

# VID Candidate Survey for the Position of NYC District Attorney

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## District Attorney • Questions

Will you prosecute drug possession? Will you prosecute sex workers? What about sex purchasers or those who facilitate sex work? \*

The over-prosecution of drug possession in New York City has been just one of many factors that have contributed to a bloated criminal legal system that has devastated communities of color in particular and undermined the well-being of the City as a whole. To that end, I will work towards the Portugese model by collaborating with public health and other agencies to decriminalize drug possession for personal use by declining to prosecute such cases entirely. This will include creating pre-arraignment diversion -- not administered by the DA's Office -- which redirects resources towards community-based peer navigators and wraparound services administered by physicians and health experts, including Medicaid enrollment, MOUD prescription where appropriate, training in naloxone administration, and access to mental health services and counseling.

With respect to sex work, I believe that sex work is work, and as District Attorney I will not prosecute private, consensual sex between adults. I will investigate and, where appropriate, will prosecute allegations of the facilitation of sex trafficking and facilitation of sex with minors.

If you don't charge crimes of poverty and other minor crimes, how will you help get services to those in need of them? \*

For far too long, our criminal justice system has served as a backstop for addressing crimes of poverty, substance misuse and other issues that would be better served through pro-social services, public health agencies, and local community-based organizations. I am committed to addressing these issues at their core. That means establishing a pathway to connect those who engage in conduct that constitutes crimes of poverty and other minor crimes with services and housing, rather than with the courts. I will do so by partnering with and, to the extent possible, supporting, agencies and community-based organizations that are better situated to respond to the needs of these New Yorkers. I will also fight to make public housing available to those with previous justice involvement.

In terms of getting services to those in need of them, I am also committed to dramatically expanding the Witness Aid Services Unit and embedding social workers in every trial bureau, such that victims are given access to services regardless of the status of the case or investigation in question. Such services will include counseling, referrals to treatment and supportive services, and connection to other legal services as appropriate. For victims of gun violence I will partner with community-based organizations with track records for success in violence interruption through credible messengers and peer navigators. I will also build a Sex Crimes Unit staffed by full-time attorneys and clinicians who are all trained in survivor-centered and trauma-informed best practices. Providing services to those who need them is amongst the most important roles that the District Attorney can fill.

What management experience do you have to prepare you to run an office of this size? \*

I have unrivalled experience with implementing reform and creating national models for change in prosecutors' offices. As Executive Director of the Institute for Innovation in Prosecution, I worked with prosecutor offices of hundreds of assistant district attorneys on projects related to data analysis of racial disparities, police accountability, and gun violence, and led the development of new training models adopted by prosecutors across the country. While at the Manhattan District Attorney's office, I created a first-of-its-kind, semester-long college in prison program that brought together assistant district attorneys and incarcerated people to study criminal justice side by side in New York State prisons. The semester-long program is now a national model for legal education and reentry support. As Director of the Manhattan District Attorney's DANY Academy, I created, oversaw, and administered specialized training for the entire 500-lawyer DA's Office on issues including the neurobiology of trauma, alternatives to incarceration, and procedural justice. As an assistant district attorney, I supervised large teams of detectives, ADAs, and paralegals over multi-year investigations, and pioneered inter-agency and community group collaborations to develop new models for addressing community needs at the conclusion of criminal investigations.

What prosecutorial experience do you have, to understand the jobs of those you are supervising? What experience do you have with this office specifically? \*

As both a national criminal justice reform leader and a former assistant district attorney, I've worked with hundreds of prosecutors, victims, incarcerated people and their families. I have experience as a criminal justice reform advocate alongside community voices including crime victims, incarcerated people, and everyone touched by the system. The next District Attorney must view the system from all of these perspectives. I was hired by DA Robert Morgenthau and served as a line assistant in the Manhattan DA's office for over a decade, under both Mr. Morgenthau and the current District Attorney. I served in the Appeals Bureau handling matters before the Appellate Division, Appellate Term, Court of Appeals, and the Southern District. I served in the Trial Bureau at every level, ultimately serving as a homicide assistant handling murders, domestic violence, and complex long-term investigations, as well as overseeing junior lawyers on investigation and trial matters. I have tried many jury trials to verdict and handled many more Grand Jury presentations, hearings, and regular court appearances, and have litigated hundreds of pre-trial matters. As Director of the DANY Academy I worked with ADAs, social workers, paralegals, and analysts in every unit and bureau of the Manhattan DA's office on specialized trainings and policy matters, including creating positions such as the Counsel for Collateral Consequences, supporting the creation of the Alternatives to Incarceration Unit, and conceiving of and developing the previously described college-in-prison program.

How aggressively do you plan to prosecute police officers for excessive use of force? What about lying? If aggressively, how do you plan to turn around and work with them in your other cases? \*

Law enforcement must be held to the highest standards, and police officers who use excessive force must be held accountable. I've released a comprehensive police accountability policy plan and have worked on police reforms alongside family members of those who lost loved ones to police violence, and I'm honored to have received the endorsement of Valerie Bell, Valerie Castile, and Victoria Davis. As District Attorney, I will prosecute cases where excessive force is used and charges are warranted. New Yorkers deserve a system with one standard of justice for all people, which means police officers who break the law will be treated like any other member of the community. To ensure that every case gets the direct attention it deserves I will have the Public Corruption Unit report directly to me and the Chief Assistant of the Manhattan DA's Office.

As District Attorney, I'm committed to doing more than just prosecuting officers who break the law – I'm focused on changing the environment that results in police misconduct in the first place. I will take a proactive role in improving NYPD training and policy to be in line with the DA's Office's moral and ethical standards and justice system philosophy; closely monitor police actions and intervene where there is a high-risk for police misconduct; ensure a public health approach to public health issues; and build upon the office's mechanism for identifying officers with whom prosecutors should not work because of credibility issues.

What is your vision for using this office to make Manhattan a better place? \*

As both a national criminal justice reform leader and a former assistant district attorney here in Manhattan, I know that the role of the District Attorney encompasses much more than prosecution alone. It requires doing the work of getting to know and collaborating with all of Manhattan's communities; it requires prioritizing prevention and rehabilitation. The next Manhattan DA must take a 360 degree view of how the system impacts everyone it touches: victims, people charged with crimes, incarcerated community members, families and children, and the communities in which we all live.

This is why, as an assistant DA, I created a first-of-its kind program for ADAs to come into prisons and take college classes side-by-side with incarcerated New Yorkers, so they could better understand each other and that the people who operate the system could learn from those most impacted by it. The need for this understanding is why I have been a leading voice nationally advocating for ending felony disenfranchisement which deprives people convicted of crimes of their voting rights -- so that the system and those seeking to run it are forced to address and engage people most impacted by it. My vision for a better Manhattan is exemplified by the work I do with incarcerated community members: building a place in which people can connect across differences, share honest thoughts and deeply-held beliefs, disagree respectfully, support one another, and ultimately work together towards a better Manhattan.

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Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?

As an ADA, I investigated a murder on upper Broadway, in which two masked men opened fire in a busy street, shooting four people nonfatally and murdering a fifth. Over the course of an 18-month investigation and a six-week jury trial, I spent countless hours with the heartbroken mother of the murdered young man, culminating in a guilty verdict against the two masked men. I called the victim's mother the morning after the verdict, and when I asked how she was, she replied, "I slept all night for the first time since my son was killed. But when I woke up, all I could think about were the mothers of those two young men."

I was myself the mother of two young children. If a mother could find compassion for the men who killed her son, then surely others could too. The desire to help myself and others further understand the experiences of people we had prosecuted led me to create a college class that would allow prosecutors to study alongside incarcerated students. The class centered on the lived experiences of the students and readings about justice, violence, punishment, and race. For the final assignment, students presented jointly crafted policy proposals to local lawmakers. This class is being replicated in other jurisdictions nationally, and significantly changing the relationship between prosecutors and the communities they are sworn to serve.

I have lived in Harlem for nearly twenty years, and my 5- and 6-year-old children remind me daily of the things that the criminal legal system has long ignored: that doing something wrong doesn't make someone a bad person, that kids warrant treatment as kids, and that punishment does not equate with accountability. Dismantling these long-held fallacies of the criminal legal system, however, requires more than this recognition alone. I know how to implement the transformative change the system needs because I have worked to reform it, both from the inside as an Assistant DA who served under two DAs, and from the outside as director of the Institute for Innovation in Prosecution who has worked closely with countless other DAs and their communities. I'm running for District Attorney to realize the full potential of what a DA can do: promote the dignity of every New Yorker, uphold racial and gender equity, and prioritize the prevention of crime, for all of us and all of our kids.

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