



## CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

### **CITY COUNCIL 11<sup>th</sup> DISTRICT CANDIDATE: DEA THOMAS, DEMOCRAT**

<http://www.deathomas.com/>

**1. Please articulate your overall vision for how young people will be supported from cradle to career in Baltimore City? What will be the priority strategies within your first four years in implementing this vision?**

My vision to support students from cradle to career is to build the learning and skills building capacity of each student. My first four years would first look at the needs of students and schools to include school meals, social services, learning materials and reducing class sizes.

**2. The Mayor and City Council do not currently have oversight authority over Baltimore City Public Schools. Would you advocate changing the current city/state partnership? What changes would you recommend to the overall administration/approach of public education in Baltimore City?**

Yes, I would advocate for local government oversight authority over schools, but maintain some coordination with the state for educational standards and funding. I believe Baltimore City needs strong school desegregation laws because our system still maintains an outdated segregated model that prevents poor and minority children from having an opportunity for a quality education.

**3. Eighty percent of a young person's life is spent outside of school, yet just 15% of Baltimore's school aged young people have access to afterschool programs. City leaders from around the country have begun to identify the importance of afterschool and summer programs as a critical support and have invested in citywide systems. Participation in out-of-school time opportunities boosts academics, attendances, school promotion and completion and it helps connects young people to caring adults. If elected, what would your approach be to addressing opportunities for youth beyond the school day and school year?**

My approach beyond the school day and school year would look to involve students in tutorial, mentoring, athletic, volunteerism, internship, and work programs. I would look to involve community organizations, academic institutions, public/private sector organizations to provide opportunities to keep students engaged and exposed to the workings of their communities. The more we look to integrate young people into city life, the sooner they may realize their role and stake in society.

**4. In the 70's and 80's Baltimore operated around 130 recreation centers. That decreased by nearly half by the early 90's. Currently, Recreation & Parks operates just 40 recreation centers. There are ongoing questions about the available resources of the Department based on the lack of audits. Some of the recreation centers require major upgrades in both physical plant and programming. While a few new, modern recreation centers and being built, it is clear that many neighborhoods lack quality recreational opportunities. How would you change the trajectory of Recreation and Parks? How will you address the challenges of programming and physical plants?**



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The overall issue here is funding. I would work with my Council Colleagues and the Baltimore City Delegation in the General Assembly to steer Baltimore City funding to recreational and parks programs for young people. A priority would be underserved communities racked by violence and lack of opportunity. I would also seek support from the Maryland Congressional Delegation to restore Community Development Block Grant funding through HUD to provide as much support as possible to community centers for program and capital improvements.

*5. Young people want jobs and they are natural entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, youth unemployment is at an all time high and young people are denied the experiences and skills they need to be prepared to enter the workforce. If elected, what will be your approach to youth employment and entrepreneurship? How will you partner with Higher Education and Industry?*

My approach will be to take inventory of the major academic institutions and companies in my district and engage them about the idea of internship, apprenticeship and mentor-protégé opportunities for young people. These opportunities should be institutionalized in Baltimore for future work and career opportunities. Also, young people must undergo work preparation training for literacy, numeracy, communications skills and workplace etiquette. I am confident Baltimore can attract tremendous support for our young people and develop successful workforce development and entrepreneurship models for the nation.

*6. The resilient young people of Baltimore City experience trauma every day. They are both witness to and victims of violence. They have very real reasons to feel stressed and afraid. A growing body of research recognizes the importance of understanding and implementing trauma informed care within schools, community services, social services, and law enforcement. What approaches will you take, if elected, to implement trauma-informed-care and/or restorative practices in the public sectors?*

As a health care professional, one of the tenets of my campaign is a healthy community. Healthy communities includes addressing the trauma associated with community violence and dysfunctional home environment. My initial approach to implementing trauma informed care would be to educate my Council colleagues and municipal government about the need to identify the impact of trauma and discern its effects vs violent or disruptive behavior. Public sector employees and police should be trained to ask the right questions upon arrival, or at intake to determine what is driving the young person's actions. Family and friends should also be interviewed to understand the larger context of the person's behavior.



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***7. In 2014, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings Blake, with the support of City Council, established one of the strictest youth curfew laws in the nation and advocated for year round curfew centers. Proponents of the curfew centers thought they were a good strategy to keep kids safe and to connect young people and their families to services. Opponents feared the curfew enforcement would further strain police community relations and disproportionately target young people of color. Questions remain about the actual utilization of the curfew centers and whether or not the “Youth Connection Centers” serve their intended purpose. If you are elected, what would your position on Curfew and Curfew Centers be? How would you build more positive interactions between youth and law enforcement?***

I am not in favor of the curfew laws or the Youth Connection Centers. I believe the curfew law was a drastic attempt to address a long standing problem of idle youth. The curfew laws put added pressure on police-community relations due to their added enforcement roll. Police and youth should communicate more through Police Athletic Leagues (PAL), organized police community relations activities, and police visiting schools in uniform and off duty while out of uniform to develop relationships and build trust.

***8. The parents and families of young people are often left out of the equation when we are seeking solutions. Family and community engagement requires long term, sustained efforts to build trust and offer authentic opportunities for families to have a voice and feel supported. The Community School strategy has been shown to increase family and community engagement and improve school climate and culture. The city funded community school strategy is currently operating in 50 schools out of 180. Do you think every school should be a community school? How would you expand the strategy?***

Every school should be a community school because they provide the necessary wrap around services many Baltimore communities need. A way to expand the strategy in Baltimore is by encouraging state Senators to pass HB 1139 which would allow schools that want to be community schools to apply for a grant from the state department of education. This would relieve the burden of financing from the city, yet increase the number of community schools and allow each one to serve the specific needs of the community they serve.

***9. The Baltimore City Health Department provides chilling statistics in its 2014 Health Disparities Report. Factors of race, gender, economics, and zip code can all be determining factors for a short and painful life, and the trajectories begin even before birth. Given what we know now about what works, how will you approach making sure every child has the opportunity to grow up to become a healthy adult?***

Much of what goes into helping children become healthy adults begins in the home and community. I would use the Community Schools Initiative, City social services and other local, state and federal program interventions to aid in building healthy communities. I would utilize a whole of government approach that encompasses agencies charged with providing pre-natal and post-natal care and early childhood education. I would also promote good hygiene, nutrition, safe sex and drug prevention services. Because violence is prevalent in many of these areas, conflict resolution and mediation training can help calm situations before they escalate to body harm and murder. Finally, we must seek ways to



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reduce the poverty trap. Delaying child birth, remaining in school through graduation and employment/training development is paramount.

***10. The bright green footprints painted on Baltimore City sidewalks are supposed to denote safe walking passageways for children to get to school. However well intentioned, the reality is that in many neighborhoods there are no safe passageways, and green footprints cut through active drug and gang territory. With schools of choice, some older students are traveling more than 2 hours both morning and evening on unreliable and sometime unsafe public transportation. What will you do when elected to make sure young people can make it to school every day safely?***

First, I would strictly enforce drug free school zones near and around public schools. Second, I would request routine police and school security patrols near and around schools to monitor illicit activity. Again, I recommend incorporating school transit safety into the Baltimore Community Schools Initiative and seek greater buy-in from families and local communities. Finally, I would encourage public discussion and awareness activities about the need to keep our children safe and in school for their future and the future vitality of the City.