



CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT CANDIDATE: Susan Gaztañaga, Libertarian

- 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?***

I believe it is foolish and foolhardy for the Mayor and City Council to imagine that they can “support young people from cradle to career” and to create such an expectation in the minds of the citizens of Baltimore. What we can do, first of all, is show respect for young people, their families and the choices they make. Next, we should work hard to do well those things that properly belong to a municipal government: ensuring public safety and administering justice without partiality, maintaining our infrastructure of streets, water and sewer systems, sanitation and snow removal, and providing emergency response. Is this not a big enough job? Can our city leaders and civil servants honestly say that they are performing as well as they might in these areas? By doing these things well, we would create an enabling environment for a stronger economy to emerge, in which families and their children could feel that they had a future in our city.

- 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?***

The State has progressively taken over more and more Baltimore City schools (and a few schools in other jurisdictions as well) because they were failing. In situations like that, parents and community members in general will not care about maintaining the authority of their local government. They will look to the next highest level for help. If the Mayor and City Council are frustrated by not having oversight authority, I am sure that taxpayers in other jurisdictions, and the State Delegates and Senators who represent them, are getting more and more frustrated at having their wealth siphoned off to Baltimore City with very little return. The fact that public schools are a virtual monopoly and attendance (not learning, just attendance) is compulsory is at the root of this failure. Experience has shown that introducing even a small amount of choice and competition will lead to improvement. I applaud the proliferation of charter schools in the City, but they require a tremendous effort on the part of parents and community members to set up and maintain. Vouchers, and any other system that will increase educational choice, including support for home schooling, will improve the quality of education system-wide in the long run, and rescue numerous individual children in the short run. And these vouchers can be funded both publicly and privately.

- 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?***



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This lack of access has many different causes that need to be understood before that percentage can be improved. The most natural place to provide after school programs is in the school building, since the students are already there, and the facilities are there. Yet many parents want their children to get on the bus and come straight home as soon as the last bell rings because they fear for their children's safety walking through the neighborhood where the school is located and coming home late. This is a problem much bigger than finding human and material resources to be able to offer more after school programs. Moreover, I would like to know where that 15% figure came from. What after school programs are being counted? For years, my husband and I ran a Friday night youth club at a small church in the Belair-Edison neighborhood. For part of that time, a couple of women were running a program at the Herring Run branch library in the same neighborhood. I am sure that my club was never counted, and I doubt that the one at the library was either. Are all the summer day camps that the churches and day care centers operate being counted? What about the Vacation Bible Schools? So, to answer the question, my approach would be to first get as complete and reliable an assessment of the situation as possible so as to craft a strategy based on evidence.

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 are 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?

Baltimore has magnificent parks and green spaces. However, over the last several years, the number of playgrounds, recreation centers and libraries has shrunk. This tendency can be reversed by giving parents and all who are served by these facilities ownership, providing them with a channel through which they can work to save their playgrounds, rec centers and libraries. We need to remove the administrative barriers that prevent local businesses, skilled tradesmen and other community residents from making monetary and in-kind contributions to the recreational, cultural and educational facilities in their communities.

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?

In order for young people to get skills, you have to provide more vocational opportunities early on. For starters, if you want to encourage the natural entrepreneurship of young people, then you need to roll back the regulations that make it difficult for people to start businesses – including zoning that keeps people from starting many kinds of businesses in their own homes. And make sure that the minimum wage does not go up in Baltimore City above the federally required minimum. An increase in the minimum wage would prevent young people from getting a start in the work force.

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



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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?

This approach is an after the fact band aid that does not address the cause of the trauma. Much of the violence that children are exposed to in Baltimore City is directly connected to the war on drugs. Elected officials in Baltimore need to pressure our representatives in Washington to end the war on drugs once and for all. Since I am not beholden to the Democratic power structure, I would do it. A lot of this trauma, which I am very much aware of, should never be happening in the first place. We expect little children to put up with things that we would never accept as adults in the places where we work.

- 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 opposed to a curfew, as it infringes on the fundamental rights of our young people and shows a lack of respect for the parents or other adults who are responsible for them. How can we expect them to be entrepreneurs and at the same time force them to remain behind closed doors after certain hours? By first showing ordinary human respect towards our young people, we make it easier for them to respect authority in return.

- 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?***

If indeed the Community School strategy has increased family and community engagement and improved school climate and culture, then it is worth continuing. The key to expansion lies in offering authentic opportunities for families to have a voice and feel supported, reversing decades of treating parents as a nuisance.

- 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***



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what works, how will you approach making sure every child has the opportunity to grow up to become a healthy adult?

In my answer to question 1, I wrote about administering justice without partiality. In fact, all services offered by the government, be they health services, garbage collection, snow removal, street repair or police response should be delivered without partiality. We need to begin working together to change the culture and expectations of people in Baltimore, so that the unacceptable is no longer accepted as normal. Experts in social and behavior change communication (SBCC) know how to change social norms with regard to diseases such as malaria or diarrheal disease, and the same techniques can be used here.

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?

Safety on the streets and on our buses and subways is an issue that goes beyond the scope of services for children and youth. It is a core responsibility of city government. The active drug and gang territories are the fruit of the war on drugs which needs to end. In addition, we need to combat the “stop snitching” culture that reaches down to the youngest students. They need to feel that reporting an assault or bullying to a teacher, their parents or a police officer is a realistic and viable response to the problem.