



Candidate Questionnaire  
 Local Candidates Committee  
 NYC Public Advocate Special Election 2019

Citizens Union appreciates your response to the following questionnaire related to policy issues facing New York City and our interest in reforming city and state government. **Please return the questionnaire to us as soon as possible, and no later than January 3<sup>rd</sup>.** Responses to these questions will be one of several factors Citizens Union uses to evaluate candidates running for New York City Public Advocate, and to issue our endorsement in the Special 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 publish returned questionnaires on our website, in printed voters directory, and in other appropriate venues. We thank you very much for your response.

**Biographical Information**

Candidate Name: Michael Blake

Party Affiliation(s): Democratic Age: 36

Education: BA, Journalism, Medill School, Northwestern University

Office Sought: New York City Public Advocate

Occupation/Employer: New York State Assembly Member to the 79th District

Previous Offices, Campaigns and Community/Civic Involvement: Served in the White House under President Obama as the Associate Director of Public Engagement and Deputy Associate Director of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs; Elected to NYS Assembly in 2014; Elected as Vice-Chair of the Democratic National Committee in 2016; Aspen Institute Rodel Fellow in Public Leadership; Visiting Fellow in the Harvard Kennedy School's Institute of Politics; Council on Foreign Relations Fellow.

Candidate Cell Phone: 847-452-9510

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

**Campaign Contact Information**

Campaign Manager Name: Sabrina Philson Additional Staff Contact: Annie Ollen

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Telephone: 917-734-8734 or 617-872-7929 Fax: N/A

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**Affirmations**

\*\*\*Will file on January 15th- which is the first date we are obligated to file since the campaign account was initiated\*\*\*

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 of being considered for Citizens Union's endorsement.)*

Signature of Candidate:

Date: 01/01/2019

## I. POLICY QUESTIONS

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

### CITIZEN UNION ISSUES

1. What is your position with respect to eliminating party primaries and establishing a nonpartisan election system in which all candidates participate in the first round and the top two candidates advance to the second round? All registered voters regardless of party would be eligible to vote in both rounds.	Support / <u>Oppose</u>
2. What is your position on instituting ranked choice voting in all elections for citywide office, including all special elections?	<u>Support</u> / Oppose
3. What is your position on modifying the City Charter to require that laws enacted by referendum only be changed through approval by the voters?	<u>Support</u> / Oppose
4. What is your position on establishing independent budgeting for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. borough presidents?</li> <li>b. The Conflicts of Interest Board?</li> <li>c. The Public Advocate?</li> <li>d. community boards?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <u>Support</u>/Oppose</li> <li>b. <u>Support</u>/ Oppose</li> <li>c. <u>Support</u>/Oppose</li> <li>d. <u>Support</u>/Oppose</li> </ul>

## ISSUES OF CITYWIDE IMPORTANCE

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

I will use my position as Public Advocate to fight for jobs and justice for all New Yorkers. I am running because I believe that even the greatest city in the world needs an accountable and responsible watchdog that goes after broken promises and fights to make them right. I am honored to have secured Former Lt. Governor Dick Ravitch's endorsement - who worked tirelessly to build more affordable housing and an effective public transportation system in New York City throughout his career. As Public Advocate, I will help identify the problems facing our communities and solve them, not just call attention to them. I want to help our city invest more in jobs, not prisons; invest more in education, not excuses. I will focus on leading an office that is committed to good governance, integrity, and transparency - as Betsy Gotbaum did throughout her distinguished career as Public Advocate. I believe a fundamental role of the Public Advocate emerges through its identity as an Ombudsman. I plan on furthering this ombudsman role to increase transparency across city agencies and officials, while also encouraging and collecting public feedback to bring popular input into larger city debates. And I am making it my mission to hold NYCHA accountable for the abusive conditions it perpetrate against its residents. I am running because I believe in a New York City that's stronger but also fairer for everyone, especially those in communities that have been ignored for too long. I am well versed in balancing accountability and finding common ground as a member of the Obama White House and as a State Assemblyman. The Public Advocate has to hold city government accountable with a relatively small budget. I have the experience and relationships to successfully navigate the watchdog and ombudsperson role of the office.

As Public Advocate, I will:

- Immediately review housing tax credits to determine what should be rescinded for failure to implement affordable housing.
- Formally request to have a permanent seat on the MTA Board to fight for improvement and ensure that the system is brought into a state of good repair.
- Ensure that we track the jobs created for women and people of color to determine city changes.
- Support ranked choice voting and efforts to advance automatic voter registration, which are critical reforms for supporting a true democracy.
- Demand good governance and will lead by example, ensuring that the Public Advocate's office is committed to transparency, accountability, and ethics.

- Review the Amazon proposal to determine potential ways for better economic opportunities for New York City residents.
- Convene a working group that assesses the current implementation strategy for criminal justice reforms including the proposed Rikers Island plans.

I am fully focused on being the most effective and successful Public Advocate possible and pledge that I will not be a candidate for Mayor in 2021.

6. What would be your most important legislative and non-legislative priorities as Public Advocate?

As New York City's next Public Advocate, I will focus on four main policy areas: public transportation, housing, minority and women-owned business enterprises, and criminal justice reform. My core policy proposals with regard to housing include rent regulation, preserving affordable housing, rescinding tax credits from landlords who fail to make good on their affordable housing commitments, and holding NYCHA accountable to make public housing safer and healthier. In terms of transportation policy, I will demand that the Public Advocate have a seat on the MTA board to ensure an increase in transportation options where they are needed. I will advocate for low income New Yorkers by working to make Fair Fares available in Single Rides, and will push to make our bus stations more accommodating to seniors by advocating for more shelters and benches. In my fight for jobs and justice, I will continue to support efforts that make it easier for women and minority-owned businesses, who are the fastest job creators in the country, to create and sustain strong businesses that support their communities. In the legislature, I championed legislation to achieve this statewide and will make it a priority as Public Advocate. I will also recommend a monitoring and tracking system to determine whether our residents are getting jobs as a result of city contracts and deals like Amazon. Across all of these policy domains, I will ensure our office is upholding the highest standards of good governance, transparency, and accountability.

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

As a city-wide elected position, the Public Advocate's three most important oversight functions are: 1) As a check on city agencies, specifically on their transparency and accountability, with the power to investigate complaints and escalate them to City Hall and the Mayor if necessary. This role is particularly necessary given the state of the City's public housing, which is unacceptable and inexcusable. 2) As a check on city elected officials, especially the Mayor; however, I do not believe that that check always

has to come in the form of opposition. Done right, the position can and should help refocus the Mayor's priorities on the issues that matter most to New Yorkers. But there are times when it should manifest as opposition - like the criminal handling and cover up of lead paint in NYCHA homes and the lack of transparency and accountability in the Amazon deal. These situations require an honest, informed and principled reckoning with the Mayor and his administration. 3) As an elected official with a seat on NYCERS, which can be used to advocate for jobs, transportation options, and criminal justice reform, among other things. The Public Advocate can do more to support the power of the purse strings at NYCERS to create jobs and affordable housing. I would also demand a seat on the MTA Board to create more accountability for transportation equity and resiliency.

8. The most recent Public Advocate has used litigation extensively, with mixed results, at least with regard to the Public Advocate's standing to bring a lawsuit. What is your view on the Public Advocate's use of litigation to attempt to force policy changes?

Litigation can be a useful and powerful tool, and one that I plan to use as Public Advocate. But I also believe that the position should be a uniter and a collaborator when possible. As Public Advocate, I want to deliver not just disrupt. And I will use every tool available to me to ensure jobs and justice for all our people, when that requires litigation, I will use it, but I also hope to be able to introduce legislation to City Council that can produce solutions and results for New Yorkers.

9. 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.

There are major discrepancies between what New Yorkers are entitled to and deserve, and what they actually receive. The most severe example right now is our City's unsafe and unforgivable public housing situation. Lead paint in walls, lack of heat in the dead of winter, and rats throughout the buildings are unacceptable. As Public Advocate, I will demand oversight of RAD and PACT dollars to report on effectiveness of capital financing to improve living conditions of residents. The federal lawsuit brought by the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York will play out for many months. I will ensure that the best interests of residents are taken into account. I will monitor and fight any efforts that might privatize public housing, endangering affordable housing for NYCHA residents. I will also fight for greater transparency of NYCHA work orders and progress and completion data so that we can all celebrate progress and hold NYCHA accountable where residents are waiting too long for repairs. As Assemblyman, I have experience balancing budget restrictions with constituent needs. I understand that

budgets can limit what the government can provide but I also know that we can do a lot better at allocating resources effectively and fairly. There are no excuses for unsafe public housing and as Public Advocate, I will make sure taxpayer dollars are being spent on those who need it most.

NYCHA residents and many low-income residents also need jobs. Public transportation is a critical service that, done right, connects residents to opportunities. New York City's transportation system does not support New Yorkers' transit needs or capabilities today, but it can. We need a transportation system that is affordable and accessible - that gets New Yorkers to work on time and gets them home at night to see their kids. For too long, we have heard about signal problems and overcrowding. We also need more transportation options for underserved communities and for people with disabilities. As Public Advocate, I will demand a seat on the MTA's board to help advance solutions not excuses.

Any system where your freedom is determined by the the amount of money in your bank account, rather than your innocence or guilt is not just. For too long, our City's criminal justice system has worked for the rich rather than for justice. Our residents have been promised fair trials, accountable policing, and humane treatment for those incarcerated and the City has failed to deliver. Raising the Age, something I fought for in the State House, is a start but we need to do much more. Closing Rikers isn't enough if we don't also change the culture around how we treat those who enter our criminal justice system. We need serious and swift bail reform, job training programs and adequate healthcare for those in our jails and prisons, and accountability and transparency from our police.

10. How would you approach the responsibilities of the Public Advocate regarding access to public information in monitoring the implementation of the city's Open Data Law?

New York City, thanks to Local Law 11, has a mandate to make public data available on a single web portal, among others. NYC is publishing over 2,000 data sets. But we have a significant transparency and accountability problem when NYCHA residents are lied to about lead paint in their apartments and New York City Police Officers disciplinary histories are not available to the public they serve. We have a serious problem when deals like Amazon occur in the shadows and our ability to track whether it produces the city and community benefits it claims it will produce. I will focus on publicly available information that will ensure transparency and accountability to jobs and justice. I am also concerned about data and protecting the privacy of immigrants and communities of

color. FOIL compliance is a significant issue and I will be a staunch advocate for agencies responsiveness to FOIL and the public listing of data and information to reduce the necessity of Requesting the information.

11. What specifically will you do as Public Advocate to ensure New York achieves a full and complete Census count in 2020?

As the son of Jamaican immigrants and a representative of the most diverse county in America, I understand how central diversity and immigration are to our city's economy, culture, history, and future. The Census is central to understanding who we are, to electoral apportionment and to federal funding. Undercounting of people of color is unacceptable. I have been tracking closely the efforts of the Trump administration to exclude immigrants from participation in our public programs. I submitted a comment on Trump Administration's appalling public charge rule and will continue to do everything in my power to oppose the administration's efforts. Through my many census briefings as Assemblyman, and in my position as Vice Chair of the DNC, it is a critical priority for me that we have an effective census to ensure quality representation and resource distribution. This decennial Census is historic in all the wrong ways - from underfunding, the offensive and bullying question of citizenship status, and the fact that it is the first digital census is making the danger of undercounting vulnerable communities significantly worse, unless we partner with our community-based organizations to support an effective and safe count. Without an accurate estimate, the city will fall short at providing services and programs to New Yorkers who need them. It is essential that we cast a wide net and partner with as many community-based and faith organizations as possible to engage our neighborhoods and our residents.

12. 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:** The Public Advocate and the city need to be doing more to protect rent regulated and stabilized apartments and make New York City a more affordable place to live. I will work to expand the number of senior citizens enrolled in the SCRIE program because right now only 50% of eligible seniors are registered. I will also fight to raise the income eligibility threshold from \$37,399 to \$45,800 to ensure more seniors are covered. As Public Advocate, I will also go after the city's bad landlords with investigations, lawsuits, and expand the city-wide enforcement system that Tish James started to make sure tenants aren't being forced out of their homes. With support from our campaign Co-Chair and Founder of Housing Rights Initiative Aaron Carr, I will continue to pressure the city to rescind tax credits from landlords who abuse and exploit their tenants and will build on the worst landlords list which is an essential transparency tool for our city. To build on that tool, I will add a demand that the Department of Buildings, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Fire Department, along with any other agencies with related data, be required to list actions

taken on each and every landlord on the list. This would increase the transparency and accountability of the relevant city agencies to action. I will create a report card based on agency action on the list of worst landlords and use that as an oversight tool on City Council and support advocacy around cracking down on the worst landlords.

**b. Public Safety:** Jobs and justice are the two main pillars of my campaign because I believe you cannot have one without the other, and that both are essential for a fair, strong city. We need to be investing in jobs not jails and we need to do more than just close Rikers, we need to rethink the way that we treat and care for those who enter our criminal justice system. As Assemblyman, I helped Raise the Age so that children would not be imprisoned with adults and I continue to fight for meaningful bail and discovery reform. I also I have fought for and won \$56M for “My Brother’s Keeper” making New York state the only state that makes these investments in our young boys and men of color. These grants help boys of color them enter school ready to learn, read at grade level by 3rd grade, complete high school and more. In terms of policing, I believe we need much greater transparency and accountability from our officers and the department. Of course we need state law change to mandate the public posting of disciplinary actions against police officers. This administration has not fought hard enough for transparency on police discipline. We still have police officers who are making up reasons to justify stopping Black and Brown residents of this city. Police officers should be required to inform people of their right not to consent to a search, if consent would be necessary to perform the search. We also need to shine a light on police misconduct. As Public Advocate, I will work with NYPD and the Civilian Complaint Review Board to track the types and quantity of complaints about officers by police precincts and to provide public information about the number of police officers in risk management and the outcomes of risk management. I also support efforts to make the Commission to Combat Police Corruption permanent and grant the Commission subpoena power.

**c. Public Transportation:** As Public Advocate, I will demand that the Public Advocate have a permanent seat on the MTA board so that we can immediately work to get signals repaired, have greater transportation access across the city, and bring the system into a state of good repair. Our campaign is honored to have Former Lt. Governor Dick Ravitch’s endorsement, who also previously served as MTA Chairman and provides expertise on improving out city’s transit system. As Public Advocate, I will focus on holding the Mayor and the MTA accountable to transportation equity because it’s not right that the amount of money in your bank account should determine whether or not you can get to work on time. If you earn less than \$55,000 you’re more likely to have to commute over an hour to get to work. If you’re a woman you’re more likely to



spend longer commuting. I also will also push the Mayor to make Fair Fares available as single rides, rather than just monthly and weekly passes which might not be accessible to everyone. Finally, I will work to get additional benches and shelters at our bus stops to make bus transit more accommodating to seniors and those with disabilities.

**d. Health and Environment:** I have been a vocal advocate for a transition to 100% renewable energy and the environmental health for NYCHA residents. I am deeply committed to holding NYCHA and the City responsible for ensuring that there is no lead in our apartment walls and that no one, no matter your color, income, or immigration status, is threatened by the irreversible effects of lead paint poisoning. It is unconscionable that in an age of the lead-filled water crisis in Flint, Michigan, and when other environmental health issues have devastated communities, that New York is experiencing a preventable public health crisis such as this one. I will fight for environmental justice so that communities of color are not the only ones burdened by the city's solid waste infrastructure and ensure that low income communities, which are more likely to be vulnerable to extreme weather conditions brought on by climate change, receive investments for infrastructure that will help keep them safe, while sustaining the environment. I will support the work that Tish James started to investigate corporate polluters who conspire with federal officials to mislead New Yorkers about the risk of climate change. I will fight to protect workers and consumers from toxic products that lead to asthma and disease. I will make sure our bike lanes are safe and accessible to decrease the negative impact that car emissions have on our city air.

**e. Economic Development:** As your Public Advocate, I want to expand on the investments being made to support small and new businesses and also make sure we're working to make New York City a fairer place to earn a living. I believe we need to do more to support women- and minority-owned businesses and we need to create better opportunities for people to learn the skills that companies need now, so that more New Yorkers can find good-paying jobs. Supporting MWBEs has been one of my biggest priorities as NYS Assemblyman. I've sponsored and helped pass legislation that demands state agencies develop growth plans for increasing the number of MWBEs awarded state contracts and called for oversight, transparency, and more accessible information about contract processes to make it easier for MWBE to compete. As your PA, I will build on my success passing state legislation to support MWBEs and help New York City deliver on its promises to help more women and people of color win contracts and start businesses. I will work to institute a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO)

through the City Charter Revision Commission to oversee NYC's MWBE program and establish CDOs at every city agency. I will also work to track and monitor the jobs being created by Amazon because if these new jobs are not going to New York City residents, Amazon is not holding up their end of the deal and should not receive tax credits.

**f. Education:** As Public Advocate, I will continue the fight for smaller classroom sizes, for more resources for teachers and students, and for billions of dollars in money from the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit that is owed to our City schools. We need that money for classroom resources and additional teachers, counselors, and nurses. I will also fight for additional funding to ensure that no teacher has to pay out of pocket for basic supplies like textbooks and markers. As Public Advocate, Betsy Gotbaum fought tirelessly for teachers and students, who she knew deserved better. I hope to follow in her footsteps and work to secure more funding and resources because teachers are currently wearing too many hats – in addition to creating lessons and curriculum, instructing, mentoring, grading, monitoring hallways, attending pds (professional development)—they are being asked to be therapists, counselors, deans, conflict resolution specialists and nurses. And while teachers don't mind helping kids in every way, we need to ensure that every school has adequate funding for non-teaching positions so that teachers can do their jobs and students can receive the best education possible. I will also work to expand My Brother's Keeper and My Sister's Keeper citywide and scale the Eagle Academy and Girls Prep models along with United Way to focus on child literacy and family engagement.

**II. CAMPAIGN PROMISES MADE TO VOTERS**

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

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.

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 2017 CAMPAIGN PROMISES OR GOALS**

1. Preserve and expand affordable housing by taking back tax credits from landlords who fail to make good on their affordable housing commitments, strengthening protections for rent stabilized units, and making public housing healthier.  
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2. Demand that the Public Advocate have a seat on the MTA board to ensure that transportation options are expanded in transit deserts; that Fair Fares are available in Single Rides, not just monthly and weekly; and that our bus stations are more accommodating to seniors by advocating for more shelters and benches.  
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3. Support efforts to make it easier for women and minority-owned businesses to create and sustain strong businesses that support their communities by creating a Chief Diversity Officer across city agencies and boroughs and introducing a monitoring and tracking system to be sure that jobs created by Amazon are going to New York City residents, especially women and people of color.  
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4. Ensure communities are engaged in how closing Riker’s leads to fewer residents engaged in the criminal justice system, receive more integrated human services so that we stop criminalizing poverty and increase public safety in communities suffering from violence.  
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5. Uphold the highest standards of good governance, accountability, and transparency and support efforts to advance ranked choice voting and automatic voter registration are critical reforms for supporting a true democracy. I will fight to institute both in the city.  
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### III. 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 public trust. With the corruption conviction of recent state 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 will always represent the public interest above all else.

Please tell us how you would continue to conduct the political affairs of this office in an upright manner.

Please return to: Citizens Union, Local Candidates Committee, 299 Broadway, Suite 700 New York, NY 10007;  
Via email to [candidates@citizensunion.org](mailto:candidates@citizensunion.org) or fax to 212-227-0345 • Call us at 212-227-0342 with questions.