

RECLAIM PHILADELPHIA

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I, Helen Gym, certify that the information provided on this questionnaire is accurate and the opinions stated here accurately reflect my own positions.

Please complete, sign and return this via email in both Word Doc and PDF format to Amanda@reclaimphiladelphia.org on or before February 1, 2019.

INTRODUCTION

This is a two-part questionnaire. The first seven questions are intended to be richer questions with longer answers. They are intended to help the members of Reclaim Philadelphia understand how you view the world and the political issues that face Philadelphia. As you might expect, these questions are big and broad. Please limit your answers to each question to no more than 250 words. The second set of questions are “yes” or “no” questions, which are NOT meant to be answered at length.

PART I - LONGFORM QUESTIONS - Please respond in 250 words or less.

1. Tell us a personal story about yourself that informs your worldview, your politics, and your decision to run for City Council.

I come out of 20 years of organizing in Philadelphia's immigrant and public education communities. I cut my teeth fighting mayors and developers who would sacrifice communities for publicly funded boondoggles like stadiums, casinos, and for-profit charter schools. One of my first major campaigns was the battle to stop a baseball stadium from being built in Chinatown. On one side was the power. On the other side were the people: immigrant families, youth and elders, educators and organizers.

I remember one of our early rallies before we knew our power or could predict any known outcome. I had my head down in the logistics of planning the event but I had a nagging sense of doubt about the futility of this campaign. Then, in the midst of that rally rose Asian American United's founder Debbie Wei, her fist raised in the air, defiant, utterly fearless, and filled with a moral authority and power that poured out in a fiery speech in both Chinese and English. In that moment she was a warrior out of a mythical fable giving us courage rooted in a vision for our city and in our cultural history and language, in order to carry on against what seemed like impossible odds.

My home lies in communities like Asian Americans United and with community justice warriors all across this city who are carrying on in uncertain times—building for the day that every young person can rise up in unlikely moments and transform their world.

2. What is your opinion of capitalism as a political-economic system? How do your opinions and analysis influence your campaign and legislative priorities?

Capitalism is an immoral system. It produces massive wealth inequality and racial inequity and perpetuates poverty. An unchecked profit motive corrupts essential public priorities, such as public education, housing, and transit. Capitalism rejects organized labor, housing as a human right, and healthcare for all. It runs counter to a human rights agenda and thus requires a countering force rooted in human rights and racial equity and justice.

I've made my legislative agenda as well as my political voice part of that countering force. The very first bill I introduced was a law that forces corporations to disclose the value of the

public subsidies they receive. My Fair Workweek law is the most expansive in the nation, offering advance notice of schedules and a path to full-time hours to over 130,000 part time workers making some of the lowest wages in our city.

I established Philadelphia's first legal defense fund for renters facing eviction. I secured historic budget investments to combat youth homelessness. I vote against indiscriminate use of the Keystone Opportunity Zone subsidies. I have consistently fought for legislation that makes corporations pay their fair share to our schools. And I introduced the most comprehensive package of bills to end the city's 10-year tax abatement program as we know it.

This agenda has made me an enemy in a few corporate boardrooms. But with the health and future of our city at stake, I think that means I'm doing a pretty good job.

3. What do "white supremacy" and "patriarchy" mean to you? How do you see them operating in the City of Philadelphia and its government? What policies, if any, would you enact in order to end them?

White supremacy and patriarchy are pillars of our unjust, unequal order. They perpetuate the gendered and racialized inequalities that make us the nation's poorest big city. We see these systems at work in the underfunding of our public schools, in the refusal to raise the minimum wage, in the quality of our housing, in the mass incarceration of Black and Brown people, and in the for-profit detention and deportation of immigrants.

I never look for solutions in the spaces where white supremacy and patriarchy are built. Instead I center the voices of communities working to tear those systems down.

My major victories in office have come through a people's campaign that strengthens organizing in our city. The Fair Workweek campaign was driven by women, immigrants, and organized labor. The fight for clean water in schools was driven by middle- and high school youth. My anti-eviction work centered on the stories of seniors, veterans, Black women and mothers.

I use the power of my voice to drive public action. I helped lead the airport protests of the Muslim ban. I joined the call to move the Rizzo statue and celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Black Student Walkouts. I had the city apologize for racism faced by Jackie Robinson, honor Fred Korematsu, and uplift Black women and girls seeking to end a public platform for R. Kelly and sexual predators like him.

I will continue to champion legislative and budget priorities that work towards our collective liberation.

4. What do you think of the crisis facing Philadelphia schools? What do you see as its root causes? What steps would you take?

My politics and policies come out of a broad movement for justice and reparations for the children, families, educators, staff, and communities fighting for equitable and quality public schools for all. Our school crisis has its roots in a long and intertwined history of capitalism and racism. The solutions have their roots in powerful collective action that ended a 17-year state takeover and shut down a corporate reform agenda that pushed privatization, blamed teachers, and defunded and closed down schools.

My legislative record is the most comprehensive schools agenda out of Council in years: From beating back reckless charter school expansion to restoring nurses and counselors and doubling the number of social workers; from winning a state complaint for special education services to guaranteeing water access, instrumental music programs and school breakfast, I am committed to stabilizing our school budgets, supporting educators and making sure students get the schools they need and deserve. You can view my full legislative record on school transformation over the past three years here:

<http://phlcouncil.com/HelenGym/accomplishments/>

Looking ahead, I'll continue a human rights and reparations agenda for the Philadelphia public schools. Six years after the City shut down 24 public schools, I'm laying the groundwork for long-term school construction and facilities investment. I'm demanding the District fulfill its constitutional obligation to meet curriculum mandates and teacher staffing. And I'm focused on a vision of safe schools that spends more money addressing student and staff needs than punitive disciplinary measures.

5. Under what circumstances should a person be detained or incarcerated, if any? Does the current system meet this criterion? What does safety mean to you and what policies or programs would you pursue to achieve your vision?

Safe communities are those in which services and institutions work for all, where people harmed by violence find pathways and resources for recovery, and where those who commit harm are held accountable for their actions in ways that emphasize prevention and rehabilitation rather than mass incarceration. We must radically restructure the carceral state. This means ending cash bail, radically overhauling probation and parole, and mass expungement of past drug-related convictions.

Our communities are safest when crime survivors and those who live in overpoliced communities come together to build common solutions for justice. We must prioritize restorative justice practices that balance accountability with rigorous supports for survivors. Risk assessment algorithms hinge upon institutionalized racial bias: our communities are safest when crime survivors and those who live in surveilled communities come together to build understandings of risk and accountability. Revenue derived from prison reform must be reinvested in communities that mass incarceration has decimated, with the voices of returning citizens helping guide the way.

My work in this field has focused on ending the school-to-prison pipeline and demanding safe school climates. I championed an end to school suspensions for young children. I passed a law to ensure that juvenile records are not considered during the hiring process. I have worked to end our reliance on residential placements that subject youth to solitary confinement and threats to their safety—all in facilities far from home with little to no family contact. I will continue to push for the deinstitutionalization of our young people.

6. What is the fundamental factor causing climate change? How should we address this? Do you support a Green New Deal for Philadelphia and, if so, what does that mean to you and what will you do if elected to City Council?

Capitalism drives climate change. We cannot undo or mitigate its damage without reorganizing energy production and use around democratic practices and sustainable infrastructure. A Green New Deal is a no-brainer.

Cities can win on environmental justice. After Flint, when the *Guardian* raised alarm bells about Philadelphia's water system, I took action. I followed the lead of young people who organized for universal access to clean and safe water in schools. By taking direction from these activists, we implemented groundbreaking solutions that require every school building (including private and charter) to have ratioed water hydration stations, and to annually test water safety with rigorous standards. I partnered with my colleagues to ensure water testing would occur in housing rentals and daycare centers. This work led to the

creation of the Philly Healthy Schools Initiative, a group of advocates advancing a community-led, systems-change approach to safe school facilities.

We can generate high-quality jobs through large-scale retrofitting of public buildings and schools, and we can make renewable energy accessible by holding PECO accountable to transitioning to renewables and passing cost savings along to residents. I will continue to fight for sustainable investments in public transit and oppose the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure in Philadelphia.

No single leader knows precisely how we attack climate change at the local level. I will listen to and follow the lead of activists and climate leaders, especially young people, who have the vision, urgency, and moral clarity to chart our city's future.

7. Do you think Philadelphia is facing a housing crisis? If so, why? If not, why not? What changes would you make to bring housing policy more in line with your vision?

One of the essential solutions to poverty is housing as a human right. Without it, tens of thousands of poor and working class Philadelphians are at the mercy of a mostly private housing market, defined both by substandard and unaffordable housing.

I have worked towards an agenda that brings forward a housing as a human right mandate. When I learned that one in 14 renters in our city face court-ordered eviction annually, with evictions disproportionately impacting communities of color, I led a campaign that created a historic legal defense fund for renters facing eviction and an anti-eviction task force initiative that spurred reforms throughout city government and the courts. This includes a rule change in the courts that require landlords to be licensed for a year in order to file for an eviction and prevent landlords from evicting people from properties with open code violations. I cosponsored Good Cause legislation, and championed the provision of local rent subsidies into the City's housing plans for the first time.

I believe there is much more we can do at the local level to further balance the scales and protect renters' rights. I am working to radically restructure the tax abatement. I believe in fair housing and true inclusionary zoning, and support prioritizing the creation of truly (and permanently) affordable housing whenever we sell public property.

Ultimately, we need to win recognition of a right to housing, and I am committed to organizing alongside those who are ready to take on that fight.

PART II - YES OR NO QUESTIONS

1. Do you commit to opposing the privatization of all utilities in Philadelphia? **YES [X] NO []**
2. Do you commit to support and vote for the creation of a Philadelphia Public Bank? **YES [X] NO []**
3. Will you support using savings from closing the House of Corrections to invest in job training programs and opportunities for formerly incarcerated people, in an effort to combat mass incarceration? **YES [X] NO []**
4. Will you support a participatory study funded by the City to formulate a local Green New Deal energy plan to transition Philadelphia to a democratically controlled 100% renewable energy system by 2030, create unionized jobs, and center the decisions and needs of Philadelphia's working class and communities of color? **YES [X] NO []**
5. Do you support a democratically elected school board? **YES [X] NO []**
6. Will you commit to publicly funding and administering fully staffed libraries and recreation centers seven days a week? **YES [X] NO []**
7. Do you support rent control? **YES [X] NO []**
8. Will you commit that at least 50% of all City funds allocated to create or preserve housing, including but not limited to the Housing Trust Fund and subfunds, must go toward helping the poorest Philadelphians (30% or less of area median income)? **YES [X] NO []**
9. Will you commit to introducing or sponsoring legislation that would establish a system of public financing for city campaigns that would create a fund that would provide matching public funds for money individual donors contribute to candidates? **YES [X] NO []**
10. Do you support the creation of an overdose prevention site / supervised consumption site to help efforts to combat the opioid epidemic in our community? **YES [X] NO []**
11. Do you support completely ending the ten year tax abatement? **YES [X] NO []**
12. Do you commit to opposing all new fossil fuel projects in Philadelphia by using all zoning and regulatory means at your disposal? **YES [X] NO []**

13. Will you support increasing funding of the Police Advisory Commission from \$500K to \$1.5M and giving it the power to subpoena, investigate and censure cases of police brutality and over-policing? **YES** [] **NO** []

14. Will you publicly support a moratorium on all charter school expansion? **YES** [] **NO** []

15. Do you support the right to strike for public employees including teachers? **YES** [] **NO** []

16. Will you enact a statutory right to counsel for any Philadelphian facing the loss of their home, be it foreclosure or eviction? **YES** [] **NO** []

17. Will you use all means at your disposal to support workers' right to unionize? **YES** [] **NO** []

PART III - ADDITIONAL CLARIFICATION

If there's anything else our membership should know about you or if you feel the need to provide additional information about any of your above responses, do so here. Please keep your response to a total of 100 words or less.