

Lateefah Williams answers to DC4D questionnaire

1. What in your background qualifies and prepares you to serve as the first elected attorney general of the District of Columbia?

My commitment to public service and my grassroots community work with various DC constituencies sets me apart from the other candidates. My experience and background make me uniquely qualified to serve as the District's chief legal advocate and a vocal champion for all Washingtonians. I have more than a decade of experience as a licensed attorney and I have dedicated my legal career and civic service to social justice causes, including fighting for workers rights, the LGBT community, community residents, and civic issues. Professionally, I worked as a litigation attorney for several years (which included serving as an associate attorney for David C. Simmons, who is now the Chief Administrative Law Judge for the DC Commission on Human Rights). I have also served as the Legislative and Political Director for ATU Local 689, Counsel for the Prince George's County State Senate Delegation, and nonprofit tax law policy analyst for OMB Watch/Center for Effective Government. Civically, I have served as the National Committeewoman for the DC Young Democrats and President of the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club. Additionally, I am currently the Recording Secretary for the Ward 5 Democrats, Legislative Committee Chair for the DC Federation of Democratic Women, 2nd Vice President of the Metropolitan Women's Democratic Club, a columnist for the Washington Blade, and a board member of the Wanda Alston Foundation, which provides housing to homeless LGBTQ youth. My diversified background in litigation, community advocacy, and public policy has given me an opportunity to familiarize myself with a wide array of legal and policy issues, as well as equipped me with knowledge about some of DC's most vulnerable communities, which is critical for an Attorney General.

2. Given the general belief, in the District and elsewhere, that the political system is corrupt, does the Attorney General have a special role and responsibility to help transform the legal and political culture of the District? If so, how would you go about doing that?

It is important that the Attorney General do what it is in the best legal interest of the District. Thus, the Attorney General must vocally speak out against corruption and take a firm stance when there is evidence of it. To be effective, he or she must put politics aside and be ethical and transparent in all of their dealings. We need an independent Attorney General who is not beholden to the Mayor, the Council or the US Attorney and who is accustomed to advocating for various interests before them, while still maintaining a productive and amicable working relationship. To accomplish this, I will designate members of my staff as the official liaisons to the DC Council and the Office of the Mayor. This will ensure an open and transparent dialogue between the various elected officials and my office, and ensure that our government works collaboratively to tackle the challenges our city faces. That said, if any elected or appointed official violates the law, my office will actively investigate it and will work with the U.S Attorney's office, if necessary.

3. The Council has adopted a number of ethics provisions that apply government-wide. Are those provisions sufficient to address corruption and ensure good government? If not, what additional provisions do you consider important to build on those already adopted? Will additional resources be needed either in the Office of the Attorney General or elsewhere?

While I definitely believe the new provisions were a step in the right direction, there are a few additional elements I would add to make the ethics law more robust, particularly when it comes to campaign finance and the bundling of political contributions. If these enhancements require additional resources in the OAG, I will work hard to secure those resources so that the office can do its work efficiently, while helping to rebuild public trust in our city's elected officials.

4. Previously, agency legal counsel have reported to the Attorney General. Effective October 1, they report to the Office of the Mayor. How do you feel about this recent decision of the Mayor and Council to change the way in which agency counsel report? Do you think it is appropriate? Should the matter be revisited sometime after a new elected attorney general takes office?

I think the attorneys should remain under the purview of the Office of the Attorney General rather than the individual agencies. Under the new transition, agency attorneys will report to the General Counsel of the agency who will ultimately report to an individual appointed by the mayor. This will cause great challenges with the consistency of legal actions and decisions across DC government and, ultimately, it will undermine the public's confidence that legal advice from one agency is consistent city-wide. If elected, I will meet with the mayor and the DC Council to highlight my concerns in detail, then I will ask them to amend this law.

5. What are the strongest legal arguments against the New Columbia Admission Act, and how would you rebut those arguments?

The biggest legal challenge the New Columbia Admission Act would face is the claim that Statehood is unconstitutional. I would rebut this by making the case that legal precedent is on the side of the District and Statehood can be achieved without additional constitutional amendments. I will work with statehood supporters to devise a strategy that includes court advocacy, federal lobbying, and community engagement. Specifically, I will pursue legal cases that establish the District's autonomy from the federal government, vigorously defend home rule, and work with congressional leaders to ensure that the District performs the functions that a state should without going through the federal government.

6. What would be your top three priorities as attorney general?

- *-We need to divert more youths away from the juvenile justice system. I will accomplish this by expanding current diversion programs to include a broader set of youth offenders; offering more community service, mentoring, individual and family counseling programs that will steer youth onto a productive path; and partnering with education and career programs, as well as city agencies that work on these issues, such as DC Public Schools and the Department of Employment Services, to help youth develop the necessary skills to succeed.*
- *-I will advocate for statehood and full autonomy in local matters. As part of seeking full autonomy in local matters, I will fight vigorously for the District of Columbia to gain independence in its criminal justice affairs and for all local DC crimes to be prosecuted by the Office of the Attorney General. The approach of having the U.S. Attorney's office prosecute District criminal cases must end. District autonomy over all criminal matters will allow my office to implement more diversion programs and alternatives to incarceration. It will also allow for more discretion in areas where rehabilitation-based approaches are often far more*

efficient than harsh punishments, such as drug offenses. Moreover, I will work with statehood supporters to devise a strategy that includes court advocacy, federal lobbying, and community engagement. Specifically, I will pursue legal cases that establish the District's autonomy from the federal government, vigorously defend home rule, and work with congressional leaders to ensure that the District performs the functions that a state should without going through the federal government.

- *-I will aim to fully realize the call of District residents for an autonomous Office of the Attorney General, and to truly be an advocate and voice for the people of the city. I will support the will of DC residents by legally defending any voter referendum or initiative that DC voters pass, holding forums and community meetings to get residents' feedback, and establishing policies to ensure that the Office of the Attorney General is shielded from political pressure.*