



The Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

1015 18th Street, N.W., Suite 200, Washington, D.C., 20036 | 202-349-1498 | www.CaribbeanPac.org

Caribbean-American Political Action Committee (C-PAC) District of Columbia – 2018 Candidate Questionnaire

Please return the completed form via email to cpac.dmv@gmail.com by Friday, April 13, 2018. Responses will be shared with C-PAC's membership.

Office sought: Ward 3 Council
Candidate's name: Mary M. Cheh
Current Occupation: Ward 3 Council Member; Law Professor
Party: Democrat
Campaign Contact information: cheh2018.com;
[4522 30th St. NW, DC 20008](http://4522.30th.St.NW.DC.20008);
 202-445-0215; mcheh@gmail.com;
 Treasurer, Matt Frumin, [4709 Albemarle St NW, DC 20016](http://4709.Albemarle.St.NW.DC.20016).

1. Please explain your plan or approach to improve agency responsiveness and the quality of the District's constituent services.

From my first day in office, I have always placed Constituent Services at the top of my responsibilities. In addition to my role as a legislator, I am elected to serve as a liaison point between my residents and the District government. To that end, my office places a premium on constituent services, with two staffers dedicated to that role and with regular Chats with Cheh out in the Ward, where residents can approach me directly with concerns and comments. I have similarly pushed the agencies under the purview of my chairmanship to place a similar priority on constituent services. At DDOT, for example, I added over \$300,000 during the last budget cycle for staff dedicated to providing better responsiveness to Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners. The agency has taken the charge seriously, developing a new Community Engagement Division. I will continue to advocate for responsiveness from agencies and provide funding to make that responsiveness a reality.

2. What specific actions have you initiated or will you take to support the Caribbean-American community in Washington, D.C.?

Throughout my tenure on the Council, I have been a staunch supporter of immigrant communities in the District. As Chair of the Committee on Transportation & the Environment, I led the initiative to pass the Driver's Safety Amendment Act, which allowed our undocumented residents to obtain identification cards and driver's licenses. Doing so has allowed thousands of immigrants in the District the opportunity to drive to work, to school, or to their place of



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worship, and to more fully integrate themselves into the life of the District. I have closely monitored the implementation of that program to ensure that it both complies with the Federal REAL ID Act as well as effectively serves our immigrant communities, including the Caribbean-American community.

3. Unfortunately, throughout the City many Caribbean-owned businesses closed in recent years. How will you support the viability and competitiveness of the City's small, minority, veteran, women, and especially Caribbean-owned businesses?

Small businesses are essential to the vibrancy of the District. My priority in supporting any business, including small and minority-owned businesses, is to ensure that government regulation and bureaucracy doesn't unnecessarily create barriers to entry, create unlevel playing fields, or unnecessarily burden small businesses. Through the legislative oversight process, I have pushed agencies to continually rethink their processes with an eye toward minimizing bureaucracy. I supported the creation of the District's blue-ribbon tax panel as well as the package of tax reforms that it recommended, including substantially lowering business taxes. I have also, over several budget cycles, included funding for Clean Teams along business corridors (including providing the start-up funding for five such teams), the Great Streets grant program, and the Main Streets program. Finally, I am proud to be a co-introducer of the Small Business Advisory Council Act of 2017.

4. What policy actions would you propose or support to improve the opportunities and rights of Caribbean immigrants in the District of Columbia?

My support for immigrant communities in the District has been unwavering. I have supported and will continue to support programs that protect immigrant communities in the District, such as the Mayor's Immigrant Justice Legal Services Program, which provides funds for legal service organization to represent immigrant populations, particularly in immigration-related proceedings.

5. The City's Caribbean Community is the only immigrant community without an Office to address and support community affairs and services. Would you support the creation of such an office?

I support the Mayor's Advisory Commission on Caribbean Community Affairs. If that Commission is failing to serve the needs of the Caribbean Community in the District, we should take action to strengthen the Commission, either through improved oversight or increased funding. If the needs of the Caribbean Community are not being effectively served without the



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creation of a dedicated Office of Caribbean Affairs, I would support the creation of such an office.

6. How do you plan to help strengthen the Certified Business Enterprise (CBE) program since larger business take advantage of many small businesses, including Caribbean-owned ones, with whom they partner under this program.

For all of its value, I believe the Certified Business Enterprise system needs reform. In my experience, truly small, local businesses often do not accumulate enough CBE points to be competitive with much larger CBEs. In my report on the Department of General Services Contracting and Personnel Management, I made a number of recommendations to strengthen the District's contracting and CBE process. Among those recommendations, I noted that the Executive should update and standardize the solicitation and bid review process across District government agencies to increase transparency for all, including small businesses and CBEs. And, I further suggested that the Council clarify District law on how CBE preference points are awarded as well as conduct a review of the system as a whole. Finally, I believe non-profits should have the same opportunity to become CBEs as for-profit companies. To that end, I introduced the Non-Profit Certified Business Enterprise Amendment Act of 2017.

7. What policies will you support to address the challenges facing DREAMers, the administration's suspension of temporary protective status for many D.C. residents, and the threats facing sanctuary cities?

I unequivocally support the rights of DREAMers in the District. I am deeply concerned about the Trump Administration's assault on immigrant communities and I will do everything in my power to mitigate that damage at the local level. I have supported and encouraged the District's status as a sanctuary city and have been keen to ensure that our local cooperation with federal immigration authorities is kept to a minimum. In 2013, I authored the law review article "Threading the Needle: Constitutional Ways for Local Governments to Refuse Cooperation with Civil Immigration Policies," which details the means by which the District and other municipalities can protect their undocumented neighbors without running afoul of the federal Constitution. Finally, I introduced the Sense of the Council Condemning President Trump's Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric Resolution of 2018. In that resolution, I stated that foreign-born District residents, including those from the Caribbean, meaningfully contribute to the civic and cultural life of the District; that the District values and embraces immigrants and refugees from across the world; and that this city is steadfast in its commitment to protect their right to live lives of dignity, free from persecution and discrimination.



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8. What concrete steps will you take to improve the District of Columbia's Public School system – including facilities and equipment, teacher treatment, relationships with parents, as well as education standards and test scores in all wards of the City?

Education has been at the forefront of my mind lately. Just this month, I introduced the District of Columbia Education Research Advisory Board and Collaborative Establishment Amendment Act. In recent months, much of what we thought we knew about our schools has been called into question as we learned that the data put forth by school leaders was often unreliable, misleading, or false. This has touched on nearly every facet of our school data, from graduation rates, to student attendance, school suspensions, standardized test scores, and enrollment rates. I have heard from a number of parents and families who have told me that their trust in the District's education system is shaken. They feel they cannot trust our school data to be correct, our school policies to be fair, and our school leaders to be straightforward. We must act to restore that trust—and I believe that the first step towards doing so is ensuring that data on our schools is accurate, comprehensive, and transparent. The legislation I've introduced would take that first step by establishing the District of Columbia Education Research Collaborative, a new division within the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor. Such a division would bring the District in line with other urban school Districts, such as Chicago, New York, Baltimore, and Los Angeles. In those cities, the analyses produced by their education consortia have yielded positive, lasting results for schools and students. Importantly, as a non-political entity under the Auditor, the Collaborative's work will help diagnose the problems our schools are facing and facilitate our implementing policy changes to address those concerns.

9. In Washington, D.C., many seniors seek to age in their homes and/or communities. What efforts will you take to improve access of services and the quality of programs for the City's senior citizens?

Helping seniors to age in place includes not just ensuring that they have access to effective and affordable health services, but also affordable housing. Displacement is a major issue in the District, and our affordable housing crisis extends to our seniors. I supported the Elderly and Tenants with Disabilities Protection Amendment Act, which protects the elderly and tenants with a disability through financial supports and rental housing protections. I have also supported laws that help seniors to age in place, such as the Safe at Home Act, which established a grant program for making accessibility modifications in residential units for those with a mobility impairment or other physical disability. And, early in my tenure on the Council, I was able to secure funding that helped establish several senior villages in the District. Finally, I was encouraged to learn recently that a Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) program may be coming to the District, which would help seniors to age in place. I support initiatives of this kind, particularly when we can reduce healthcare costs in other areas such as hospitalization.



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10. What issues are you most concerned about in your run for political office?

As Chair of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment, my focus is on ensuring that the District remains a vibrant, sustainable, and accessible city for everyone. That includes protecting our environment; providing, efficient, accessible, and safe transportation of all kinds; and investing in our infrastructure. Additionally, as noted above, I am deeply concerned about the state of education in the District. I am a fierce advocate for Statehood. And, above all, my top priority has been and will continue to be protecting the health and well-being of District residents from every community, in every corner of the city.