

# Caribbean-American Political Action Committee



## Caribbean-American Political Action Committee (C-PAC) District of Columbia - 2016 Candidate Questionnaire

Please return the completed form via email to [cpac.dmv@gmail.com](mailto:cpac.dmv@gmail.com) by Friday, April 15, 2016. Responses will be shared with C-PAC membership.

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**Office Sought:** Ward 4 - Council of the District of Columbia

**Candidate's Name:** Leon T. Andrews, Jr.

**Current Occupation:** Policymaker - Director of Race, Equity and Leadership - National League of Cities, Institute for Youth, Education and Families

**Party:** Democratic

**Campaign contact information (Address, Phone, Fax, Email, Website):**

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

A. **Paid Family and Medical Leave** - As a father to three girls, I fully understand the benefits of paid family and medical leave. As a family, we made the choice to have a paycheck and to care for one another on a daily basis, but there are too many families in the District that are living paycheck to paycheck and must make the difficult decision of a paycheck or caring for their family and this is unacceptable when change can happen.

While the language within the Universal Paid Leave Act of 2015 establishes a universal paid leave system for all District residents, the DC Council has been unable to agree on its fiscal impact. Thus in its current state, it does not appear it will move to the Committee of the Whole for a vote, but will instead be re-introduced with new language. I do support the concept, but not with a negative fiscal impact.

This policy action would greatly improve the rights of Caribbean immigrants. I would work with my colleagues and other community organization, to draft fiscally sound language that would be

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acceptable to all DC residents, the Executive Office of the Mayor, the DC Council and Congress.

- B. **Housing People Can Afford** - We must have a dedicated fund for affordable housing that is deposited, at the beginning of the fiscal year, through collected non-dedicated sales tax revenue.

In 2006, the DC Council passed legislation, without sunset, that directed the Chief Financial Officer to begin depositing the first \$100 million of non-dedicated sales tax revenue collected annually into the Public School Capital Improvement Fund, which was meant to modernize our public schools. Should DC continue with its revenue growth, I would recommend the Council pass language that directs the second \$100 million of non-dedicated tax revenue to affordable housing construction and programming to secure that population for years to come.

Just as the city placed a moratorium on liquor licenses across Ward 2 because of the proliferation of restaurants in neighborhoods, we must look to innovative methods to ensure affordable housing remains in every ward and neighborhood across DC. As the Caribbean American population in DC continues to grow and people are seeking residential living options, this policy would have a direct effect on available opportunities.

- C. **Educational Pathways to Better Careers** - At a time when roughly 40% of DC students leave high school without a diploma, we need to put more emphasis on dropout prevention and recovery through multiple pathways to graduation, including: alternative high schools; credit recovery programs; flexible diploma and GED programs linked to job training; dual enrollment options; and other programs that offer wraparound services and connect classroom instruction with career and college readiness.

While these pathways may also involve reengaging students in traditional high schools, we need to work with DC Public Schools to expand the number of alternative high schools available to students who struggle in traditional high school settings. Hallmarks of these alternative schools include a rigorous and relevant curriculum, project-based learning, close student-teacher relationships, youth voice and leadership development.

As I consider those Caribbean American youth who need to consider multiple pathways to success, I will work to connect students in

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alternative high schools with supportive wraparound services provided by city agencies and community organizations. At the same time, I will forge better connections with postsecondary institutions and businesses to expand college and career options.

## 2. How do you plan to help D.C.-based small and medium sized - especially Caribbean-owned -- businesses realize a greater share of DC Government contracting opportunities?

A. DC has a vibrant and growing Caribbean American population. Within Ward 4 there are some corridors of commerce that have yet to experience the development, investment and economic opportunities underway in other parts of our Ward. As a Ward with transportation-friendly commercial corridors, the opportunities for development are exciting, and as Councilmember, I will advocate for projects that bring our entire Ward along in a balanced and equitable manner.

For a decade I've seen how cities partner with businesses and communities to improve curb appeal, develop vacant and blighted properties, expand service offerings and strengthen the quality of retail and grocery stores that create living wage jobs. I want to bring these concepts to DC and in particular, in Ward 4.

It is also important for our base of small business owners to be re-energized so they may prosper for the foreseeable future. Their input on development projects is vital to the creation of corridors where residents and visitors alike are inclined to spend their hard-earned dollars.

## 3. 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?

A. My parents are both from Guyana and my wife's parents are from Trinidad and Bequia. We were both raised in Caribbean families that stressed the importance of quality education. For many Caribbean families, good schools are often the deciding factor when establishing a residence. For those Caribbean families who have chosen to live in DC and want to send their children to public schools, further improvement is needed to raise the quality standards of DC schools. The following are a few steps I would take:

- Promote reading proficiency by the end of third grade;

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- Recruit mentors to help, particularly our students of color, stay on track in school;
- Push for in-school alternatives to suspension and expulsion;
- Work to reduce chronic absence and truancy;
- Develop alternative pathways to high school completion, including investing in vocational education and trade schools;
- Ensure that students receive at least two healthy meals every school day and during the summer months when school is not in session;
- Prioritize placing qualified teachers in places of need;
- Support parental and family engagement to ensure they are empowered to be their child's first teacher and most important advocate;
- Connect families with the diverse support systems they need for a safe, healthy and economically secure household; and
- Invest in creative funding strategies to allow communities to provide more comprehensive and collaborative systems of support for children and families.

I will work with city agencies and community organizations to connect students in alternative high schools with supportive wraparound services. At the same time, I will forge better connections with post-secondary institutions and businesses to expand college and career options.

#### **4. What efforts do you support to make higher education accessible and affordable to all D.C residents who aspire towards completing collegiate and advanced degrees?**

A. The cost of higher education today makes it inaccessible to many. There is a real need to create opportunities for students to enter into and succeed in collegiate and advanced degree program - it is critical to developing a well-educated and highly skilled workforce. To make higher education accessible and affordable to all D.C residents, I would:

- Invest in creative funding strategies to allow communities to provide more comprehensive and collaborative system of support to make education more accessible and affordable.

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- Make a commitment to educational aid literacy in our communities – so families are aware of federal and private aid opportunities but are also knowledgeable to be unencumbered with large educational debt after their degree program. These include programs like income-based repayment and education tax credits.
- Continue to strengthen one of our more affordable local colleges, the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). UDC needs to be seen as a viable gateway to economic prosperity and educational opportunities for DC residents. Some ideas for strengthening this reputation include: investing in bringing highly talented and credentialed faculty to teach, providing faculty with ongoing professional development and continuing education opportunities, increasing the rigorous academic and research programs, innovative and strategic planning that maps courses offered to employment trends, etc.

## **5. How would you propose improving access to quality, affordable health care services to DC residents, especially those who reside East of the River?**

- A. I support providing healthcare to any family that wishes to be enrolled in the Healthcare Alliance program, as this decision can mean life or death for those without coverage. As a government, we must not over-regulate those coming for assistance. If we can increase participation rates through a simplified application and recertification process, then we must make the changes for a better outcome, and quality of life for residents.

## **6. For many years the Caribbean Carnival was a fixture in the District of Columbia. Would you support the return of the Carnival to DC with financial support from the DC government?**

- A. As an annual attendee of the Caribbean Carnival, I truly miss the event and I have not attended since its relocation to Baltimore, MD. While the location of the Carnival along Georgia Avenue highlighted Ward 4, I believe we must elevate this event to Pennsylvania Avenue, NW and create a festival around the parade. For us to garner financial support from the DC government, we must create an organization with partnerships that include sponsors, such as Events DC. When the DC Government feels they are at the table, they take

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pride and a level of ownership, which guarantees a successful event. As a Councilmember, I would recommend a line item within the FY2018 budget that provided funding for the Office of Caribbean-American Affairs (yet to be created) - some of that funding would be directed at cultural events like the Caribbean Carnival.

**7. The City's Caribbean Community has consistently called for the creation of an Office of Caribbean-American Affairs in DC. Would you support the creation of such an office?**

A. As a commissioner on the DC Commission on African-American Affairs, I fully understand the need for boards and commissions for all communities. And as a son of Guyanese parents, I know the impact an Office of Caribbean-American Affairs could have for those within our community living in DC. If you support my candidacy, once elected, I will advocate for the creation of the Office of Caribbean-American Affairs. It is time to include our population in the highest levels of discussions in DC.