



Candidate Questionnaire
Local Candidates Committee
NYS Elections 2018

Citizens Union appreciates your response to the following questionnaire related to policy issues facing New York State, and our interest in reforming state government. Please return the questionnaire to us as soon as possible, and no later than July 13th. Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for Attorney General of New York State, and to issue our preference for the Primary and endorsement for the General Election. Please feel free to affix any additional information such as a résumé, campaign brochure, or issue statements.

If you seek our support, we will also need to schedule an interview with you as part of the evaluation process. Please contact us if you wish to be interviewed.

We plan to make responses to this questionnaire public on our website, printed voters directory, and other appropriate venues.

We thank you very much for your response.

Biographical Information

Candidate Name: Letitia James

Party Affiliation(s): Democrat

Age: 59

Education: City University of New York, Lehman College (BA), Howard University (JD), Columbia University (MPA)

Office Sought/District: New York State Attorney General

Occupation/Employer: New York City Public Advocate

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement: New York City Public Advocate, New York City Council Member,

Brooklyn Regional Office and Civil Rights Bureau of the New York State Attorney General's Office, public defender at the Legal Aid Society

(Please feel free to affix any additional information such as a résumé, campaign brochure, or issue statements.)

Campaign Contact Information

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I. AFFIRMATIONS

Have you completed required campaign finance filings?

YES NO

Are you willing to be interviewed by CU's Local Candidates Committee?

YES NO

(Please note: interviews are prerequisites for Citizens Union endorsements.)

Signature of Candidate: Letitia James

Date: 07/13/2018

II. CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

1. What will be your top priorities if elected Attorney General?

~~Target Corporate Greed and Protect Consumers from Fraud and Abuse: This has been called a golden age for grifters and scammers and, given the occupant of the White House, it is hard to disagree. Major corporations create contracts of adhesion that deprive wronged consumers of any recourse. Entire industries spring up around bilking vulnerable immigrants and seniors out of their hard-earned savings. Predatory lenders and deed thieves operate with near impunity. Private data is treated as a commodity and sold to the highest bidder. I will stand up to the corporate powers who hide their misdeeds in fine print and incomprehensible legalese, but under my watch, no fraud or abuse will be "too small" to find help at the Attorney General's Office.~~

~~Protect New Yorkers from the Trump Administration's Unlawful Actions: The Trump Administration has flouted the law at every turn, seeking to roll back generations of progress. Their ethos is a combination of animus and venality and they have worked to turn the awesome might of the federal government into a tool for sewing hate and reaping corporate plunder. We cannot and must not accept this administration's contempt for the rights and the livelihoods of the most vulnerable among us. As Attorney General, I will seek every lever of power available to me to challenge the Trump Administration's unlawful actions and to protect New Yorkers from their attacks on our basic rights.~~

~~Protect Our Environment for Future Generations: The effects of human-induced climate change are threatening our homes, our economy and our future. We are the stewards for future generations and we owe it to them to stand up today so that there is an earth left for our great grandchildren to inherit. The Trump Administration has abdicated its role as guardian of our natural resources and, as Attorney General, I will step into the void. I will sue to hold the federal government accountable for their unlawful policies, fight climate change by investigating polluters for fraud, and vigorously enforce environmental laws against bad actors within and outside our state's borders.~~

~~Enforce Equal Pay for Equal Work: New York law prohibits paying women less than men for doing the same job, but the reality is that gender wage discrimination remains rampant. As Attorney General I will seek out partnerships with state and local agencies and create a Wage Discrimination Task Force to aggressively target credible allegations of systemic wage discrimination. I will take on the root causes of the wage gap from pregnancy discrimination to the motherhood penalty to the devaluation of "women's work." I will also push to bring statewide legislation I passed in New York City banning employers from asking workers about their salary history. Equal pay for equal work is not a slogan, it is the law. As Attorney General, I will fight to make sure that the law is enforced.~~

~~Defend Civil Rights for All: From its opening hours, the Trump Administration has made clear that it has more interest in waging a culture war than in protecting civil rights. They have reversed position on voter ID laws, abandoned efforts to reform police practices, dismantled civil rights divisions across agencies, destroyed protections for transgender students, workers and homeless people, removed, slowed or abandoned safeguards against discrimination from too many programs to name. When they are not failing to protect civil rights they are actively violating them, doggedly pursuing a pretextual Muslim ban based solely on racial and religious animus and committing untold atrocities against immigrants. As Attorney General, I will take legal action against the Administration's unlawful policies and step into the breach left by federal abdication, prioritizing enforcement actions that the Trump Administration has abandoned.~~

2. How would you address fraud and public misconduct of elected officials? Do you believe that greater responsibility should be given to the office to investigate corruption and how would you achieve that?

~~I will aggressively go after those who would subvert or abuse the public trust using every tool of the office and seek to expand the office's reach by pushing for authority to prosecute violations of the Election Law and Public Officers Law. Using the office's existing powers, I will investigate and civilly prosecute businesses that use bribes and kickbacks to buy political favors, go after money laundering and shady LLCs, build upon Operation Integrity and take on politicians who steal from the public, use the power to regulate not-for-profits to target dark money, and push for significant reforms from public financing to closing the LLC loophole to ending pay-to-play.~~

~~Throughout my career in public service I have never been afraid to speak truth to power or take on entrenched interests. As a City Council Member, I exposed one of the largest frauds ever committed on the public coffers in the CityTime corruption scandal. I blew the whistle and catalyzed an investigation that exposed hundreds of millions of dollars in government waste and fraud and led to multiple convictions. I stood up to a billionaire Mayor who wanted to change the law to grant himself an unprecedented third term. I fought the Republican Party's attempts to eliminate SEC pay-to-play rules. I have partnered with District Attorneys in Brooklyn and Manhattan to put bad landlords behind bars, working together to build cases against some of the worst actors perpetrating harassment against tenants. As Public Advocate, I have served as a watchdog over city government, and sued New York City and State to protect kids suffering irreparable harm in the foster care system, public housing residents subjected to dangerously cold conditions, and students with disabilities sweltering on overheated buses.~~

~~The Attorney General's dual roles as the counsel for the state and the people's lawyer both demand that she safeguard public funds from theft and abuse and the functioning of government from malfeasance. I will seek additional jurisdiction over matters of public integrity through all available avenues: agency referrals, executive order, and legislative enactment.~~

~~No one is above the law, and as Attorney General I will fight to ensure that corrupt politicians are held accountable.~~

3. What do you think the role of Attorney General should be in enforcing election and campaign finance laws? Would you publicly ask the governor to empower you with greater authority to oversee public corruption and enforce related laws, particularly in those areas?

I believe that the current enforcement system is too diffuse to bring about systemic change and that the Office of the Attorney General should be the centralized hub of interagency efforts to take on public corruption. I will publicly and openly seek additional authority through every available channel.

4. Do you support measures to limit the role of money in elections and politics, such as substantially reducing contribution limits and/or instituting a matching public campaign financing system at the state level? If elected, would you set an example on campaign finance reform by voluntarily limiting the size of campaign contributions you receive by an amount significantly less than the current limit, should reforms not be enacted?

We must reform our campaign finance system to support any New Yorker who wants to run for office, not just those who can afford it. New York State's current campaign finance laws make rampant corruption and regulatory capture all but inevitable. New York's individual contribution limits are the highest in the country by a significant margin and the law is so riddled with loopholes as to make those astronomical "limits" essentially meaningless. I strongly support bringing statewide the public financing system that helped me get my start and that has worked so well in New York City. I also believe we must close the LLC loophole, eliminate oft-abused housekeeping accounts, and place stricter limits on entities lobbying or doing business with the state.

I come from a hardworking family, but not a wealthy one. When I first ran for office, I did not know millionaires, and I did not know those with deep pockets — but I knew those who wanted to have a voice in government and have a seat at the table. The public financing system in New York City gave me the opportunity to compete and succeed, allowing me to represent individuals whose voices are historically ignored.

I do not believe that supporters of systemic change should hobble their ability to win elections under the current system. That only decreases the chance of reformers getting and holding office.

7. The previous and current Attorneys General have given priority to litigating against federal action that they deemed harmful to the state. What would be your approach to addressing such federal policies?

~~With a federal administration that is hellbent on attacking our communities and rolling back our rights, litigating against the federal government must be more of a priority than ever. The Attorney General is the People's Lawyer, and I believe it is her job to zealously protect the citizens of New York against any entity that encroaches on their rights, including the government in Washington. I will sue to protect our environment, our people, and our institutions. I will stand up for our state and every individual living in it.~~

~~I will never hesitate to take on the unlawful actions coming out of Washington, but just as importantly, I will respond to their inaction. The Trump Administration has all but abandoned oversight of banks, ceased prioritizing civil rights, rolled back critical consumer protections, declared open season for wage thieves and predatory lenders, and tried to turn back the clock to a free-polluting past. So while I will continue the fight against the Trump Administration's illegal actions, I also recognize that, in order to protect New Yorkers, the next Attorney General must pick up the slack and do the jobs that Washington is supposed to be doing.~~

8. If elected Attorney General, what organizational changes would you make to the Department of Law, if any?

~~I believe the responsible course of action is to take stock of the current structure post-election and work with the individuals who know it best, rather than promising wholesale changes based solely on an outsider's perspective.~~

~~However, I am committing to at least one major change: the creation of a Housing Bureau merging elements of consumer protection, civil rights, and criminal law enforcement in a bureau that is not just New York City focused, but deeply integrated into the operations of the regional offices.~~

9. What are your thoughts on striking the appropriate balance between the Attorney General's role as the lawyer representing the state's officials, and as an independently elected government official?

As the state's chief legal counsel, I will vigorously defend the state's interests, and in the vast majority of cases there will be no conflict between these two roles. But ultimately I am running to be the People's Lawyer and that will be the guiding principle I follow. If a state official steps over the line, I will not hesitate to prosecute. If I disagree with a state action, I will make that abundantly clear. I also believe the dual roles can be complementary. As counsel to the state, I will have unmatched insight into the weaknesses and failings in the government's interactions with its citizens. As an independent elected official, I can identify and fight for systemic reforms that will benefit both the state's agencies and its people.

10. What, if any, are the key social issues of the state that you would address should you be elected Attorney General? How would you address them?

At a time when our constitutional rights are under attack, the Attorney General's office must be occupied by someone who will be an advocate for everyday New Yorkers and stand up for all of our rights. Throughout my career, I have been driven by the basic belief that the law is the most powerful and effective tool in our quest for progress and equality. I have used it to defend our most vulnerable communities, to uplift our working families, and to ensure that no New Yorker lives beyond the protective shade of justice.

As Attorney General I will continue that lifelong fight by:

Fighting for Access to Reproductive Healthcare: Access to healthcare a fundamental human right that should not be a matter of politics. With the Supreme Court in imminent danger of shifting even further right, we must pass the Reproductive Health Act and then begin the work of permanently enshrining the right to personal autonomy and reproductive rights into our state constitution. We must also ensure that contraceptive care remains free and that employers cannot discriminate on the basis of reproductive decision-making. As Attorney General, I will fight to pass these necessary laws and to defend them against all challenges. I will sue and prosecute abortion clinic harassers and I will investigate scam crisis pregnancy centers that prey on vulnerable women. Most of all, I will fight with every fiber of my being to stop the federal encroachment on our personal decisions and privacy.

Protecting the Right to Vote: The right to vote is the right from which all others spring. It is the fundamental bedrock of changemaking. But it is under threat from a Republican party that looks longingly at the disenfranchisement of the Jim Crow era. It is under threat from administrative failures here at home. We must do better fighting back against the former and fixing the latter. As Attorney General, I will fight relentlessly to ensure that the right to vote is sacrosanct here in this state.

Fighting for the Rights of Immigrants: The Trump Administration's policies on immigration enforcement, deportation, and family separation are inhumane. As Attorney General, I will work with the Legislature to make New York a Sanctuary State, to keep ICE out of State Courts, and take legal action to keep migrant families together.

Protecting New Yorkers From Predatory Labor Practices: As Attorney General I will challenge every anti-worker policy the Trump administration seeks to advance. Just as importantly, I will ramp up enforcement here in New York to make up for federal abdication. I will aggressively take on wage theft, bringing civil and criminal enforcement actions. I will also seek to create multi-state partnerships to investigate and penalize major corporations that are the most prolific culprits of wage theft.

Combatting Education Scams: The Trump Administration is seeking to ensure that predatory education practices are free of consequences, gutting critical consumer protections which would erase student loan debt for students who were cheated by for-profit colleges that acted fraudulently and cut off funding for schools whose graduates were could not make enough money to pay back loans. As Attorney General, I will work to hold accountable sham education institutions and those that engage in fraudulent advertising. I will also investigate whether predatory for-profits have obtained state funds through deceit.

11. What, if any, would be your top legislative priorities to pursue should you be elected Attorney General? What specific solutions would you put forward?

As Attorney General, I will put forward a robust legislative agenda to target corporate greed, protect New Yorkers from Trump's actions, and defend civil rights.

As Public Advocate I passed more legislation than all previous Public Advocates combined, including landmark equal pay legislation banning employers from asking about salary history and a bill to convene the first ever legislatively created Charter Revision Commission which has a chance to fundamentally transform the foundational governing document of the City of New York. I have also passed legislation that will make government more accountable and transparent such as a bill that requires the City to publicly track its progress on the promises it makes during rezonings.

My priorities will include:

Public Integrity: I will fight for permanent authority to prosecute public corruption and support efforts to create an independent commission to oversee ethics laws. I will push to bring public campaign financing statewide, seek to significantly reduce contribution limits, close the LLC loophole, eliminate off-abused housekeeping accounts, and place stricter limits on entities lobbying or doing business with the state.

Housing: I will push to end vacancy decontrol and create stronger penalties for tenant harassment.

Pay Equity: I will fight to pass the salary history ban statewide and seek additional authority to enforce equal pay laws.

Workers Rights: I will introduce legislation to give individuals the power to enforce labor law violations, seek to create stricter standards for misclassification in response to the modern gig economy and work to strengthen anti-retaliation and whistleblower protection laws. I will also fight to support wage liens that will hold wage thieves accountable.

Reproductive Rights: I will continue fighting for the Reproductive Health Act, lead the multi-session campaign to amend the state constitution to further codify reproductive rights, and continue to work to ensure that contraceptive coverage remains free.

Criminal Justice Reform: I will introduce legislation to create a mechanism for genuine expungement with fairer parameters than our current sealing statute, push for grand jury reform, an end to cash bail, and early discovery.

Immigration: I will introduce legislation to make immigration status a protected class under the State Human Rights Law and create criminal penalties for threatening to disclose an individual's immigration status.

Please use the space provided or a separate sheet of paper to elaborate on your positions on the issues contained in the previous pages. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

III. CAMPAIGN PROMISES MADE TO VOTERS (PAST AND CURRENT)

In addition to evaluating their stances on the issues above, Citizens Union will assess candidates on the commitments they are making to voters during the campaign. For candidates who have held elected office before, we will also evaluate them on how well they kept the promises they made to voters in the past.

As a candidate who has held an elected office other than the one for which you are running,

- a. what are the top five promises or goals you are making to the voters during this campaign, and,
- b. since 2014, what have been your top five campaign promises or goals and what progress has been made in keeping those promises?

We thank you very much for your response. Please feel free to use additional paper if the space provided is not sufficient.

TOP FIVE 2018 CAMPAIGN PROMISES OR GOALS

1. I Will Stand up to Donald Trump and the Trump Administration:
Donald Trump has been violating the rights of New Yorkers and harming the people of this state for half-a-century. He started his career as a predatory landlord accused of racial discrimination and tenant harassment. He cheated workers out of their wages and exploited immigrant laborers. He graduated into a scammer, bilking New Yorkers out of millions with his bogus university. In the course of his Presidential campaign, he and his associates may have committed violations of New York law ranging from money laundering to tax fraud. Now he is deploying the resources federal government in way that is antithetical to all we stand for. As Attorney General, I will fight to ensure that Trump, his businesses, his associates, and his administration are not above the law. Where Trump's policies harm New York and New Yorkers I will sue. Where Trump's agencies have given corporations the green light to abuse workers and consumers, I will step in. Where Trump's businesses or cronies have violated the law, I will investigate and hold them accountable.

2. I Will Protect the Rights of All New Yorkers:
As Attorney General, I will have a zero tolerance policy for discrimination or the violation of civil or human rights. I will use every avenue available to me to defend the rights of New Yorkers and hold bad actors accountable, be they individuals, businesses, or government actors.

3. I Will Make the Attorney General's Office Accessible to All:
I am running to be the People's Lawyer and, as Attorney General, my office will be open and accessible to the people I serve. I have spent the last five years as the New York City Public Advocate, serving as the Ombudsman who connects the people to their Government and ensures their government is treating them as they deserve. I have spoken with thousands and thousands of people all across New York, and it is the people that drive me. I will bring that same approach to the Office of the Attorney General. I understand and share the desire to achieve industry-changing results as Attorney General, but when I sit in that office, no case will be "too small." That means significantly expanding the consumer protection and labor law enforcement arms of the AG's office. It also means more attention focused on issue navigators like those who currently mediate consumer disputes and help individuals navigate the healthcare system.

4. I Will be an Independent Voice for Justice:
Throughout my life I have never backed down from a fight, no matter how powerful the adversary. I have taken on real estate interests and banks, challenged mayors and the police, fought for better schools and safer housing, and always taken the side of the people. As Attorney General I will do what I have always done: listen to the real problems of real people, stand up for the vulnerable against powerful interests, and use creative thinking to harness every power at my disposal to protect those who need it.

5. I Will Protect The Environment:

At a time when the EPA is abandoning its responsibility to enforce the laws that protect our air, water and the rest of our natural environment, the role of the Attorney General is all the more vital for the health and safety of New Yorkers everywhere. New Yorkers across the state breathe unsafe air largely from emissions from other states, yet the EPA is currently refusing to enforce a multi-state agreement to hold those states accountable — another sad example of this administration giving carte blanche to industry over the public's interest. And the EPA's abdication of its responsibility is not limited only to air quality. The EPA is currently trying to limit the waters protected by the federal Clean Water Act. Without a vigilant EPA, it is up to the state Attorney General to use the courts to ensure that the laws that protect New Yorkers are enforced. As Attorney General, New Yorkers can be assured that I will fight protect their health and safety with the same commitment that I have brought to my work as Public Advocate.

TOP FIVE CAMPAIGN PROMISES SINCE 2014 AND ACTION ON THEM

1. Be a Voice for Economic Fairness

Since I have been in public office, I have been a strong voice for economic fairness in this City. I have stood on the side of workers against corporations and tenants against landlords and pushed a vision of shared prosperity. One of my proudest achievements of my time as Public Advocate is passing legislation to ban employers from asking prospective employees about salary history. This measure is so important because when employers rely on past salaries they perpetuate the vicious cycle of pay inequality. By forcing companies to rely on an individual's qualifications, rather than past pay stubs, when setting salary, we can help disrupt that vicious cycle.

I passed legislation to make it easier for MWBEs to access City Contracts, a bill that empowered communities to hold the City to their promises during rezonings, and legislation requiring diversity disclosure for major construction contractors. I have also taken on wage theft, pushed for employee owned businesses, and stood up for workers whose employers refused to bargain in good faith. I have fought back against the privatization of government services and taken action against unfair mandatory arbitration clauses, including recently introduced legislation that would require companies to disclose whether they require employees to sign such clauses.

2. Stand up for tenants

I have championed the rights of tenants across the city. I identified landlord abuses and have published the annual Worst Landlords list to shine a spotlight on the one hundred worst landlords ranked according to the number of violations issued to their buildings. I successfully sued NYCHA for keeping public housing residents in dangerously cold conditions during the winter. I won a lawsuit in federal court challenging a rule change that led the Department of Finance to terminate the rental benefits of seniors whose spouses had died. I have taken legal action against the unscrupulous landlords, and the City of New over tenant harassment utilizing the infamous Worst Landlords Watchlist as a tool to empower tenants and apprise them of their rights.

I have investigated and published policy reports with recommendations to help tenants access and maintain their housing, such as my work in advocating for tenants in the Tenant Interim Lease program and the Housing Development Finance Corporation buildings. I successfully advocated for changes to the the Affordable Housing Lottery that will open the door for thousands of New Yorkers to potentially obtain safe and affordable housing. I also passed legislation that help hold landlords accountable by making their violations across properties open and accessible.

3. Bring Parents' Voices Back into Our School System

Since taking office in 2014, I have taken significant action to make New York City public education more parent-driven, student-focused, and accountable. I successfully sued to open School Leadership Team (SLT) Meetings to the public to ensure that parents have a direct line to decision-making in their children's' schools. I fought to reform Mayoral Control issuing reports and holding public forums and town halls across the City. I led the successful campaign to create free universal school lunch. I have fought back against school closures and blew the whistle on a bloated contract that would have wasted hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars.

4. Fight for Children and Families

As Public Advocate, I have always stood up and fought hardest for the least, the last, and the lost. I sued the City for subjecting disabled kids to sweltering hot buses and took on the foster care system for causing irreparable harm to young lives. I helped lead the fights to institute paid family leave and paid sick leave. I have pushed to expand daycare services and introduced legislation to create on-site daycare for municipal workers. I passed legislation to track outcomes for kids who age out of the foster care system. On the state level, I successfully advocated for the expansion of New York's Medicaid coverage to include tomosynthesis, a three dimensional technology that more accurately diagnoses breast cancer.

