DC Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Responses Organized by Question

2026 Election Cycle

Thrive Under 25 (TU25) is a coalition of organizations and directly impacted individuals working to end the racist, damaging, and punitive responses of DC's adult criminal legal system toward people who came into contact with that system when they were under 25. Since 2019, TU25 has been instrumental in criminal justice reform in the District, including the passage of the Second Look Amendment Act expanding the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (IRAA), ongoing work to fully implement the Youth Rehabilitation Act, and advocacy for the establishment of an Office of Emerging Adult Services. Our coalition centers the voices of those who are directly impacted, including currently and formerly incarcerated members who continuously shape our issue priorities.

As DC prepares to elect new leadership, TU25 invited mayoral candidates to share their vision for juvenile justice, reentry, facility conditions, and the relationship between DC and the federal government on public safety issues. Four candidates responded.

🟪 Janeese Lewis George
🟩 Kenyan McDuffie
🟦 Gary Goodweather
🟫 Vincent Orange

Question 1

What makes you want to serve the people of DC as our next mayor?

Vincent Orange

I have dedicated my career to delivering measurable results for DC residents—raising wages, expanding opportunity, and building pathways to the middle class. I am running to ensure every resident, including justice-involved youth, has a real chance to succeed.

Gary Goodweather

I am guided by tikkun olam, the Jewish obligation to repair the world. This is how I have tried to live my whole life. And repair means looking at the parts of the city that are not working and being honest about why. Not studying them. Not commissioning another report. Fixing them. I want to be mayor because I believe DC residents deserve a government that actually performs. One that sets goals, measures results, and holds itself accountable. That is what I have done my entire professional life. I want to bring that to a city I love and have called home for over 30 years.

Kenyan McDuffie

I lifted up communities and small businesses to ensure they could not just live and set up shop but so they can thrive. And I've sought to build a criminal and civil justice system in the city that promoted justice and safety in equal parts. DC faces an economic crisis that demands urgency. The city's unemployment rate already straddles 6.9% compared against a 4.3% national rate even before full impact of federal workforce reductions. Washington, DC also carries the largest racial wealth gap in the nation, with white households holding 81 times morewealth thanBlack households. I am running for Mayor because this moment requires a Mayor who will fight every day to lower costs for families, expand opportunities in every ward, and hold government accountable for real results.

Janeese Lewis George

I'm Janeese Lewis George, the DC Councilmember for Ward 4. I'm the daughter of a union postal worker and a third-generation Washingtonian who was raised in Ward 4. I'm a proud graduate of DC Public Schools (Cuno H. Rudolph Elementary School, Alice Deal Middle School, and School Without Walls) as well as Howard University School of Law. Starting in 2014, I served as the DC Assistant Attorney General in the Juvenile Section of the Public Safety Division under DC Attorney General Karl A. Racine. I was elected to DC Council in 2020.

I fight for working families because I know firsthand what working people in DC are up against. As Councilmember, I've worked to save tenant protections and make housing more affordable because when I was a kid, my family had to leave my childhood home due to rising rent. I've voted for raises for working class people and strengthened worker protections because a good union job with a fair wage is what put dinner on the table for my family. I expanded Paid Family Leave because when my dad got sick, I took time off to care for him and everyone should be able to do that for the people we love.

As Councilmember, I've made a point to always choose the side of DC residents, workers, and families. I led legislation that raised wages for early childhood educators, created good jobs for construction and retail workers, ended the subminimum wage for restaurant workers, increased SNAP food assistance for families and seniors, and improved traffic safety around schools. As Assistant Attorney General, I fought to secure justice for victims of violent crime and built programs that put young people in DC back on the right track. As Mayor, I'll always side with working people to make DC safe and affordable, and create a government that listens to and delivers for residents in all eight Wards. I understand the urgency of the moment and the power DC has to make life better for everyone.

Question 2

What are your top three priorities?

Kenyan McDuffie

Concentrated poverty in DC did not emerge in isolation. In fact, these inequitable outcomes are only symptoms of broader structural challenges that I will urgently confront as Mayor. Decades of overpunishment stripped education, stability, and wealth out of Black and Hispanic communities. The product is racialized, concentrated poverty with real consequences, with housing and childcare crises hitting those same communities the hardest. Real safety comes from stable homes and economic security, and that freedom from poverty is just as foundational as freedom from violence. On opportunity, my priority is closing the racial wealth gap, growing the local economy, and connecting residents to in-demand, high-quality, future ready industries. We can break cycles of economic stagnation by providing our youth with the opportunities to pursue meaningful careers early. I will expand career technical education offerings in DC schools, build apprenticeship and workforce development pipelines, and ensure every student graduates from DC public schools empowered to either pursue higher education or a career upon graduation. On accountability, my priority is defending Home Rule against federal overreach and delivering a government that produces measurable results for all DC residents. Immigrant communities from Latin American, Caribbean, and African countries have been hit hard by the Trump Administration's ruthless immigration policies. We need a fighter that will bring humanity into governance and ensure these communities are protected from the inhumane actions from the White House. Residents should also be able to trust the DC government even if they may not trust their federal government. That means residents should have no doubt about (i) how government funds are spent, (ii) whether services are delivered on time, and (iii) that their government is working for them.

Gary Goodweather

Affordability is the foundation. When families cannot afford to stay in DC, every other problem gets worse. Housing instability drives instability in every part of a person's life, including their contact with the legal system. I will build 50,000 new homes by 2032, make housing permanently affordable through community land trusts and social housing, and lower the total cost of living through Fare-Free DC, utility relief through Power DC, and expanded access to affordable groceries in every ward. Affordability is not just rent. It is the full cost of being a DC resident, and right now that cost is pushing people out. Opportunity means making sure every DC resident can build a life here. That starts with jobs and a functioning local economy, but it also means removing the barriers that keep people from accessing either. DC's Second Chance Amendment Act was a major step forward, and I want to build on it by accelerating implementation, funding outreach so the estimated 95,000 eligible residents actually know their records can be cleared, strengthening enforcement against background check companies that report sealed records, and exploring expanded eligibility for people who committed offenses as young adults and have demonstrated rehabilitation. A record from when you were 19 should not define your economic future at 35. Self-determination means DC residents decide how we are governed. Federal interference threatens that at every level, from congressional override of local laws to federal law enforcement operating in our neighborhoods without local consent. I will use every legal and political tool available to defend Home Rule and ensure that DC's priorities are set by DC residents, not by Congress or federal agencies pursuing agendas our communities did not choose.

Vincent Orange

1. Public safety and safe neighborhoods 2. Economic growth and job creation 3. Education and workforce pathways, including youth apprenticeships

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Janeese Lewis George

My top three priorities are:

Affordability (especially housing, childcare and utility bill affordability) Standing up to Trump. Defending DC Making government more effective for all of us in all 8 wards (grocery stores east of the river, youth programming)

Question 3

What will you do on day one to ensure that young people and IRAA recipients coming home from jail and prison can reenter successfully?

Gary Goodweather

I want to be direct about what "day one" means. A mayor who takes office in January and waits until a strategic plan is complete before acting has already failed the people coming home that month. Roughly 2,000 people return to DC from prison every year, and right now about two-thirds of them recidivate. IRAA recipients are a remarkable exception, with a recidivism rate around 3 percent, precisely because they have had to demonstrate sustained rehabilitation before release. The system should be learning from that success. On day one, I will direct MORCA to shift from a referral office to an operational reentry coordination hub with clear performance metrics: how many returning citizens are connected to housing within 30 days, employment within 60, and a primary care provider within 90. If MORCA cannot report those numbers today, that tells you everything about how it has been operating. I will issue a Mayor's Order on day one requiring every DC government agency to adopt a fair chance hiring policy that goes beyond the existing ban-the-box law. DC government should be the largest employer of returning citizens in the city, and right now it is not leading by example. I will set a specific hiring target and report on it publicly. Housing is the most urgent barrier. I will direct DHCD to create a dedicated set-aside within the Housing Production Trust Fund for returning citizen transitional and permanent supportive housing. People coming home from 15 to 20 years in a federal facility hundreds of miles from DC should not be navigating a housing waitlist that has been closed since 2013 with no support. My Capital Corps proposal includes a specific reentry and diversion pathway. Returning citizens will have access to structured civic service with stipends, education credits, career certifications, and mentorship. This is not a make-work program. It is a pipeline into healthcare, public safety, education, STEM, and infrastructure careers that DC needs filled. I will also accelerate implementation of the Second Chance Amendment Act by funding public outreach so eligible residents know their records can be cleared, strengthening enforcement against background check companies that continue reporting sealed records, and working with the Council to close the timing gap that is delaying automatic relief for some residents until 2027 even though they would have been eligible under the old law. IRAA works. The data proves it. My job as mayor is to build a reentry system that matches the seriousness of the people going through it.

Vincent Orange

Establish a coordinated reentry system: guaranteed ID, housing placement, job/apprenticeship pipeline, and case management before release. Expand "Incarceration to Incorporation" to ensure immediate employment pathways.

Janeese Lewis George

Reentry is a critical step of returning to the community and, because District residents are shipped to facilities throughout the country, reentry planning rarely occurs and, if it does, the burden is on the individual and the plans lack whole of government coordination. The common result is a return to the District without plans for housing, medical and mental health treatment, employment opportunities, and education—a burden commonly placed on the individuals lucky enough to have family available to shoulder. Reentry is yet another area where our government has failed its residents, where we are resource rich and coordination poor, and where we fail to meaningfully invest in key resources and programming to meet the needs of this population. As Mayor, I pledge to tackle the siloes that have for too long made reentry planning bifurcated and ineffective.

When an individual is returning home, whether they are an IRAA recipient or a young person, they have distinct needs that should be addressed—from housing to mental health to education to employment. As Mayor, I will ensure that there is available housing—including transitional housing programs—for justice-impacted individuals and will work with my agencies to build systems that connect with individuals throughout the reentry process, linking them to needed services and supports prior to their return back to the community. Technology training, workforce development programs, and education offerings must be tailored to meet the needs of our returning citizens. For example, I will expand investments in the READY Center and other programs that are tailored for returning citizens.

On Day One, I will conduct a comprehensive assessment of available reentry supports and build a plan to strengthen reentry. As part of this effort, I will listen closely to returning citizens about their experiences–what has worked, what has not–as they are some of the foremost experts on reentry. I will prioritize working with the federal government to attempt to keep District residents closer and to begin reentry planning when individuals are locked up.

Kenyan McDuffie

As a Councilmember and Chair of the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety, I led on the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (IRAA) 1.0, which helped create the very pathway that made reentry possible for many people. Successful reentry starts before someone walks out of prison doors, and it requires investment in the organizations that can reduce recidivism. Groups like the National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens have built models that work precisely because they are staffed by people who have lived the experience. Peer navigators carry credibility, a relational depth, and a practical knowledge of what reintegration demands that no institutional substitute can replicate. Organizations like these are chronically under-resourced, and many have been hit by the same cuts that have hollowed out victim services. On day one, my administration will prioritize sustained, direct funding for peer-led reentry organizations so they can actually do the work. We also must be honest about what people are coming home carrying physically and emotionally. Incarceration exposes people to profound trauma, including violence, yes, but also the grief of losing loved ones while inside, severed relationships, and years of powerlessness over basic decisions. We extend trauma-informed care to people who experience hardship in our communities, and there is no principled reason to deny that same treatment to people returning from incarceration. Many individuals enter jails and prisons with both known and unknown health conditions, which are exacerbated by routinely inhumane conditions of confinement. My administration will work to connect returning residents to mental health support, primary care, housing, employment pathways, and documentation assistance in a way that recognizes the full weight of what they have been through.

Question 4

DC law allows transfer of certain youth cases to adult court based on the age of the accused and the charges. The current US Attorney General has argued that more such cases should be transferrable. Which youth and which cases should be eligible for such transfer?

Vincent Orange

Reserve transfers for the most serious violent offenses, with strict judicial oversight. Youth status and rehabilitation potential must remain central.

Janeese Lewis George

Current law identifies the categories of cases eligible for transfer. I do not support expanding the categories of cases for transfer. DC is an outlier with our child transfer policies—the vast majority of states do not allow prosecutors to transfer certain children to adult court and deny judges the ability to return those children to juvenile court. Unlike those states, the prosecutors making these decisions in DC are US attorneys, who are unaccountable to DC residents. Direct file does not address the harm caused in those cases nor does it serve as a deterrent for future harm. Through prevention, intervention, and enforcement I will make us safer, and, through my comprehensive District-wide approach to public safety, I will continue to drive down crime, particularly the more serious crimes committed by young people.

Kenyan McDuffie

Children should be treated as children and always worthy of redemption. That is a public safety position grounded in decades of research. The family court system is designed to advance the best interests of the child rather than to punish, and that design reflects a fundamental truth that overpunishment is criminogenic. Locking young people into the adult system does not make communities safer. It diminishes the vitality of a beautiful flower before even being given the chance to grow. I authored landmark juvenile justice legislation[1] that put these principles into action. The law bans juvenile life without parole and solitary confinement, prohibits detaining youth for status offenses like truancy or running away, ends placement of juveniles in adult facilities, and bars placing children under 10 in government custody without parental consent. It also expands diversion programs, mediation, and rehabilitation opportunities. Cutting-edge in its alignment with emerging adolescent neuroscience, the legislation has been praised by the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth, DC Lawyers for Youth, and the Justice Policy Institute. Among its most consequential provisions: it moved Title 16 youth out of adult jails, which is precisely why the question of transfer eligibility matters so much. By drawing rigid categorical lines that remove judicial discretion produces distorted outcomes. Because DC is working with an aging, imperfect criminal code, moving cases into adult court based solely on offense type will inevitably sweep in conduct that has no business there. Consider a 16-year-old involved in a fight that results in a weapon charge because a pocket knife was in someone's bag. Under a categorical offense-based rule, that case could land in adult court regardless of individual circumstances, the young person's history, or any rehabilitative potential. DC's situation is particularly troubling because we are already among a small minority of jurisdictions that allow a child to be treated as an adult without any transfer hearing. That means an unelected U.S. Attorney holds enormous power to make a life-altering decision about a child with no adversarial process, no judicial check, and no individualized review. Karl Racine's bill to end direct file should be passed and signed. The DC Attorney General should handle the lion's share of DC cases involving young people. Judicial discretion, informed by full information about a young person's life and circumstances, is what actually produces fair and effective outcomes. 1 Comprehensive Youth Justice Amendment Act of 2016, D.C. Law 21-238 (2017).

Gary Goodweather

The current US Attorney General's push to expand transfers of youth cases to adult court is wrong, and it reflects a federal enforcement philosophy that contradicts what the science tells us about young people and what DC's own experience with IRAA has proven about rehabilitation. I say often I want to run a scientific campaign based on data, proven policy, and informed by subject matter experts - that comes into play here. Brain development research is clear: the regions of the brain responsible for impulse control, risk assessment, and long-term decision-making are not fully developed until roughly age 25. That is not an excuse for harmful behavior. It is a fact that should shape how we respond to it. Treating more young people as adults does not make communities safer. It makes it harder for those young people to ever become the contributing members of their communities that the vast majority of them are capable of becoming. I believe transfer to adult court should be reserved for an extremely narrow set of circumstances: the most serious violent offenses, committed by older teens, where a judge has reviewed the individual facts of the case and determined that the juvenile system cannot adequately address the public safety concern. That determination should rest with a judge, not with a prosecutor's charging decision. Judicial discretion, informed by individual circumstances, is the appropriate safeguard. DC passed IRAA because we recognized that people who commit offenses as young people can and do change. Expanding adult prosecution of youth moves in direct contradiction to that principle. It also hands more power to a US Attorney's office that DC residents do not elect and cannot hold accountable, which is a Home Rule concern as much as it is a justice concern. My administration will work with the Attorney General and the Council to ensure that DC law keeps youth cases in the juvenile system wherever possible and that our local response to youth involvement in serious offenses is rooted in rehabilitation, accountability, and developmental science.

Question 5

There are currently bills in Congress that would allow prosecutors to directly file charges against children as young as 14 in adult court. As Mayor of DC, would you support or oppose lowering the age of direct file to 14, and why?

Janeese Lewis George

As Mayor, I would not support lowering the age that allows for prosecutors the United States Attorneys' Office (USAO) to file charges against children as young as 14 in adult court. As a former juvenile prosecutor I have seen firsthand the poor—and often dangerous–choices that many children make that land them in the courthouse. The solution to violent crime is not thrusting a young person into a federal system. The solution is a comprehensive approach to public safety that focuses on prevention, intervention, and enforcement. This means the development of well-resourced communities, intervenes when services and supports are needed at the right—often critical moments before harm is caused or immediately thereafter, and holds individuals—and government—accountable for their actions and promises.

When young people have paths to education, access to needed therapies and mental and behavioral health supports, and opportunities for future growth and enjoyment, we will see crime continue to decrease. Charging a 14-year-old as an adult does not make us any safer nor does it address cycles of violence or repair harm in communities. In addition to not serving as a meaningful solution to public safety, transferring more authority to the federal government (USAO) over our young people's futures runs contrary to our autonomy and Home Rule. I will not support that proposal.

Kenyan McDuffie

I oppose it. Children should be treated as children and always worthy of redemption. That is a public safety position grounded in decades of research, not a sentiment. The family court system exists to advance the best interests of the child rather than to punish, and that design reflects a fundamental truth: overpunishment is criminogenic. It does not make us safer. DC is also among the minority of jurisdictions with no minimum age for charging children at all. It is uncommon to see children under 12 charged, but it happens, and that should be prohibited by law. We are also among a small minority of jurisdictions that allow a child to be treated as an adult without any transfer hearing at all. Lowering the direct file age to 14 would hand even more unchecked power to an unelected U.S. Attorney to make life-altering decisions about children with no adversarial process, no judicial check, and no individualized review. That is the wrong direction. Karl Racine's bill to end direct file should be passed and signed before we even consider expanding it. Judicial discretion, informed by full information about a young person's life and circumstances, is what produces fair and effective outcomes. Categorical rules that remove that discretion will sweep in cases that have no business in adult court and will fall hardest on Black and Latino youth.

Gary Goodweather

I oppose this. Lowering the age of direct file to 14 is indefensible on every level — the science, the outcomes, and the principle. A 14-year-old's brain is years away from full development and that is a neurological fact that should inform how our legal system responds to children. Charging a 14-year-old as an adult does not produce safer communities. It produces a person with an adult criminal record, exposure to an adult carceral environment, and dramatically reduced prospects for the rest of their life. The research on this is consistent: youth prosecuted in adult court recidivate at higher rates than those whose cases stay in the juvenile system. I believe in accountability. I believe in building a truly safe city. That is exactly why I oppose this approach. Accountability that destroys a child's future without making the community safer is not accountability. It is punishment that fails everyone, including the victims it claims to serve. The juvenile system exists to hold young people accountable while preserving the possibility of rehabilitation, and that combination is what actually reduces harm over time. Direct file is also the wrong mechanism regardless of age. It places the decision to charge a child as an adult entirely in the hands of a prosecutor, removing the judicial review that should be the minimum safeguard whenever we are considering treating a young person as an adult. In DC, this is compounded by the fact that our felony prosecutor is the US Attorney, a federal appointee DC residents do not elect. Expanding direct file authority hands more unaccountable power over DC's children to a federal office that has already signaled it wants to be more punitive, not less. DC built IRAA on the recognition that people who commit offenses as young people are capable of profound change. Expanding adult prosecution of children moves in the opposite direction. My administration will oppose any federal legislation that lowers the age of direct file and will work to ensure DC's local legal framework treats children as what they are.

Vincent Orange

Oppose. Children should not be placed in adult court. Focus on intervention, rehabilitation, and accountability in youth systems.

Question 6

What is your governing posture toward the Trump administration when federal actions conflict with DC home rule (e.g., policing control, budget constraints, immigration enforcement, Congressional disapproval)? Name three "red lines" for the federal government and what you will do if those lines are crossed (e.g., lawsuit, public advocacy, noncooperation, budget contingencies).

Kenyan McDuffie

I will defend DC's right to govern itself and challenge every federal action that harms our residents. This has been my consistent record on the Council. I will bolster resources for the Mayor's Office of Legal Counsel for constitutional challenges and strengthen federal advocacy for statehood and budget autonomy. Red line #1: Immigration enforcement. On Day One I will issue a directive ending MPD cooperation with ICE and provide civil right-to-counsel protection programs for immigrant families. When federal agents detain residents without due process and create a climate of fear, fewer people report crimes, seek medical care, or cooperate with public health efforts making every neighborhood less safe. If the federal government crosses that line, I will pursue litigation and public advocacy immediately. Red line #2: Congressional rescission of locally funded programs. Congress has already passed measures that could disrupt funding for the child tax credit and other critical programs, creating a projected $1.1 billion budget shortfall. If Congress moves to defund or overturn local laws, I will challenge it in court and build coalitions with other jurisdictions facing the same overreach. Red line #3: Federal control over MPD or DC's criminal legal system. Decisions about how DC polices its own streets must remain in the hands of elected DC officials accountable to DC residents. Any federal attempt to commandeer local policing will be met with public advocacy, litigation, and non-cooperation where legally permissible.

Gary Goodweather

My governing posture is principled resistance paired with disciplined governance. I will not pick fights for headlines, but I will never sacrifice DC's autonomy to avoid them. A well-run city is the best shield against federal interference. Fiscal discipline, residents that feel safe, transparent outcomes, and strong services remove the pretexts that Congress uses to justify overreach. At the same time, defense alone is not enough. DC must be on offense, using litigation, coalition-building, public advocacy, and creative use of federal pilot authorities and intergovernmental agreements to advance our interests. I will stand up the Defend DC office on day one to coordinate the District's legal, legislative, and public response to federal overreach. Three red lines: First, federal control of local policing. DC residents did not consent to federal law enforcement operating in our neighborhoods under federal priorities. MPD exists to serve DC communities, not to advance federal agendas. If the federal government attempts to federalize MPD operations, deploy the National Guard for routine policing, or direct joint operations that serve federal enforcement goals over local public safety, my administration will respond with immediate litigation, non-cooperation directives to DC agencies, and a national public advocacy campaign. MPD officers will operate under explicit protocols: no immigration status inquiries, no collaboration with ICE without a judicial warrant, and no joint operations that subordinate local public safety to federal priorities. Second, congressional override of DC criminal justice laws. If Congress moves to overturn or weaken laws passed through DC's own democratic process through riders or standalone legislation, I will coordinate with the Attorney General and Council to mount immediate legal challenges, mobilize a coalition of mayors, governors, and national advocacy organizations, and run a sustained public campaign making clear that members of Congress are overriding the democratic will of 700,000 Americans. I will never signal to Congress that overturning a duly passed DC law is acceptable. Every law passed by the Council and signed by the Mayor will be defended. Third, federal interference with DC's budget autonomy. Congress continues to use riders to restrict how we spend our own locally raised tax dollars. If the federal government attempts to impose budget constraints that block DC from funding our own priorities, including public safety alternatives, reentry services, housing, and transit, I will pursue budget contingency planning that insulates critical programs, push to eliminate or shorten the congressional review window, and build the national coalition needed to end congressional veto power over DC's locally raised revenue. Underneath all three of these red lines is one principle: DC residents decide how we are governed. A mayor who is ambiguous about that principle invites the interference. I will not be ambiguous.

Vincent Orange

1. Budget interference 2. Policing control 3. Immigration enforcement mandates

Response: litigation, coalition advocacy, and non-cooperation where lawful.

Janeese Lewis George

As I have stated, the federal government will not interfere with my governance to the extent that it harms District residents or Home Rule. From a high level, I have three red lines:

First, as Mayor, I will not allow District resources to be used to undermine the trust and safety of the public. For example, I will prohibit MPD from cooperating with ICE or other federal law enforcement agencies for the purposes of federal civil immigration.

Second, I will not support federal interference in District infrastructure and governmental decisions that do not benefit District residents, support our budget and revenues, or contribute to the economic development of the District. For example, recent reporting indicates that the federal government seeks to remove downtown bike lanes. This is a decision that runs contrary to keeping our roads, pedestrians, bikers, and drivers safe. I have spoken out against this and will speak out against it as Mayor. I will not support interference that does not advance the District.

Third, I will fight against Congressional interference in our laws. While there may not be much I can do to prevent congressional disapprovals, or the introduction of harmful legislation, I will speak out proactively and will build relationships with members on both sides of the aisle to help bolster support for the District's position, autonomy, and right to self-determination. For example, I will speak out against Congressional attempts to modify or repeal IRAA or our juvenile transfer provisions. These are laws that keep us safe and contribute to well-functioning and healthy communities. The passage of local laws that affect the District's right to govern is a local issue. I will work with Congress and the White House to ensure that they respect our autonomy and local rights to set our own laws and to govern ourselves.

For all these red lines, and for those which I am sure will arise in the future, I will use all tools available, including working closely with the DC Attorney General to enforce our laws and to protect DC from unlawful interference. I will build deep and meaningful relationships with Congress and the White House. And, I will always keep District residents' best interests at the forefront.

Question 7

Will you ever collaborate or acquiesce when Congress seeks to overturn DC laws during the review period? What tactics will you use to defend home rule (e.g., public campaign, coalition building, litigation strategy, negotiated amendments)?

Gary Goodweather

There is no policy disagreement significant enough to justify inviting federal intervention in our local lawmaking. Mayor Bowser vetoed the Revised Criminal Code Act and refused to sign the Sanctuary Values Act, both of which were then attacked by Congress. When a mayor publicly opposes Council legislation in ways that arm congressional critics, it undermines the core principle of Home Rule. My administration will not repeat that mistake. Once the Council acts and the Mayor signs, the executive branch defends the law. To defend Home Rule, I will use every tool available, and I will use them in combination rather than in sequence. Some of this I have mentioned in previous responses. I will coordinate with the Attorney General to prepare legal challenges to every congressional action that exceeds legitimate oversight authority. AG Schwalb's litigation has already produced early wins, and that work should be reinforced and expanded. Public advocacy is how you raise the political cost. Most voters in Virginia and Maryland have no idea their representatives vote to override DC laws. My administration will partner with advocacy organizations, labor unions, and allied elected officials in neighboring states to make those votes visible. Congressional Democrats who vote against Home Rule will hear from me directly. I will build a coalition of mayors, governors, and national organizations to reframe DC self-governance as a national democratic rights issue. When Congress overrides DC law, it sets a precedent that affects every city in America. The Defend DC office will lead all of this as a permanent function of the mayor's administration, not a one-time response to a crisis. Congressional engagement, coalition building, public campaigns, and legal strategy, coordinated under one office with one mandate: protect DC's right to govern itself.

Vincent Orange

I will not acquiesce. I will use litigation, national coalitions, and public advocacy, while negotiating only where it protects DC's interests.

Janeese Lewis George

Each Congressional intervention into our legislative process is an attack on Home Rule and our democratic rights to self determination. There is no collaboration or acquiescence. When the DC Council passes a law, that should be the law of the land and I will not stand by or agree to Congressional interference. This principle–the commitment to our autonomy–holds true regardless of the circumstances. The appropriate tactics will depend on each situation at hand, but I commit to using all tools available to protect District law–from public campaigns, to developing relationships on both sides of the aisle, to coalition building, and joining forces with the Attorney General in litigation. I commit to being open to and exploring any strategy that would result in an outcome to better District residents and protect local autonomy.

Kenyan McDuffie

No. I will not acquiesce if Congress seeks to overturn DC laws that reflect the will of our residents. My record on the Council demonstrates this consistently. My tactics for defending Home Rule will include litigation through the Mayor's Office of Legal Counsel, public campaigns to build national awareness, and coalition building with civil rights organizations and DC statehood advocates. Where narrow negotiated amendments can preserve the core substance of a DC law while avoiding a full Congressional reversal, I will consider that on a case-by-case basis. The standard will always be whether DC residents are better off with or without the compromise.

Question 8

Under what circumstances, if any, should a past conviction restrict a person's ability to work, secure housing, or travel? For each category of restriction you support, specify:

Vincent Orange

Limit restrictions to serious violent/financial crimes, with defined lookbacks, individualized review, and early removal based on rehabilitation, employment, and compliance.

Janeese Lewis George

While I was not on Council when Ban the Box passed unanimously in 2014, I strongly support that District value. As Mayor, I will lead with the principle that second chances are important and an inherent District value–reflected in our passage of Second Look and the Second Chance Amendment Act, both of which I voted for. I strongly support Second Chance Amendment Act and I look forward to seeing its full implementation.

There are myriad collateral consequences that people face for having previous convictions. I am committed to working with justice-impacted individuals to best understand how these consequences come up in all areas, beyond just housing, employment, and travel. It is a priority of mine to remove systemic barriers that prevent individuals from getting on their feet and becoming independent. I will work with federal partners to help remove barriers on individuals with a conviction, including housing and travel restrictions. I will work with local businesses to encourage second chance hiring and to provide pathways to employment for all individuals, including those with convictions.

Kenyan McDuffie

Restricting a person's ability to provide for themselves does not improve public safety. My approach is grounded in the principle that every person should have a real path back to full participation in civic and economic life. I supported the RESTORE Act, which had shorter waiting periods and eligibility for all offenses, because the goal should be to position people to lawfully succeed. I introduced Clean Hands reform to end the practice of denying professional licenses due to unrelated debts like unpaid parking tickets. I also authored the Fair Credit History Steering Act to stop discriminatory use of credit history in employment decisions. The Collateral Consequences Resource Center gave the District relatively higher marks than other states on rights restoration, but more work remains. Where individualized review processes exist, they should maximize the information available to the decision-maker and allow for outcomes tailored to the person, not just the offense.

Gary Goodweather

The default should be that a past conviction does not restrict a person's ability to work, secure housing, or travel. Restrictions should be the exception, narrowly drawn, time-limited, and subject to individualized review. DC's current framework still allows convictions to function as permanent barriers in ways that undermine rehabilitation, contradict the premise of IRAA, and disproportionately harm Black residents.

Employment:

The only convictions that should trigger employment restrictions are those with a direct and demonstrable relationship to the specific job. A conviction for financial fraud is relevant to a position managing other people's money. A conviction for a sexual offense is relevant to any position involving vulnerable populations, supervisory authority over others, or access to private spaces. Beyond those kinds of narrow, job-specific connections, a conviction should not be a barrier to employment.

Lookback periods should be proportional. For misdemeanors, no lookback beyond three years from completion of sentence. For felonies, no lookback beyond five years. For positions where a longer lookback is warranted by the nature of the role, the maximum should be eight years, consistent with the Second Chance Act's felony sealing timeline.

Every applicant who is flagged through a background check should have an individualized review process that considers the nature of the offense, the time elapsed, the person's conduct since, and any evidence of rehabilitation. That review should be conducted by someone trained in reentry and workforce development, not left to an HR department checking a box.

A restriction should end when the person can demonstrate sustained employment, completion of relevant programming, community engagement, or a statement of support from a supervising officer or reentry case manager. A sealed or expunged record should end the restriction entirely, and I will strengthen enforcement against employers who use sealed records in hiring decisions.

DC government will lead by example. I will set specific hiring targets for returning citizens across DC agencies and report on them publicly.

Housing:

No conviction should bar a person from housing. Housing is a fundamental need, and denying it based on a criminal record is a direct driver of recidivism and homelessness. The public housing waitlist has been closed since 2013 with approximately 39,000 households on the combined list. Returning citizens are competing for an already inadequate supply, and blanket criminal history screening makes that competition impossible.

For federally subsidized housing, the only restrictions required by federal law involve lifetime sex offender registration and methamphetamine production convictions. DC should not impose any restrictions beyond what federal law requires. For private housing, I support strengthening DC's fair chance housing protections to prohibit landlords from using criminal history as a blanket screening criterion. Where a landlord seeks to deny housing based on a specific conviction, the burden should be on the landlord to demonstrate a direct relationship between the conviction and a legitimate safety concern, with individualized review and a right to appeal.

There should be no lookback period for housing beyond what federal law mandates. A person who has served their sentence and returned to the community needs a place to live.

Travel:

Restrictions on travel should be limited to the terms of supervised release or parole, as determined by a judge or supervising authority based on individual risk assessment. No blanket travel restrictions should apply based on conviction type alone. Once supervision is complete, all travel restrictions should end. The ability to move freely is essential to employment, family reunification, and reintegration.

Across all three categories, my administration will direct MORCA to establish a collateral consequences navigator program that helps returning citizens understand which restrictions apply to them, how to challenge restrictions that are unlawful or disproportionate, and how to access the individualized review processes they are entitled to.

Question 9

DC has enacted broad sealing and expungement reforms (Second Chance Amendment Act). What further changes—if any—do you support (e.g., automatic eligibility, fee elimination, shorter timelines, enforcement against data brokers)?

Janeese Lewis George

I voted for the Second Chance Amendment Act and would like to see it implemented in full. I am in strong support of eliminating government waste and promoting efficiency. To the extent feasible, I support automatic eligibility and I commit to working with Council to ensure agencies have the funding necessary to implement the Act and with the Court to streamline the process. Further, I am committed to an equitable, affordable District–this means removing fees for those upon which fees would be fiscally burdensome. Improving second chance sealing allows people to move on with their lives, building stability, and avoiding recidivism.

Kenyan McDuffie

I supported the RESTORE Act, which had shorter waiting periods and extended eligibility to all offenses. Every person should be incentivized to earn their way back to full restoration of their rights and be made whole again. Our goal should be to give people a genuine path, not to signal that lawful success is permanently out of reach. A handful of other states have moved in this direction. It does not mean every petition gets granted, but it means everyone has a real chance. The bill that became law was called the Second Chance Act. Many of the people it applies to never had a full and fair first chance. Automatic sealing is a genuine advance and clearing tens of thousands of records that way is welcome progress. The administrative reality is complicated: eligibility is calculated from the date a sentence is completed, which means courts have to wait on forms and information from federal agencies before they can act. The RESTORE Act calculated eligibility from the date of conviction, with a carveout saying that anyone still under sentence had to wait. That approach would have been cleaner and faster. The current waiting periods of 5, 8, and 10 years are too long. They should be closer to 1, 2, and 3 years. The RESTORE Act also included a presumption that sealing is in the interests of justice after 10 years. That presumption matters because it shifts the burden in a meaningful way and reflects how people actually change over time.

Gary Goodweather

The Second Chance Amendment Act was a major step forward, and DC deserves credit for passing it. But the law has implementation gaps that are delaying relief for people who are eligible right now, and there are areas where it should go further. DC Justice Lab has identified an unintentional gap that delays relief for people with certain records until 2027, even though under the old law those same records would already have been eligible for sealing. The Council passed a temporary fix, but a permanent solution is needed. Second, shorten the waiting periods and change when the clock starts. Right now, the waiting period for felony sealing is eight years from completion of sentence, not from the date of conviction. For someone on supervised release for years after prison, the clock does not even begin until supervision ends. I support starting the clock sooner. I also support reducing the waiting periods — five years for felonies and three years for misdemeanors — to reflect the reality that the vast majority of people who are going to recidivate do so within the first three years. Third, accelerate automatic processing. The courts have until October 2027 to process automatic expungements and sealings. I will work with the Council to fund the court infrastructure needed to move faster. Fourth, fund public outreach. An estimated 95,000 DC residents are eligible for full or partial relief under the new law. Most of them do not know it. I will direct MORCA to run a sustained outreach campaign in partnership with legal aid organizations, reentry service providers, and community organizations so eligible residents can access the relief they are entitled to. Fifth, enforce against data brokers and background check companies. I support giving the Office of Human Rights the resources and authority to investigate and penalize background check companies that report sealed or expunged records, and I support requiring companies that provide background checks in DC to certify compliance with the Second Chance Act. Sixth, eliminate fees. No one should have to pay to access a right the law already provides. Filing fees and related costs for sealing and expungement motions should be eliminated entirely.

Vincent Orange

Support automation, fee elimination, shorter timelines, and enforcement against data misuse.

Question 10

For each Deputy Mayor position below, name: (a) one thing the cluster has done well; (b) one thing it has done poorly; (c) whether you would retain current leadership.

Kenyan McDuffie

DMPSJ has helped drive better coordination across agencies and supported a more holistic approach to public safety, particularly by investing in violence interruption, reentry services, and data-sharing that treats public safety as both a law enforcement and public health issue. Where the cluster has fallen short, however, is in consistent execution and accountability. Residents still experience uneven results across neighborhoods, and too often we see delays in implementation, lack of clear performance metrics, and insufficient follow-through on initiatives that should be delivering measurable reductions in crime and recidivism. With respect to retaining current leadership, I plan to conduct a full performance review during the transition period from the general election and first day in office. Leadership decisions would be based on a clear standard: the ability to deliver results, manage across agencies effectively, and restore public confidence. In addition to receiving applicants from jurisdictions with successful measurable outcomes, I would remain open to continuity if current leadership is meeting those expectations and demonstrating a plan to improve. However, where it's not, I won't hesitate to make changes to ensure we have the right team in place to execute a comprehensive, accountable public safety strategy. b. Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services (DMHHS) The Health and Human Services cluster has advanced Medicaid coverage and taken steps toward health equity, but significant gaps remain in coordinating care across housing, behavioral health, and social services. One area my Administration would focus on is on ensuring we handle homeless encampments with dignity, care, and respect. Under the current Administration, the clearing of encampments have violated DC law requiring timely and proper notice and has occurred without prioritizing housing first principles. Collectively, these shortcomings have worked to undermine trust, disrupt service connections, and failed to address the root causes impacting our unhoused communities. As Mayor, any public health or safety interventions must be carried out with dignity, care, and a Housing First commitment that follows investment. My healthcare platform calls for treating housing instability, food insecurity, transportation barriers, and violence exposure as core drivers of health outcomes. That level of coordination has not been fully realized. I have also called for a transparent performance dashboard for publicly funded health institutions covering staffing, access, and quality metrics. Whether to retain current DMHHS leadership will be determined through a direct review of whether they can execute on those standards.

Gary Goodweather

Done well: Violent crime has declined significantly from the 2023 peak, including a meaningful drop in homicides. The Safe Passage program has been funded and expanded with clearer data-driven criteria for priority areas around schools. These are real results that deserve acknowledgment. Done poorly: The conditions inside DC's correctional facilities are unacceptable. The 2025 DC Jail audit documented 790 assaults in a single year, eight deaths in custody, food reported as rotten or contaminated, 37 percent of behavioral health positions vacant, and Narcan administered 148 times for overdoses. The jail population grew substantially even as crime fell, which means we are locking more people up in worse conditions with less justification. At DYRS, the Youth Services Center has been overcrowded virtually every night for a year, with an average of at least one assault per day. The Council defunded the independent juvenile justice oversight office, and the agency's own director was told by a Councilmember that DYRS is "dangerous" and "failing on its mission." These are systemic failures in the core responsibility of this cluster: keeping people in government custody safe. Every agency head in my administration will be evaluated on a single question: can this person deliver measurable results within twelve months? The failures documented in the jail audit and at DYRS are severe, and they will factor heavily into that evaluation. I am not coming into office with a predetermined list of who stays and who goes, but I am coming in with clear expectations. On DMHH: Done well: The 2025 Point-in-Time count showed a decrease in homelessness from 5,616 to 5,138 people. That is progress, and it reflects real work by service providers and agency staff. The DMHHS cluster also maintained continuity of services through an extraordinarily difficult period of federal disruption. Done poorly: That progress is being actively undermined by the administration's own decisions. DMHHS expanded encampment clearings under federal pressure, reduced the required notice period, and conducted up to four closures per week, displacing people without adequate pathways to permanent housing. The Mayor's FY2026 budget proposed cuts to homeless services, healthcare, and welfare programs even as the numbers were starting to improve. Service providers have said these cuts will reverse the progress the PIT count reflected. You do not clear encampments to satisfy a federal administration that is threatening your autonomy and then cut the services that would actually move people off the street. Retain current leadership: Same standard. Every agency head will be evaluated on whether they can deliver measurable results. The DMHHS cluster's willingness to accelerate encampment clearings in response to federal political pressure rather than public health criteria is a serious concern, and it will be part of that evaluation.

Vincent Orange

DMPSJ: Strong violence reduction efforts; weak coordination/accountability. Review leadership.
DMHHS: Strong services; weak integration/outcomes tracking. Review leadership.

Janeese Lewis George

a. Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice (DMPSJ)

Under the DMPSJ the district has made some progress in expanding violence interruption and community-based strategies to disrupt cycles of violence, both important for the long term goal/approach of reducing harm. However, there has been significant failures to fully fund, implement, and manage violence interruption. Additionally, there has been persistent challenges with coordination and reliability across agencies, particularly with Office of Unified Communications. District Residents need a system we can trust to respond quickly and effectively in moments of crisis.

We have not as a City followed through on our promises to commit to violence interruption and support ONSE, effectively tackle gun violence, implement the promises of the Youth Rehabilitation Act's Strategic Plan, or destroy siloes within agencies so coordination and collaboration across government can work to improve the lives of District residents. As Mayor, and as typical with a new executive administration, I will be evaluating leadership across the government to ensure we have the right team in place to meet this moment. I will focus on strengthening coordination, improving emergency response systems, investing in community based approaches, and ensuring that every agency is focused on the work they are best equipped to do so that our public safety is actually effective and accountable to district residents.

b. Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services (DMHHS)

Under DMHHS, the District has taken steps toward expanding services in behavioral health and preventing homelessness to respond to growing needs. Yet, we have not gone far enough. As Mayor, I will evaluate leadership across the cluster to ensure we have the right team in place. I will prioritize expanding capacity in DBH and DHS so residents can get care when they need it, including reducing wait times for behavioral health services and strengthening community-based care. I will ensure that truancy prevention programs are adequately funded and staffed. I will also focus on moving more residents into permanent housing and reducing the number of families cycling through shelters. And for justice-impacted residents, I will ensure access to housing, benefits, and mental health support begins immediately, not months after release. The goal is straightforward: when someone reaches out for help, the system should respond quickly and help them stay stable.

Question 11

Where should "reentry outcomes" sit in the executive org chart (DMPSJ, DMHHS, or MORCA)? Why? What are the three metrics you will publicly track for reentry outcomes (e.g., housing placements, time-to-ID, revocations for technical violations)?

Gary Goodweather

Reentry outcomes should be led by MORCA, but MORCA as it exists today is not equipped for that role. It sits under the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs, operates primarily as a referral and case management office, and lacks the operational authority or budget to drive outcomes across agencies. I will elevate MORCA's authority so it functions as a cross-cluster coordination office with direct reporting to the Mayor and the ability to compel cooperation from agencies under both DMPSJ and DMHHS. Reentry is inherently cross-cluster. A person coming home from 15 years in a federal facility needs housing (DMHHS), identification documents (DHS/DMV), employment (DOES), healthcare (DBH/DHCF), and legal support for record relief (courts/OAG). No single cluster owns all of those touchpoints. The office that coordinates reentry outcomes needs the authority to reach across all of them and hold each agency accountable for its piece. The reason it should not sit under DMPSJ is philosophical and practical. Reentry is not a criminal justice function. Treating it as one reinforces the framework that a returning citizen's primary relationship with government is through the justice system. That framing follows people for the rest of their lives. MORCA's value is that it exists to serve returning citizens as residents, not as cases. That identity should be preserved and strengthened, not absorbed into a public safety cluster. Three metrics I will publicly track: Housing placement within 30 days of release. A returning citizen without stable housing within the first month is dramatically more likely to recidivate. This metric will track the percentage of people connected to transitional, supportive, or permanent housing within 30 days and will be reported by type of housing and by ward. Employment connection within 90 days of release. This will track not just job placement but job retention at 90 days, because a two-week temp assignment is not reentry success. It will include Capital Corps enrollment as a qualifying pathway, since structured civic service with stipends, certifications, and career pipelines is a real employment outcome. Revocations for technical violations. DC residents should not be sent back to prison for missing a check-in or failing to meet a condition that has nothing to do with public safety. I will track the number and rate of revocations for technical violations and publish that data quarterly. If the numbers are high, that tells us the supervision system is failing, not that the people coming home are failing. This metric will also be disaggregated by age at original offense, because the population TU25 serves, people who entered the system under 25, should be tracked separately to measure whether our reentry system is meeting their specific needs.

Vincent Orange

Place under DMPSJ with cross-agency authority. Track: housing placement, employment rates, recidivism/technical violations.

Janeese Lewis George

As Mayor, I will take a hard look at the responsibilities and clusters of my Deputy Mayors. My public safety plan requires a comprehensive, whole of government approach—not one agency is absolved from promoting public safety or contributing to the network of supports and services that are needed to guarantee well-resourced communities. Given that, reentry outcomes will inherently fall under multiple agencies that may not share the same Deputy Mayor. The metrics will sit under the relevant agencies providing the services: housing and behavioral supports would be DMHHS, for example, whereas successful employment outcomes with ONSE would be under DMPSJ, and I would look to MORCA to develop metrics related to coordination and collaboration among different clusters.

While the most important metrics to me are housing placements, education, and workforce engagement, I will hold focus groups during transition to hear from impacted individuals on the current gaps in coordination in DC services during reentry and ensure that my plans are tailored to address those problems. A new Office of Emerging Adult Services would also play an important role, with leadership involving a directly impacted person.

Kenyan McDuffie

Reentry outcomes should not be measured by technical violations or rearrest rates alone. Those metrics capture contact with the criminal legal system, which is a product of both individual behavior and systemic decisions about enforcement, supervision intensity, and prosecutorial discretion. They are poor proxies for whether a person is actually building a stable life. My administration will support reforms to our probation laws, including earned time credits as proposed by the Jails and Justice Task Force, precisely because measuring failure through technical violations sets people up to return to incarceration for conduct that has nothing to do with public safety. The research supports a different approach. Richard Rosenfeld, who chaired the National Academies committee that produced the 2022 report "The Limits of Recidivism: Measuring Success After Prison," argued that the field needs metrics beyond rearrest or reincarceration, including progress in personal well-being and structural factors. The committee recommended metrics like deceleration in offending frequency and de-escalation in offense seriousness. My administration will publicly track housing stability at 90 and 180 days post-release, employment and education placement rates, and time-to-documentation including IDs, benefits enrollment, and health coverage. These measure whether the District is actually delivering on the supports that allow a person to build a life. Where this function sits in the org chart matters less than whether it is staffed with people who understand the population and has real authority to coordinate across agencies.

Question 12

Do you support the building of a new jail? If so, would you fund it through the capital budget or a public-private partnership? Do you support including the construction of a local prison so that incarcerated DC residents can be brought home as part of the long-term plan?

Vincent Orange

Support modern, humane facility via capital budget. Support local prison to bring residents home.

Janeese Lewis George

As Mayor, I will assess the best path forward to determine funding as well as approving plans that ensure that we are not expanding jail capacity in ways that drive more incarceration. Instead, we must focus on right-sizing the system and investing in the supports that reduce the need for incarceration in the first place.

DC Jail, the Central Detention Facility, and the Correctional Treatment Facility are dangerous with unsanitary and unsafe living conditions. These facilities are not fit to house anyone. We need a new facility that integrates technology, space for education and recreation, and state of the art infrastructure to minimize noise. The Jails and Justice Taskforce has been working on plans for a new jail for years and I will assess that work and continue to move the appropriate pieces forward.

Kenyan McDuffie

The current DC Jail is uninhabitable. No one should be living in it. Beyond the conditions, the status quo means that DC residents who are incarcerated get shipped thousands of miles from home into a federal Bureau of Prisons system that can move them around at will, destroying family ties and community connections, and subjecting them to discrimination at every stage from classification to programming to fee structures. That is a harm we are inflicting on DC residents and their families, and it needs to end. What we build to replace the current facility matters enormously. We should not replicate the large warehouse model that has failed people in every state where it has been tried. My administration will follow the recommendations of the Jails and Justice Task Force and draw on the expertise of organizations like Designing Justice + Designing Spaces, which have developed practical, evidence-grounded models for how incarceration facilities can be reconfigured to support human dignity. The Vera Institute's Dignity Principles, developed through Restoring Promise in partnership with correctional leaders, incarcerated people, and advocates, provide a clear framework. The seven principles are Safety, Human Dignity in Carceral Settings, Morale and Well-Being, Fairness, Purpose, Family and Community Partnership, and Transparency. These are operational commitments that shape everything from physical design to staffing ratios to visitation policy. Vera is clear that these principles are a floor: the goal of humane conditions runs alongside a commitment to decarceration and eliminating racial disparities behind prison walls. Testimony and research both show that when people are treated with dignity, facilities become safer for incarcerated people and staff alike. Any new facility should be designed with these principles at its core from the start, funded through the capital budget with full public accountability, and built to serve DC residents close to home.

Gary Goodweather

Yes, I support building a new jail. The conditions inside the Central Detention Facility are indefensible. People are dying in a facility that the city has known for over a decade needs to be replaced. But I will not build a new jail the wrong way. The District Task Force on Jails and Justice got it right: a new facility must be paired with a serious commitment to reducing the number of people we incarcerate. The Task Force developed 80 recommendations and a ten-year plan to shrink the footprint of our criminal justice system, and the majority of those recommendations have not been implemented. Building a new facility without doing that work first risks building a bigger system rather than a better one. My administration will pursue both simultaneously: replace CDF with a modern, humane facility and implement the community investments, alternatives to incarceration, and policy reforms that reduce the population going into it. On funding: this should be funded through the capital budget. The facility must be publicly owned and locally controlled. The Task Force raised serious concerns about public-private partnership models, including the risk of creating a for-profit facility whose financial incentives run counter to rehabilitation and population reduction. I share those concerns. DC residents are already subject to a federal prison system they have no control over. A Community Advisory Board with meaningful representation from directly impacted people should be established to provide oversight throughout design, construction, and operation. On a local prison to bring DC residents home: yes. This is one of the most important and least discussed issues in DC's criminal justice system. When DC's last prison closed in 2001, the District lost the ability to house its own residents convicted of felonies. Today, DC residents serving felony sentences are scattered across federal Bureau of Prisons facilities hundreds or thousands of miles from their families, their communities, and the city they will return to. That distance makes rehabilitation harder, family connection harder, and reentry harder. It is also a Home Rule issue. DC has no control over the conditions, programming, or policies in BOP facilities, even though the people inside them are our residents. I support including the construction of a local correctional facility as part of the long-term plan so that DC residents serving felony sentences can serve them here, close to family, with access to DC-based reentry programming, job training, and community connection before they come home. Being near the people who care about you changes how you prepare for life after incarceration.

Question 13

How will you end the ongoing violence, abuse, overcrowding, and inadequate programming in secure facilities like the DC Jail and the Youth Services Center? How will you recruit and professionalize Corrections Officers and Youth Development Representatives for these facilities?

Janeese Lewis George

I will evaluate leadership and conduct a full audit of the Department of Corrections (DOC) and the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) to address in facility violence and abuse, persistent overcrowding, and gaps in care.

Too many people in DOC custody are living in unsafe and harmful conditions. At DOC, I will expand access to mental health care, improve oversight and accountability, end practices that subject people to prolonged isolation and serious psychological harm, and ensure people have real access to education and reentry support. I will also work to reduce the jail population, because safer facilities start with fewer people in them.

At DYRS, the focus must be on development and rehabilitation–as is statutorily required–not punishment. I will reduce overcrowding, keep young people out of facilities whenever possible, and invest in community-based programs that provide mentorship, education, and behavioral health support.

To recruit and professionalize staff, I will invest in training and support of Corrections Officers and Youth Development Representatives so that they are equipped in de-escalation, trauma-informed care, and working with people in crisis, with clear standards for accountability. For youth facilities, that means building a workforce focused on development and punishment.

Kenyan McDuffie

Correctional officers face pervasive violence, chronic stress, and severe mental health consequences including high rates of depression, PTSD, and suicidal ideation that worsen over the course of their careers and into retirement. The violence, abuse, and overcrowding inside DC's secure facilities are not accidents of policy. They are the results of policy. I will treat them as such. The racial composition of who is incarcerated in the DC Jail tells a story that the data makes undeniable. Black residents are incarcerated at rates that have no relationship to actual rates of drug use, property crime, or violent crime across the city's demographics. The honest reading of that gap is that incarceration has been applied selectively by race, and communities that have been shielded from it have better public health and economic outcomes as a result. I will work to reduce the jail population to the level that the actual risk profile of detainees warrants, and will push aggressively for alternatives to pretrial detention for lower-risk individuals. Conditions inside the facilities must improve. I will treat the dignity of people in DC's care as a governing standard, not an afterthought. That means adequate space, programming that prepares people for reentry, healthcare that meets basic medical and mental health needs, and an end to the kinds of conditions that currently drive violence on both sides of the cell door. The staff crisis in these facilities deserves direct attention. Correctional officers and Youth Development Representatives face pervasive violence, chronic stress, and severe mental health consequences, including high rates of depression, PTSD, and suicidal ideation that compound over the course of their careers and follow them into retirement.2 Research on this is 2 34% of COs suffer from PTSD, compared to 14% of military veterans and 7% of the general public, nearly 5x the general population rate. clear. Facilities where residents are treated with dignity and where staff have manageable workloads, meaningful mental health support, and fair pay produce measurably better health outcomes for workers and lower rates of on-the-job violence. I will pursue a recruitment and retention model built around that reality. Competitive pay is part of it, but so is genuine investment in staff mental health services, peer support programs, manageable caseloads, and ongoing professional development. People who work in these facilities should be proud of the work and supported in doing it well. Right now the conditions drive talent away. Changing the conditions changes that.

Gary Goodweather

The conditions I described in my answer on DMPSJ are not new problems. They are the predictable result of years of underfunding, understaffing, and a lack of leadership. At the DC Jail, the immediate priority is staffing and medical care. You cannot address violence, abuse, or inadequate programming without enough trained staff in the building. Behavioral health vacancies at 37 percent mean that people in crisis are going without treatment, which drives the overdoses, the suicide watches, and the violence. I will treat correctional healthcare staffing as a public health emergency and direct DOC to fill behavioral health positions within my first year, using competitive pay, loan forgiveness, and partnerships with Howard, Georgetown, and UDC's health programs to build a pipeline. At the Youth Services Center, the overcrowding and daily assaults reflect a system that is holding young people it does not have capacity to safely house. The Council's decision to defund independent juvenile justice oversight made this worse by eliminating the only entity with the authority to document what is happening inside. I will restore independent oversight of juvenile facilities and fund it at a level that allows for unannounced inspections, public reporting, and enforceable recommendations. Oversight is not optional. It is how a government proves it is not abusing people in its care. Both facilities need to provide meaningful activity for every person, every day. People who spend 20 hours a day in a cell with nothing to do are more likely to harm themselves and others. My administration will require DOC and DYRS to publish daily programming schedules and track participation rates as a performance metric reported to the Mayor's office monthly. Recruiting and professionalizing Corrections Officers and Youth Development Representatives requires treating these as the demanding, essential positions they are. Compensation has to be competitive. DC is competing with federal law enforcement agencies, neighboring jurisdictions, and the private sector for the same workforce. If the pay and benefits are not competitive, the positions will stay vacant and the people who do stay will be overworked, undertrained, and burned out. I support the DROP concept for corrections officers to retain experienced staff, and I will benchmark CO and YDR compensation against comparable roles in Maryland, Virginia, and the federal system annually. Every CO and YDR should receive regular training in de-escalation, trauma-informed practices, mental health first response, and crisis intervention. Working with incarcerated people, especially young people, requires a specific skill set that most new hires do not arrive with. The training academy and ongoing professional development have to build it. I will create clear advancement tracks from entry-level CO and YDR positions into supervisory roles, specialized units, reentry coordination, and community-based positions. My Capital Corps also includes a Public Safety Support track that can serve as a recruitment pipeline into corrections careers for residents who want to serve their communities in this way. Culture change starts at the top. My agency heads will be evaluated on staff retention, use-of-force trends, grievance resolution rates, and programming participation.

Vincent Orange

Improve staffing, training, oversight, and programming. Professionalize workforce with better pay and accountability.

Question 14

Do you support Second Look For All—post-sentencing review after 15 years in prison for all prisoners regardless of age at the time of offense?

Kenyan McDuffie

Do you support Second Look For All—post-sentencing review after 15 years in prison for all prisoners regardless of age at the time of offense? Yes. A 15-year review threshold is a reasonable starting point, and I would go further and support a 10-year review consistent with Senator Cory Booker's federal Second Look Act, S.

Gary Goodweather

There is also a fiscal reality. It costs tens of thousands of dollars per year to incarcerate a person in a federal facility. When someone has served 15 years and demonstrated that they are no longer a danger to the community, continuing to spend that money does not make anyone safer. Those resources could be invested in the housing, employment, and reentry services that actually reduce harm.

Vincent Orange

Support carefully structured expansion with judicial review.

Janeese Lewis George

Yes, I do. If an individual has demonstrated rehabilitation, and met the factors set forth in the law, all individuals should have the opportunity to petition for a relief under our second look laws. We know that longer sentences do not improve public safety and can have the opposite effect.

Question 15

Current law creates a rebuttable presumption for pretrial detention, but recent legislation has significantly increased the burden of proof. What is your position on pretrial release for people who are presumed innocent?

Gary Goodweather

I support a pretrial system that defaults to release with appropriate conditions. Risk assessment should be individualized, evidence-based, and focused on flight risk and genuine public safety concerns, not on the severity of the charge alone. Charge-based presumptions sweep too broadly. A person charged with a serious offense is not automatically dangerous, and a judge should evaluate each case on its facts rather than applying a blanket rule that treats an accusation as evidence of danger. The data does not support the expansion DC has pursued. Research from the Council for Court Excellence found that 99 percent of people released pretrial who had been accused of violent crimes remained arrest-free throughout their pretrial release period. That is not a number that justifies locking more people up before trial. It is a number that suggests our pretrial release system was already working for the vast majority of cases. Yet the jail population has grown substantially even as crime has fallen. That means we are incarcerating more people in a facility the city's own auditor has described as dangerous, overcrowded, and unfit, and we are doing it to people who have not been found guilty. The conditions inside CDF that I described earlier in this questionnaire apply to every person held pretrial. They are experiencing the assaults, the contaminated food, the behavioral health vacancies, and the overdoses. Where genuine public safety concerns exist, a judge should have the tools to impose meaningful pretrial conditions: supervision, GPS monitoring, check-ins, curfews, or other measures tailored to the individual case. I also want to be direct about what pretrial detention costs the city. Every person held pretrial is occupying a bed in a facility that is already over capacity. They may lose their job, their housing, and their connection to family while awaiting trial. That instability follows them regardless of whether they are ultimately convicted, and it makes every outcome worse for them and for the community. The direction of recent legislation has been to expand detention, and the results have not made us safer.

Vincent Orange

Support release with risk-based conditions; detention only when necessary for safety.

Janeese Lewis George

As a former prosecutor, I've seen firsthand how pretrial decisions impact both community safety, access to critical services, and an individual's long-term stability. I believe our system should start from the least restrictive approach while cases are pending, consistent with public safety. I do not support changes that would broaden the use of pretrial detention and I did not support changes to the pretrial detention standard, because we should only deprive someone of their liberty when there is no alternative. The research shows that even one day of incarceration can cause long term harm and make us less safe. Although my position did not carry the day, I did successfully push for those changes to be temporary and efforts to ensure we are tracking outcomes closely. Courts should continue to weigh public safety and individual circumstances, with a preference for community-based placements and appropriate conditions that support stability and ensure people can return to court.

Kenyan McDuffie

Every person who stands accused is presumed innocent. That presumption is the constitutional foundation on which the entire system is supposed to rest. Current DC law creates several rebuttable presumptions in specific circumstances, not a universal presumption of detention, Jayawardene, W., Kumbalatara, C., Jones, A., & McDaniel, J. (2024). Work Stress and Psychoactive Substance Use among Correctional Officers in the USA. Psychoactives, 3(1), 65-77.https://doi.org/10.3390/psychoactives3010005 See also: https://news.berkeley.edu/2018/08/23/california-correctional-officers-at-high-risk-for-depression-ptsd-and- suicide-new-survey-finds/ and being precise about that distinction matters because the constitutional limits on burden-shifting are real. Courts should have full discretion, grounded in the fullest possible information about an individual, to make bond decisions tailored to two constitutionally required purposes: the safety of every person in the community and the person's return to court. That calibration cannot happen when rigid statutory presumptions displace individualized judgment. When a judge is required to presume detention, or when the legislature has dramatically shifted the burden of proof, the court loses the flexibility to arrive at the least restrictive condition that actually meets those purposes. Secure DC worsened this problem in meaningful ways. The racially disparate impact of our pretrial system starts at this stage. Racial bias and prior contact with the criminal legal system, which is itself shaped by enforcement decisions, affect who is deemed dangerous and who is detained. Expanding presumptions of detention amplifies that disparity. I stood against the DNA collection provisions in Secure DC when almost no one else would, because the presumption of innocence requires more than lip service. My position is that we should revisit the presumptions added under Secure DC and return to a framework that gives courts genuine, individualized discretion.

Question 16

Will you push the US Bureau of Prisons to construct a halfway house in DC?

Vincent Orange

Yes, essential for successful reentry.

Janeese Lewis George

The current system is failing DC residents. Too many people are sent far from home while incarcerated and then placed in halfway houses outside the District, making it harder to reconnect with family, access services, and successfully return to their communities. I believe DC residents should have the option to return home and complete their transition in the District. But we have to be clear: we cannot repeat the failures of places like Hope Village.

If we are going to have reentry facilities in DC, they must be clean, safe, well-run, and focused on stability and success. That means strong oversight, well-trained staff, access to mental health care, education opportunities, job placement, and housing support, and clear accountability for conditions inside those facilities.

Kenyan McDuffie

My administration will push the Bureau of Prisons to build with that model in mind, and we will insist that any new infrastructure be designed with the future in mind. As DC continues to decarcerate, these facilities should be repurposable, built to transition into affordable housing, community health centers, or other neighborhood assets rather than becoming stranded investments. Smart reentry infrastructure is also smart city planning, and I will fight for both.

Gary Goodweather

DC on Benning Road, is over five years behind schedule and still not open. In the meantime, DC residents convicted of DC code offenses who are transitioning out of federal prison are being sent to a halfway house in Baltimore. A person coming home to DC after years in a federal facility is spending the most critical months of their reentry in another city, separated from the family connections, community ties, and local services that determine whether reentry succeeds or fails. I also want to broaden the frame. A single halfway house is not sufficient for a city where roughly 1,200 people return from BOP custody every year. DC needs a continuum of transitional housing options: BOP-contracted residential reentry centers, community-based transitional housing, permanent supportive housing with reentry services, and the dedicated HPTF set-aside for returning citizen housing I committed to earlier in this questionnaire. A halfway house is one piece.

Question 17

Are you confident in the leadership of the Department of Corrections and the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services? Would you keep or replace the current directors, Tom Faust (DOC) and Sam Abed (DYRS)?

Janeese Lewis George

I am not confident in the current outcomes we are seeing from DOC and DYRS, particularly when it comes to safety, conditions, and care. As Mayor, I will be responsible for appointing leadership, and I will be looking for leaders with a proven track record of delivering safe, accountable, and rehabilitative systems.

At the same time, these challenges are not just about one person. We are seeing systemic issues around culture, accountability, and priorities that need to be addressed. That's why I will conduct a comprehensive audit of both agencies and set clear expectations for humane conditions, safety, and a focus on rehabilitation and the least restrictive approach.

I expect that leadership changes will be part of that process, but my focus is on ensuring these agencies are delivering the outcomes residents deserve.

Kenyan McDuffie

As the former chair of the committee on public safety and judiciary, I have deep respect for the public servants leading these agencies and the incredibly difficult work they do every day. DOC and DYRS are responsible not just for custody, but for rehabilitation, safety, and preparing individuals, young people in the case of the latter, for a successful return to our communities. That said, my standard, which is simple but worth reiterating and applying for this question: are we delivering safe facilities, effective rehabilitation, and better outcomes for residents? We've seen real challenges in both systems. From safety concerns to questions about programming, 3 The Council for Court Excellence and the Jails and Justice Task Force staffing, and consistency of care, these issues need to be addressed with urgency and transparency. I would not make a blanket commitment today to retain or replace any individual. Similar to DMPSJ, I would conduct a thorough performance review of both agencies and their leadership, with clear metrics around safety, recidivism reduction, staffing stability, and rehabilitation outcomes. In addition to receiving applicants from jurisdictions with successful measurable outcomes, I would nonetheless remain open to continuity if current leadership is meeting those expectations and demonstrating a plan to improve. If not, however, I will make changes to ensure we have leaders in place who can deliver the results our residents, including our young people, deserve.

Gary Goodweather

I am not confident in the current trajectory of either agency for the reasons i have mentioned throughout this questionnaire. If the people currently leading them could have fixed these problems, the problems would not be this severe after years under their leadership. Both directors should understand that my administration will evaluate them against a standard of performance.

Vincent Orange

Evaluate performance; retain or replace based on results and accountability.

Question 18

What is your position on involving people with lived experience in the criminal legal system—both as mentors, credible messengers, and leaders in direct-service programs, and in deciding what reentry services are offered and how the budget is allocated? Do you support funding for an Office of Emerging Adult Services?

Kenyan McDuffie

People with lived experience in the criminal legal system are a primary resource, not a supplementary one. Their involvement as mentors and credible messengers in direct-service programs is well-documented as effective, but the conversation about their role too often stops there. What is equally important and far less discussed is their role in research and policymaking. The people who have lived inside a system understand its actual operations, its failures, and its pressure points in ways that no external analysis can fully replicate. Any serious reform effort that excludes them from design and decision-making will produce policy that misses the mark. On budget allocation and service design: people who have navigated reentry know which services are meaningful and which are performative. They know where the gaps are. An advisory structure that gives returning residents genuine authority over how reentry dollars are spent, rather than consultative input alone, will produce better outcomes than one designed by administrators who have never experienced the system from the inside. I fully support funding for an Office of Emerging Adult Services. The emerging adult population, roughly ages 18 to 25, occupies a gap in our service architecture that neither youth-serving systems nor adult systems address well. OEAS would create dedicated infrastructure to serve that population with programming that reflects their specific developmental needs. Before its closure, the Justice Policy Institute completed an emerging adults plan under the Youth Rehabilitation Act, and that work should serve as an implementation guide as we stand up this office. We should focus on what has already been done and that investment is overdue.

Gary Goodweather

Yes, at every level. They know what works and what the system looks like from the inside in ways no policy analyst can replicate. My administration will fund credible messenger and peer mentor roles as professional positions with real compensation and career pathways. I will establish a Reentry Advisory Council of returning citizens, formerly incarcerated leaders, and impacted families with a defined role in reviewing MORCA's performance and advising on reentry budget priorities, reporting directly to the Mayor's office. On the Office of Emerging Adult Services: yes, I support funding it. I

Vincent Orange

Strongly support. Lived experience must inform policy. Support OEAS funding.

Janeese Lewis George

Individuals with lived experience should be contributing to the solution and will only improve public safety through our city. These individuals should be involved in legislative change, programmatic expansion, and in the identification of problems and corresponding solutions. I strongly support the inclusion of people with lived experience in my government and will commit to finding employment opportunities and pathways to engage with government.

Young people—emerging adults–between the ages of 18 and 25 make up a disproportionate amount of crime in DC and also have needs unique to that of other populations. There must be an intentional focus on ensuring that their needs are met across all sectors, this will require coordination and planning. Given that, I strongly support the funding of an Office of Emerging Adult Services.

Question 19

Would you support a budget allocation for transitional housing or residential programming for court-involved emerging adults?

Gary Goodweather

Would you support a budget allocation for transitional housing or residential programming for court-involved emerging adults? Yes. Housing is the single most urgent barrier to successful reentry, and it is even more acute for emerging adults who often have no independent housing history, no credit, and no savings to draw on. A person coming out of incarceration at 22 or 23 with nowhere to live is being set up to fail.

Vincent Orange

Yes, critical for stability and reducing recidivism.

Janeese Lewis George

Yes. Housing is a critical need and too often I hear that there is not available housing for justice-impacted individuals. Further, there must be transitional housing options for emerging adults, these options must be fully staffed and developed to meet the unique needs of this population so that they can transition into independent adulthood.

Kenyan McDuffie

We also need to address the crisis bed shortage directly. DC currently has only 16 crisis stabilization beds citywide, provided through Crossing Place and Jordan House and located at the emergency facility on the grounds of the old DC General Hospital. These beds serve adults experiencing psychiatric or emotional crises as an alternative to inpatient psychiatric hospitalization, available for stays of up to 14 days. They are accessible through the Access Helpline at 1-888-793-4357, and mobile crisis teams can bring services to individuals who are unable or unwilling to come in. The Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program operates 24 hours a day as an additional layer of support. Sixteen beds for a city of 700,000 people is a serious gap, and court-involved emerging adults disproportionately need this level of support. My administration will fund expanded crisis bed capacity alongside dedicated transitional housing for this population.

Question 20

How will your administration measure success in youth safety and hold agencies accountable?

Vincent Orange

Track violence reduction, youth engagement, recidivism, and employment outcomes, with public reporting and agency accountability.

End of Document

Janeese Lewis George

Holding agencies accountable is a cornerstone of my campaign. For too long the District has been labeled as resource rich and coordination poor. The administration has poorly managed funding and obsolete programs remain on the books while programs that residents need are lacking. As a people first Mayor, I will assess the programs that we need to fully fund and build that will lift up young people and disrupt cycles of violence. Youth safety is broader than violence, however, and also means that we must solve truancy and we must have safe, and productive, spaces for young people to gather and develop. Youth safety will be measured by number of young people accessing positive, pro-social services; decreasing rates of youth violence and youth victims; and rates of youth engagement in education.

Kenyan McDuffie

My administration will track youth safety outcomes through a citywide performance dashboard that publishes real-time service delivery data across agencies, visible to residents, advocates, and policymakers alike. The metrics I will publicly report include: housing stability and placement rates for court-involved youth; school enrollment and attendance; connection to workforce training or employment; access to behavioral health services; and intervals between contact with the legal system. Rearrest rates are a blunt instrument and I will supplement them with markers of gradual behavioral change, including reductions in the severity of any subsequent legal contact. Agencies including DYRS, DBH, and DOES will be held accountable through these dashboards, with annual public reviews and direct reporting lines to my office.

Gary Goodweather

The same way I will measure success across every area of city government: clear metrics, public reporting, and consequences when agencies fail to deliver.

For youth safety specifically, my administration will track and publish three categories of data quarterly.

Outcomes for young people in government custody: assaults, use of force incidents, average daily population versus capacity, programming participation rates, and behavioral health service access at DYRS facilities. Independent oversight of juvenile facilities will be restored and funded. The decision to defund that office was a step backward and I will reverse it.

Outcomes for young people in the community: youth employment and enrollment rates, participation in violence interruption and mentorship programs, and contact with the criminal legal system disaggregated by ward, age, and race.

Reentry outcomes for emerging adults: housing placement, employment connection, program completion, and recidivism rates for the 18 to 25 population, tracked through MORCA and coordinated with the Office of Emerging Adult Services.

All of this will be published on a public dashboard. Agency heads will be evaluated against these metrics in regular performance reviews reported to the Mayor's office. When the numbers show a program is working, we scale it. When they show an agency is failing the young people it is responsible for, it is responsible for leadership changes.

My service and career has been built on setting goals, measuring results, and being held accountable for what I deliver. That is what I will bring to youth safety in DC.