



## 2013 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC ADVOCATE

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Citizens Union would appreciate your response to the following questions related to policy issues facing the City of New York that are of concern to Citizens Union and residents of the City. We plan to make public your responses to this questionnaire in our Voters Directory, on our website, and in other appropriate venues. Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union will use to evaluate candidates who are running for office in order to determine our "Preferred Candidates" for the primary election and "Endorsed Candidates" for the general election.

If you seek our support, we would also need to schedule an interview with you as part of the evaluation process. We will not automatically schedule an interview with you if you return this questionnaire, as we prioritize competitive races and resources constrain us from evaluating all races. Please contact us if you wish to be interviewed. We thank you very much for your response.

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Candidate Name: Reshma Saujani \_\_\_\_\_ Age: 37

Campaign Address: 216 W. 30<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10001

Campaign Telephone Number: (646) 756-4562 Fax: N/A

Party Affiliation(s): Democrat \_\_\_\_ Campaign Manager Name: Michael Blake \_\_\_\_\_

Website & Email: www.reshmafornewyork.com; reshma.saujani@gmail.com \_\_\_\_\_

Education: University of Illinois; Harvard Kennedy School; Yale Law School

Occupation/Employer (or years in currently held elected office): Founder, Girls Who Code

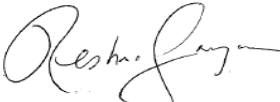
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Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement: Deputy Public Advocate & Executive Director of the Fund for Public Advocacy (2011-2012); Board Member of Bronx Academy of Software Engineering (current); Candidate for US Congress (2010)

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Are you willing to be interviewed by CU's Local Candidates Committee? YES  NO   
*(Please note: Citizens Union can only grant its support to candidates we have interviewed. If you would like to be interviewed, please follow up with Citizens Union staff, as resources constrain us from interviewing every candidate.)*

Have you completed requisite campaign finance filings? YES  NO

Signature of Candidate: \_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_8/12/13\_\_

**CITIZENS UNION ISSUES**

Please state your position on the following issues by indicating whether you support or oppose each, where applicable. Please also use the space provided below each question or on a separate sheet of paper to elaborate on your positions on the questions which require a detailed answer. You may also provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to advance your positions on these issues.

1. What is your position with respect to eliminating party primaries and establishing a non-partisan election system in which all candidates and all voters participate in the first round and the top two candidates advance to the second round?	<b>Support</b>
2. What is your position on instituting Instant Runoff Voting for all citywide offices and for all special elections for city offices? (Int. No. 1066)	<b>Support</b>
3. What is your position on requiring city agencies to report the number of applicants that they register to vote as required by current law (Int. No. 760)?	<b>Support</b>
4. What is your position on modifying the City Charter to require that laws enacted by referendum only be changed through approval by the voters?	<b>Support</b>
5. What is your position on establishing independent budgeting for:	
a. the borough presidents?	<b>Support</b>
b. Conflicts of Interest Board?	<b>Support</b>
c. the public advocate?	<b>Support</b>
d. community boards?	<b>Support</b>
6. What is your position on granting the office of the Public Advocate the ability to appoint one member to the following boards:	
a. the Board of Standards and Appeals?	<b>Support</b>
b. the Franchise and Concessions Review Commission?	<b>Support</b>
c. the Conflicts of Interest Board?	<b>Support</b>
7. What is your position on dissolving the Commission on Public Information and Communication and transferring its major duties to the office of the Public Advocate, giving greater responsibility for expanding public access to government data, information and reports?	<b>Support</b>

## ISSUES OF CITYWIDE IMPORTANCE

8. How would you use the office of the Public Advocate to impact public policy to serve the broad public interest?

I believe that in order for the Public Advocate's office to serve the broad public interest, we need a new structure for the office that takes a pro-active approach to solving issues New Yorkers are facing every day. It is not enough to respond to constituency complaints and hold press conferences.

To that end, I will establish four Deputy Public Advocates, each of whom will be a leading voice speaking out for New Yorkers on the issues that impact our City and its residents: education initiatives; affordable housing; women and the elderly; and jobs and the economy. Each Deputy would be an experienced policy leader, charged with developing innovative solutions that can usher in a new era of government administration.

9. What would be your most important legislative and non-legislative priorities as public advocate?

Though the Public Advocate may introduce legislation, the Public Advocate's Office is not primarily a legislative office, but rather an executive office.

The Public Advocate has to be a dynamic mix of policy, advocacy, and oversight. For this reason, my legislative and non-legislative priorities overlap. For example, to support small businesses, I intend to introduce legislation to repeal harmful and excessive fines, but I will do this in conjunction with providing support and mentorship for to small business owners to help them grow.

Similarly, I have already introduced legislation in Albany with Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi to allow computer science to count as a science requirement towards graduation, but there is a significant advocacy, public-private partnership, and teacher training that will also be necessary to meaningfully expand computer science education. The Public Advocate has to take a comprehensive approach to solving our city's greatest challenges.

My priorities in office are:

- Creating new jobs and expanding opportunity by increasing access to capital and technical assistance for small businesses, investing in new entrepreneurs, and leveraging new funding to train New Yorkers with in-demand job skills.
- Ensuring every New York City public school student is college and career ready by increasing technology education, fighting for increased professional resources for teachers, and enhancing the voice of parents and communities in school decisions.

- Ensuring access to quality affordable housing by partnering pro-bono lawyers with tenants fighting unscrupulous landlords, advocating for more affordable housing developments, and improving quality of life for NYCHA residents.
- Empowering women and working families by expanding paid parental leave, reducing the education gender gap in science and math for young women.

10. What do you consider to be the three most important oversight functions of the Public Advocate?

1) Reviewing overall city agency performance and constituent service, but with a particular role in promoting greater responsiveness and transparency in city government; 2) serving as Chair of the 11 member Commission on Public Information and Communication; 3) Ordering a summary inquiry into any alleged violation or neglect of duty relating to the property, government or affairs of the city.

11. How best do you believe the office of the Public Advocate should be utilized? Do you believe the Public Advocate should address broad citywide issues or should be limited to oversight of specific issues?

I believe that to truly serve the most vulnerable among us and be relevant in people's lives, the Public Advocate has to be focused on a few specific areas – in my case, jobs, education, housing, and women and seniors. At the same time, the Public Advocate must be bold and innovative to take on issues within these areas that affect New Yorkers citywide in a targeted way.

This is what I successfully did as Deputy Public Advocate. When the City Council cut the Vallone scholarship that was available to hardworking undocumented students, I partnered with the New York Immigration Coalition to create the DREAM Fellowship so we could send undocumented students to CUNY and put them on a path to economic prosperity.

Similarly, when immigrant small business owners were not getting access to adequate services, I commissioned the first ever survey of immigrant entrepreneurs to ask them what they needed to succeed. I partnered with Accion, surveyed more than 600 immigrant small business owners, and then did a report with specific recommendations for how to better support these businesses.

12. How would you publicize the Public Advocate's office and its role?

I believe the Public Advocate has to go far beyond the Bully Pulpit role and focus on creating results that change New Yorkers lives. To make New Yorkers aware of the Office and its role, I will not only shine a light on problems or challenge the mayor, but will also highlight the proactive programming the Public Advocate's Office is doing to uplift families.

Additionally, in an era of rapidly evolving technology and social media networks, it is easier than ever to connect with constituents across the city to get out a message. I will use all avenues of outreach both traditional and technological to connect with constituents, and also to encourage activism and advocacy around specific campaigns, as I did during my campaign on the issue of Paid Sick Leave.

My four deputies and I will also make it a priority to use in-person outreach to connect with diverse communities in all boroughs and engage the public to help identify and find solutions for the issues plaguing our communities. People need to know that they have an ally in government who will not only hear their voices, but also champion their causes.

13. What would you propose the Department of Education do to increase the ability for parents and teachers to become more meaningfully involved in the education system? What other positive changes can be made to the New York City public school system?

I believe we must engage the entire community—parents, students, educators and administrators—to ensure that every student has access to first class education and the 21st century skills to succeed in the workplace and college. As Public Advocate, I will be a strong and forceful fighter to make City Hall and Albany meet their obligations to our students and our City.

First, I plan to empower parents and families with a mentoring program to help them navigate the public school system. Particularly in immigrant communities, parents are not aware of the choices available, and have difficulty filling out applications for specialized schools.

Second, I believe our public education system is overly focused on testing. Time and again, research shows that a greater emphasis on learning and a less pronounced emphasis on test scores produce smarter, more well rounded students.

Third, we need more innovative solutions to prepare our kids for the jobs that are available. I founded the national non-profit organization Girls Who Code to teach teenage girls the skills to get jobs in technology. I will push for Computer Science education in every public high school to give our children the skills necessary to get jobs.

14. What discrepancies, if any, do you see between services promised to New Yorkers and services rendered? For those listed, please indicate your proposals for bringing policy closer to practice.

I think public housing presents the most severe gap in services promised and services rendered by the City of New York.

The New York City Housing Authority's outstanding building repairs impair the safety and quality of life of its nearly 450,000 residents—we can and should do better. As Public Advocate I will create a Repairs Watchlist, which will publicize the top 25 critical repairs that NYCHA has repeatedly failed to address in a timely or satisfactory manner. To ensure the most effective solutions, we need to work directly with NYCHA residents, resident associations, legal services attorneys, union members and NYCHA resident advocates.

Additionally, the historic rise in our city's homeless population is unconscionable—we are failing to provide basic resources for our most vulnerable. As public advocate I will fight for reforms to the city's shelter eligibility process and develop administrative reforms that can improve the quality of homeless services. There must be new pathways to out of homelessness; I plan to create more transition rental assistance programs for permanent, affordable housing, and pilot a new job training programs for homeless individuals, particularly LGBT youth and veterans, who are disproportionately homeless.

15. What would you propose to further enhance transparency of city government? How would you utilize the responsibilities of the Public Advocate with regard to access to public information in monitoring implementation of the city's Open Data Law?

With the rise in recent ethics scandals, it's time for new leadership and a new vision that empowers New Yorkers with transparent government and gives them a voice in the most important decisions being made for our city.

That should start with the Public Advocate's office. To build on Public Advocate Bill De Blasio's record of transparency, I will set a new standard by:

- Publishing the Public Advocate's schedule and listing all organizations who meet with or lobby the Public Advocate's office.
- Putting the annual tax reports of the Fund for Public Advocacy, the 501(c)(3) affiliated with the Public Advocate's office online and issuing detailed bimonthly reports on the Fund's spending.
- Listing which organizations have sponsored and partnered with the Fund's projects.
- Ensuring the Public Advocate's office is responsive to all FOIL requests in a timely manner.
- Scheduling Town Hall meetings in each Borough at least twice every year.

Additionally, I believe the Public Advocate can have a watchdog role when it comes to Public Private Partnerships. Public-Private Partnerships are a critical city resource that can accomplish important goals for our citizens but often are not subject to the public scrutiny and transparency standards to which government agencies must adhere. As Public Advocate, I will launch a new effort to expand the transparency and accountability mechanisms for 501(c)(3) organizations whose missions are to solely raise money for city government-run institutions and activities. I will create new transparency standards for

PPP's, which I will voluntarily apply to the Fund for Public Advocacy, while working with transparency, open government and campaign finance reform advocates to introduce legislation in my first year in office to apply these standards to all PPP's:

- Making public all information available about donors and donation amounts to city-affiliated 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations and the specific spending of these organizations.
- Identifying any potential conflicts of interests that may arise between nonprofit donors, fund recipients and ongoing city administrative decisions.
- Making PPP's subject to the audit authority of the City Comptroller's office.
- Making all PPP's subject to the Freedom of Information Law in the same fashion as City agencies.

16. How would you leverage the office of Public Advocate to address any of the following issues, if not discussed in answering previous questions:

- a. Affordable Housing
- b. Public Safety
- c. Health and the Environment
- d. Economic Development

#### **A. Affordable Housing:**

Without safe, affordable housing, our families will continue to be squeezed out of New York City. In addition to my proposals to reform NYCHA, the city's largest landlord, and hold it accountable to tenants, I plan to improve affordable housing access for all New Yorkers.

Under current state law, developers receives significant tax incentives to build new residential buildings in New York City if they agree to set aside 20% of units to affordable housing. As Public Advocate, I will advocate for necessary reforms to this system to ensure that developers no longer receive tax windfalls that do not address the larger affordable housing challenges in New York City. I will call on Albany to increase the affordability set-aside to one-third of housing units in new developments that receive 421-a tax incentives; push for reforms to affordability requirements so that they reflect the income realities of New York City workers and families; and call for decreases of the overall amount of the tax abatements, so that the savings can be reinvested in other programs that expand and maintain affordable housing units in New York City.

Finally, housing courts in New York City are a mess. With increased requirements for pro-bono work by attorneys in New York, I will set up within the office of the Public Advocate a volunteer legal corps dedicated to helping tenants stand up to unscrupulous landlords. Public Advocate Bill de Blasio has done an admirable job identifying the city's worst slumlords; I will use the Public Advocate's office to hold them accountable.

#### **B. Public Safety:**

Relations between communities of color and the NYPD have been severely strained under the era of racist and unconstitutional Stop & Frisk and surveillance of Muslim communities. The first step in improving public safety is to repair that critical relationship.

Additionally, we can improve public safety by expanding improving channels of communication and interpretation services between immigrants, our local government, the NYPD, and all critical city services. In that vein, I will launch a new anti-domestic violence effort in our immigrant communities that publicizes through community-based organizations the interpretation services available to victims of domestic violence; the NYPD's procedures for responding to domestic violence claims, including not inquiring about immigration status; and immigration visas available for victims of domestic violence, so they do not need to rely on an abusive partner for legal immigration status in the U.S.

I will also work with the NYPD and sex trafficking experts who have experience working closely with victims to launch a new training program for new officers to help both identify the unique signs of sex trafficking and sensitive NYPD officers to the special needs of sex trafficking victims. This program will focus on improving prosecution rates for sex trafficking crime rings and clients through improved front-end cooperation of witnesses and enhanced support for victims.

Given the plague of gun violence in our communities, I also believe we need to explore new innovative approaches to reducing violence, including Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.'s idea to create an online registry of gun offenders.

#### **D. Health and The Environment:**

The aftermath of Hurricane Sandy continues to place undue burdens on too many of our families, businesses and communities. I believe a central part of the smarter rebuilding effort must be addressing both New York's role in global climate change and the effects global climate change will have on New York. As Public Advocate, I would support a thorough examination of the innovative projects being implemented across the world, and fight to ensure that we do not just enter into a contracting process that repeats more short-term thinking.

It is also important to find alternative sources of energy and I support a continued moratorium on fracking. Protecting the quality of our drinking water is not just an economic issue, it's a public health and safety issue. While the prospect of more jobs seems appealing, the energy industry has a proven track record of leaving behind environmental havoc whenever and wherever it suited their bottom line. We would be better off creating jobs in non-polluting industries that do not threaten our safety or public health.

#### **E. Economic Development:**

There is a clear disconnect between the myriad of New York City and New York State resources for our small businesses and the reality that our small business owners face on the



ground. As Public Advocate, I will launch a new program to address the critical needs of New York City small businesses, focusing on the following priorities:

- Creating new jobs by scaling up existing small businesses and helping new business owners get their businesses off the ground.
- Providing technical assistance for obtaining access to capital, budget and growth planning, legal services and debt management.
- Leveraging city social media resources to support the growth of city small businesses to new consumers and markets.
- Creating a one-stop, community-based hub for learning about and applying for city, state and federal small business resources.
- Addressing language access issues for immigrant entrepreneurs dealing with city regulatory processes.



## **CANDIDATE ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONNAIRE**

As a candidate who presently does not hold elected office, CU is interested in knowing your top five campaign promises you are making to the voters during this campaign for this position.

If elected, Citizens Union will use these promises to evaluate your performance while in office, as well as, to evaluate your candidacy in the future.

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

### **TOP FIVE 2013 CAMPAIGN PROMISES**

1. Push for computer science education in every public high school by 2018.
2. Create a Pro-Bono Legal Corps to represent tenants.
3. Build a Women's Commission to review city legislation for effects on women and girls.
4. Create NYCHA Repairs Accountability Online Platform and Mobile App.
5. Introduce legislation to repeal the most unnecessary and harmful small business fines.