

Candidate Questionnaire

Local Candidates Committee

NYS Legislative 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 1st. Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for the New York State Legislature, 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: **Amanda Septimo**

Party Affiliation(s): **Democrat**

Age: **27**

Education: **Vanderbilt University**

Office Sought/District: **State Assembly District 84**

Occupation/Employer: **Full-time candidate**

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement:

- **Worked with Congressman Serrano for 4 years**
- **Volunteered extensively with Hillary Clinton 2016 campaign**
- **History of community activism with The Point CDC, Mothers on the Move, Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, and the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance**

Campaign Contact Information

Campaign Manager Name: **Tara Gitter – 973-557-0167 – taragitter@gmail.com**

Additional Staff Contact: **Aaron Hecht – 917-273-9082 – aaron@redhorsestrategies.com**

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Website: **amandaseptimo.com**

Email: **amanda@amandaseptimo.com**

Twitter: **@AmandaSeptimo**

Facebook: **@AmandaSeptimoBX**

If elected, which legislative conference will you join? **Democrat**

I. AFFIRMATIONS

Have you completed required campaign finance filings? **YES**

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

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

Signature of Candidate:



Date: **June 29, 2018**

II. CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

Please state whether you support or oppose the following reform measures, and feel free to may elaborate in the space provided at the end or on additional paper.

2018 PRIORITY ISSUES:

ETHICS

1. Limit outside compensation earned by state legislators and statewide officials to 25% of their salaries, while enacting a salary increase and eliminating stipends. **Support**
2. Reform the Joint Commission on Public Ethics to eliminate the ability of one party to veto an investigation and to increase disclosure of its decision-making. **Support**

ELECTIONS AND VOTING

3. Do you support or oppose the following changes to the state's current registration and voting system?
 - a. Early voting – **Support**

- b. No-excuse absentee voting – **Support**
- c. Election Day voter registration – **Support**
- d. Re-enfranchisement of people on parole automatically through legislation, without
- e. requiring a Certificate of Good Conduct or Relief – **Support**
- f. Automatic voter registration, unless the potential voter opts out - **Support**
- g. Consolidated state and federal primaries – **Support**
- h. Electronic poll books – **Support**

4. Reform the special election process, utilizing a nonpartisan special election for state legislative seats and eliminate delays in filling vacancies. **Support**

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

5. Establish public financing of campaigns for state legislative and statewide offices using a method similar to New York City’s Campaign Finance Law. **Support**

6. Close the LLC loophole to ensure that limited liability companies have the same contribution limits as corporations, rather than the higher limit for individuals. **Support**

7. Drastically reduce campaign contribution limits and reduce them even further from registered lobbyists and those who do business with the state. **Support**

BUDGET PROCESS

8. Require full disclosure of grants and contracts issued by the state, including the budget lines from which the spending is made and reporting on the results of each grant or contract over a certain amount. **Support**

9. Provide for adequate online disclosure and itemization of spending from elected officials’ lump sum appropriations, including reporting on potential conflicts of interest and how the funds are spent. **Support**

POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

10. Repeal Civil Rights Law, Sec. 50-a, which shields from public view the disciplinary records of police officers, correction officers, and firefighters. **Support**

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

11. Restructure the state Board of Elections to abolish the strict two-party division of governance and operation and putting in place professional, nonpartisan administration. **Support**

12. Empower the attorney general to investigate and prosecute election law malfeasance and cases of public corruption. **Support**

HOME RULE

13. Make mayoral control of city schools permanent, with a governance system that provides for accountability, transparency, parent engagement, and democratic participation. **Support**

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.

The issues mentioned above that I am most passionate about working through is transparency in the budget process. Transparency in the budget process is simply not something individuals should still be having to ask of their government. As a citizen, it is my right to know where money comes from, how it is spent, and to understand what oversight of spending looks like. As a South Bronxite, I am particularly interested in understanding exactly how spending decisions are made and which funds are continuously raided for other projects, so that we can begin to unpack exactly why our community consistently receives the short end of the budgeting stick. Budgets, grants, and generally how a place spends their money speaks to their values. We need to know that our budgets and state spending are reflective of the values that we expect our elected leaders to uphold, and transparency is the only way to do that.

III. CAMPAIGN PROMISES MADE TO VOTERS

In addition to evaluating stances on the issues above, Citizens Union also considers the campaign goals articulated to voters.

What are the top five promises you are making to the voters during this campaign?

Please feel free to use additional paper if the space provided is not sufficient, and to affix additional information such as a résumé, campaign brochure, or issue statements. We thank you very much for your response.

TOP FIVE 2018 CAMPAIGN PROMISES OR GOALS

1. Get More Resources to our Schools

- Our schools are severely under-resourced because of chronic under-funding from the state government. The politics of New York State make it so that no elected has challenged the school formula funding beyond it's rhetoric, but I look forward to joining the NYS Legislature and digging into the minutia of school funding so that districts aren't forced into court to fight for fair funding...only to see court mandates for level funding ultimately ignored. Until we can fix school funding, which is a tall political order in itself, I will work to establish an "Adopt a School" program within the district, where private companies can partner with a school to help plug the resource gaps that might exist, whether that looks like resources for a computer lab or support professional development for staff.

2. Improve Access to Affordable Housing

- New York City is constructing new affordable housing units each day, but the constant question asked by local residents is "affordable for who" because the income brackets that are set for eligibility for these apartments is simply too high. It is not unusual to see the lowest income eligibility bracket be significantly higher than the average income for the area's immediate residents. This issue is inextricably linked to the federal government's Area Median Income (AMI) and how these figures are connected to tax incentives that are central to affordable housing development. While the state government has no control over AMI, in my four years working with Congressman Serrano, my local Congressman, we took a deep dive on this issue and learned that the federal government experiments with different versions and applications of this formula in other parts of the country. We need to see this type of experimentation brought to New York. Period. I will fight to make that happen.

3. Access to Sustainable Jobs

- The Bronx has seen a boom in big-box retail presence in recent years, but in 2018 it is becoming clearer each day that retail was a bad bet. I am eager to support opportunities in tech as New York's "Silicon Alley" continues to develop. Tech based careers are one of the few that do not have formal education as a requisite for success, and that serves as a tremendous opportunity in my district, where many people do not pursue higher education. As NYC's tech boom prepares to crest, I am committed to supporting groups like Per Scholas and The Knowledge in their efforts to build a meaningful tech ecosystem in the South Bronx, which includes providing access to opportunities to be trained in a relatively short time (6-10 weeks) for jobs that start at 35K, which is higher than the average family income in our area. If we are to ever break the cycles of poverty that have had a stronghold on our community for decades, we must provide meaningful opportunities for economic mobility, and in today's world the best opportunity for that seems to be in technology. Talent is universal, and I look forward to working to ensure that opportunity becomes universal as well.

4. Get Guns off the Street

- If we want to get serious about ending gun violence in our communities, then we need to get serious about getting guns off the street. I would push to ensure that

“no question” drop off zones for guns exist in neutral zones, outside of police precincts, where individuals who want to get rid of a gun can feel comfortable walking into without fear of retribution. Additionally, I would push for “no question” gun turn-in programs paid the same amount of money someone could sell a gun for on the black market. The reality of our community is that many people are looking for ways to make ends meet each day, and if a gun turn-in program is only paying \$200 per gun meanwhile someone on the street is paying \$800, that gun is going to end up in the wrong hands every time. To be serious about eliminating gun violence, we need to put our money where our mouth is, put action behind words, and fund common sense programs that will bring real change to our community.

5. Positive Youth Programming Opportunities

- Young people in the South Bronx simply do not have access to enough positive recreational programs. Whether that means dance, sports, music, performance art, visual, filmmaking, etc., whatever it is, we have a shortage. We need to create more microgrant opportunities for local leaders to be empowered to run programming in communities that need it most. We also need to give young people safe, productive spaces to be young, and build relationships within our community. Given crime patterns, it is clear that leaving community centers open later would keep our communities safer. I will work to have our local community centers open until midnight on the weekends between Memorial Day and Labor Day each year, and bring more resources to structured programming in these same community centers, so that our young people can have ample opportunity to spend their time in positive ways.

IV. ETHICAL REPRESENTATION OF CONSTITUENTS

Citizens Union believes that all New Yorkers deserve to be represented by officials who work for the public interest and honor the public trust. With the corruption conviction of recent legislative leaders, we seek to endorse a candidate who will demonstrate that she/he will honor the full commitment of the oath of office, and always represent the public interest above all else.

Please tell us how you have and would continue to conduct the political affairs of this office in an upright manner, and maintain the public trust.

I have lived in the South Bronx my entire life. I know names of people whose children are bullied but don't feel heard by the Department of Education; I know mothers who struggle to find meaningful work, and are caught in cycles of seasonal employment in the meantime; I know someone who moved into a shelter, and sent their mother to live with an aunt, because they just couldn't afford rent anymore. I say all of this to demonstrate how much of my *real* life this work includes. I am fighting for jobs because I know people who need them, I am fighting for housing because I know people who don't have any, and I am fighting for better schools because I know children being failed by them today. The nature

of politics is not meant to be personal, but this work is deeply personal for me. Every one of my goals is connected to real people. And, I know that each time our state experiences corruption, it is those same people that suffer the most. Bringing my whole self to this work means using my mind, but leading with my heart. I will continue to lead by example, and demonstrate that meaningful, responsible, life-changing, policies and programs are not only possible, but exactly what the people of New York deserve.

Please return to: Citizens Union, Local Candidates Committee, 299 Broadway, Suite 700 New York, NY 10007

Via email to candidates@citizensunion.org or fax to 212.227.0345 • Call us at 212-227-0342 with questions