools, we must raise more revenue by taxing Governor Cuomo's biggest campaign donors -- Wall Street, corporations and the 1%. If elected, I will work to increase taxes on ultra-millionaires, Wall Street speculators, and empty luxury homes so that our children can get the education they deserve.

**What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing New Yorkers and those in your district regarding housing and what would you do to address them?**

As a great-granddaughter of this district, who grew up here and still today calls it home, I am running for New York State Assembly to ensure that our district stays true to our roots while building a bright and resilient future for us all. But it's becoming harder and harder for long-time residents to stay in place in the face of an affordable housing crisis, gentrification, and sky-rocketing rent. Every day, huge rent increases are forcing out tenants in our district and across New York. Landlords eager for gentrification are evicting people just to charge higher rent to a newcomer. This is devastating our communities, and making it impossible for the working people of my district to survive and thrive in their homes. Residents have no clear way of fighting back and few allies in Albany.

As a member of the State Assembly, I will fight to end such evictions. I will work to pass the "Housing Security and Protection Act" (formerly known as "Good Cause Eviction") in the New York State Legislature. This bill prevents tenants in market-rate apartments from being evicted for not paying an "unconscionable" increase in rent. As Assembly Member, I will also co-sponsor and build support in my conference for the "Housing Security and Protection Act" (Assembly Bill A5030A), and make sure the final version of this legislation sets rent limits that truly help keep our tenants in their homes.

My district will also be directly impacted by climate change. Red Hook is in a flood zone and still has not received investment following Hurricane Sandy to make it more resilient. Residents in NYCHA housing in Red Hook are at the mercy of climate change, just as they are dependent on NYCHA itself for even basic upkeep and repairs of their homes. Where can they go if Red Hook is underwater in a decade or two? I will work directly with the community to find solutions that advance social, racial, environmental, and economic justice in our housing policy.

**What do you feel are the biggest challenges facing New Yorkers and those in your district regarding public transit and what would you do to address them?**

As a trained urban land use planner and daily user of New York City public transportation, I understand at a deep level both how important access to reliable public transportation is for the striving working-class communities in my district as well as how broken the current system is.

We need to increase funding for the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority (NYMTA) in and around New York City to upgrade the infrastructure and continue to improve the subway system's on-time rate. Oversight from the Governor's office and Albany has been problematic on this front and I will increase pressure in Albany to more urgently make necessary changes to the world's largest public transit system. Our subway and busses are the lifeblood for millions across the city, many of whom are low income and rely on public transit for all of their mobility.

Generating new revenue to fund historically neglected programs like our public transit is one of my major priorities. Governor Cuomo has repeatedly undercut progressive reforms and initiatives that could help our communities by restricting funding. We must end his 2% spending cap so that revenue can be spent on improving transit access and quality, especially in our underserved communities across the outer Boroughs, instead of on economic development projects that only enrich the already well-connected.

**What more do you think could be done in regards to street safety in your district and/or in all of New York City / State?**

After becoming the first big city in the country to adopt Vision Zero in 2014, New York made real progress in curbing traffic deaths. But the alarming rise in such fatalities in 2019, especially among cyclists, tells me we still have a long way to go. The city and state governments need to increase investments in things like protected bike lanes and pedestrian islands, which enhance pedestrian and cyclist safety on our roads. We also need to ensure that roads which require repair or need to be rebuilt to make them safer are addressed with greater speed and urgency.

Another critical safety issue is gun violence. Though New York already has some of the strongest gun control legislation in the nation, I support a complete ban on all handguns except in the hands of trained police officers. The problem of mass shootings is both physical and psychological: I will work to bolster both gun restrictions and investments in mental health services in our schools. Many of the guns used in crimes in New York come from surrounding states such as Pennsylvania - while New York cannot dictate what happens in other states, I will support efforts to enhance collaboration between the states to reduce the illegal transportation of guns across state lines.

**What is your vision for a just and equitable New York election and campaign finance system?**

We all know that our country's democratic system is straining under the weight of corruption. Corporate money, lobbying, and weak campaign finance rules have created an electoral "wild west" where the big and powerful steal elections from normal people or otherwise make it impossible for them to participate in our democracy. This is certainly the case in New York state politics.

My experience in this campaign so far has proven just how tilted the current system is toward the rich and powerful. Last month, all of the candidates for races across New York State were legally obligated to file the details of all the money they have raised so far. I filed with 670 individual contributions, and with 92% those donations in amounts of \$100 or less. Meanwhile our incumbent Assembly Member Felix Ortiz ignored the deadline and filed over a week late. Furthermore, his filings showed that he has taken money from real estate management and hotel companies, as well as a PAC associated with the Independent Democratic Caucus, which

has long blocked numerous common-sense and progressive reforms across the state. Worse still, he had ZERO individual contributions from residents of our district! What does it say when, after 26 years in office, not even one constituent will donate a dollar to your re-election?

This is what I am up against as a first-time candidate, and what I am committed to change in our system. We need campaign finance laws in New York that take money out of the equation and ensure that regular people -- not individuals and PACs with deep pockets -- decide elections. It is essential that we end the corrupting power of corporate money in campaign finance.

Albany desperately needs a small-donor matching system, with lower contribution limits, as this is one of the most powerful ways to counter big money flowing into our elections. A matching funding program has been successful in the city, and it is unconscionable that our state legislators and Governor couldn't make this happen in 2019 when there was so much public support. I think it's telling that AD51's current Assemblymember was silent on this issue throughout the last legislative cycle and then again in late 2019 during the Commission review.

More specifically, I am in favor of lowering the contribution limits to \$7,500 for statewide races (from \$18,000), \$5,000 for Senate (from \$10,000) and \$2,500 for Assembly (from \$6,000). I also support public financing of elections with at least a \$6 to \$1 match for all small donations from New Yorkers in state elections, including district attorney and state judicial races. Adequate enforcement as well as robust candidate support services will ensure that this matching funds program runs smoothly. Together these reforms will empower others like me to run principled campaigns and succeed at the ballot box without accepting special interest money, such as donations from real estate developers, charter schools, and Independent Democratic Conference affiliates.

Additionally, I am committed to the expansion and restoration of rights for disenfranchised voters. Voter registration should be automatic and easy for all eligible voters, same day enrollment is common sense, as is restoring the vote to those with a criminal record and those with resident status. If the laws of the State are going to affect the lives of these residents, they must have the ability to make their voices heard in the voting booth.

### **What is your opinion on the Industry City rezoning and what would you do about it?**

We must take into consideration the full totality of our communities' interests when major changes like Industry City are proposed. My priorities for the Brooklyn Waterfront are climate adaptation and economic growth that does not displace or otherwise threaten the livelihoods of residents. I welcome economic development projects in our communities as long as these projects are in line with the interests of current community members and are designed and debated with transparency and in consultation with community groups and leaders. I will not support rezoning unless concerns of community members are credibly met and residents are supportive of the plan. I hope the City Planning Commission carefully considers all community

feedback when they make their decision about rezoning and as a member of the Assembly I will work to ensure that they do.

In the case of Industry City, some local leaders, encouraged by community members who were concerned about the plan, demanded that Industry City delay the filing of their land use application and also issued several demands to ensure that the project truly buttresses the community and is complemented by investments from the city. Despite agreeing to this at first, Industry City shocked me and the Sunset Park community by moving forward with their rezoning proposal anyway. This has not given me confidence in the process or future projects.

**What other issues do you consider important and how will you address them?**

The climate crisis is real and it requires urgent action. I have spent much of the past decade working directly on climate change, trying to build coalitions around practical local solutions to this global challenge. I am currently the Head of Cities, States & Regions program at the international environmental nonprofit CDP, where I work with more than 200 cities (including NYC) on climate action planning. For 10 years, I have engaged planners, policymakers, and financial decision-makers to measure, manage, and take action on climate change, including minimizing environmental impact and preparing for future stresses. As an urban planner, I will fight for the Green New Deal for New York, which will bolster green affordable housing, create good local jobs, and strengthen my district's resilience to climate change.

My vision for a Green New Deal includes plans to bring flood resilience and mitigation projects to Red Hook, to promote a Sunset Park staging ground for proposed offshore wind projects, to encourage community solar, building weatherization, and energy efficiency projects, and to retrofit the Brooklyn Cruise Terminal with Cold Ironing technology. I will also launch a tree planting and stewardship program in vulnerable urban neighborhoods and scale up investment in green stormwater infrastructure and maintenance, both of which will create local jobs. I will limit the development of trucking facilities in both Red Hook and Sunset Park to improve our air quality and the safety of our streets. I will also work to increase investment in energy efficiency through improved building insulation and more efficient HVAC systems.

I have the expertise and vision to achieve 100% renewable energy and carbon neutrality in our district and to replicate this model around the state.

**Assembly District 51 encompasses many different communities and diverse neighborhoods. How do you plan to give voice to the communities and engage them in partnership?**

Having lived in Sunset Park for the majority of my life, I am deeply connected to residents in my district and am continually learning from my neighbors and community. As the Chairperson of the County Committee Democratic Party and a member of the Community Board I know that we need to have many voices to make decisions that work for our district, and I am ready to ensure

our government works for the people. As an elected representative, I will work to engage my constituents regularly and in-person. Elected officials must host community forums and listen to and learn from their neighbors. I will do this in part by reaching out to the incredible grassroots organizations that are deeply invested in the people of this district and who can help me learn more about my constituents and their concerns.

As an Assembly Member, I will hire a diverse staff that is well placed to engage with and help me represent such a vibrant community. I will continue to forgo money from lobbyists and PACs for future elections and will continue to look to community members for support.

## **For fun (answers to these questions are not required)**

**If your district had a musical anthem, what would it be and why?**

[Are You Ready By Aaliyah](#) takes me back to hanging out on the stoop during the summer as a 90s kid. This song reminds me of life as a young person growing up in a tight knit community and hanging out with friends while we soaked up Brooklyn's unmatched energy. I think for people like me who grew up in this district the song is a reminder that our neighborhood is an extension of our family. We want to share that feeling of love and connection with future generations.

This song is also from the movie Sunset Park, so it fits.

**What is your favorite restaurant in your district?**

I have spent the last five New Year's Eve at my favorite restaurant 99 Favor Taste. When I lived in Taiwan it reminded me of Sunset Park and since moving back here it reminds me of my time in Taiwan. The experience of eating there is much like living in Sunset Park - as it is a shared meal you are surrounded by other groups from a variety of cultural backgrounds all enjoying the massive bowls delicious of hot pot. I love being around my family and friends while sharing a meal in my neighborhood.