

Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People
Political Action Committee
Questionnaire for
Durham County Board of Commissioners

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Candidates wishing to be considered for an endorsement by DCABP PAC must submit a completed questionnaire and resume by the stated deadline, as well as participate in the interview process.

This questionnaire is due no later than Wednesday, January 1, 2020 at 11:59pm.

Please email your completed questionnaire as a pdf. file to pac.dcabp@gmail.com

1. Durham maintains a AAA bond rating that is managed by the county manager. Do you think that any of the budget components aligned with Black Durham's priorities? If yes, can you identify those components? If no, what budget priorities would you change?

I think very much of the 2019-20 County budget funding aligns with Black Durham's priorities. The Board of County Commissioners has approved the manager's recommended funding priorities in the budget for the past 3 years. Here are some highlights of the budget's funding components:

- Funding for Durham Public Schools increased by nearly \$13 million, including operations and capital funding, for a total of about \$145 million. This is the largest budget item and accounts for over 1/3 of county funds and keeps Durham County as one of the top three County supported school districts in the state. Approximately 42% of DPS students are African American, and the increased funding will help give our students the best education they deserve. The increased funding will help with recruitment of the best teachers by increasing the local salary supplement, among other Board of Education priorities.
- The budget includes funding to increase the quality and access to preschool in Durham County, with a goal of having Universal pre-K. The budget includes \$5.25 million for this goal. This will help address the racial inequities in access to Pre-K and kindergarten readiness.
- Funding for Durham Technical Community College was increased and includes \$1.5 million for the Durham Tech Promise scholarship, for which any DPS graduate is eligible.
- Employee compensation was increased by over \$3 million in the current budget. Many County staff are African American, and this compensation increase will help us achieve market competitiveness and internal equity of salary and benefits compensation. An additional \$3 million in health benefits is also included.
- ACES coordinator funding was included for a new position to help with the County's work

to reduce toxic trauma in the lives of Durham children and families. African American children face disproportionate levels of adverse experiences, and better coordination of services will help reduce this inequity.

- Chief Equity Officer funding is in the budget to continue and advance the County's work to improve racial equity in all policies and processes.
 - AIDS navigator position was funded to decrease the rate of HIV/AIDS related illness in Durham, which disproportionately affects African American individuals.
 - Funds for Made in Durham (MID) were increased to improve the education to workforce pipeline.
 - Economic development incentives helped to recruit over 2000 new jobs to Durham County with salaries that exceed the median for Durham. Many of these jobs do not require a college degree but will be good-paying jobs for Durham residents.
 - Durham County is using its publicly owned land to expand affordable housing options in downtown at 300/500 Main Street. The Board has selected a private partner team that is a Black female-owned business to provide the mixed-use elements and over 300 affordable units. This will help make downtown a place where more can afford to live and take advantage of the jobs and services nearby and will help prevent downtown from being the realm of the white upper class.
 - Minority Economic Development goals are monitored through County-funded staff positions and a contract with the Institute for Minority Economic Development.
 - Eviction diversion, permanent supportive housing, emergency rental assistance funding have all been increased in this year's budget to help people stay in their homes.
 - Bull City United is a County funded program to interrupt the spread of violence in specific neighborhoods in Durham with higher crime rates by intervening and providing jobs and services for those who might otherwise be a victim or perpetrator of a violent offense
 - Triple P program provides positive parenting support to help improve outcomes for young families and infants and to address the racially disproportionate infant mortality rate in Durham, that mirrors that of the nation.
2. What is the single most critical issue facing all of Durham County/City? How will you address the issue as a County Commissioner?

I think our most important issue is setting the County on a path that brings prosperity for all.

As we move into a new decade with a swelling population and a growing economy, we need careful planning and thoughtful decision-making to ensure new investments coming to Durham benefit us all. My two topmost guiding principles for decision-making are racial equity and environmental sustainability, and I think we must focus on three interlocked areas to bring shared prosperity: health, education and economic security. I work hard on complex social challenges in these three areas every day, and you can count on me for the following:

First, to build a culture of health for all in Durham, I am devoted to:

- Aggressive carbon-reduction policies and changes that make Durham greener
- Safe, affordable housing in neighborhoods free from drugs and violence
- Access to nutritious food from local farms and distributors
- Strong public health and social services that connect people with the resources they need
- Sustainable growth that protects our natural resources and watersheds
- Pedestrian- and bike-friendly trails and open spaces for physical activity and recreation

Second, to guarantee outstanding educational opportunities, I will fight for:

- A fully funded DPS budget for school operations, maintenance, and school construction
- Expanded access to universal, high-quality Durham Pre-K
- Delicious, nutritious food in our schools that 20,000 children depend on each day
- Prevention of adverse childhood experiences and trauma for families

Third, to promote a vibrant economy with opportunities for everyone, I will work hard for:

- Economic development that creates well-paying jobs and benefits our residents and communities
- Work-force development that aligns our residents' skills with jobs coming to Durham
- Transit options that serve the needs of all and connect people to jobs, schools and services
- Increased County contracting with local and minority businesses

I pledge to keep an open mind and listening heart as I work hard for you and with you to build a greener, healthier and more prosperous Durham for all.

3. What would be your top three priorities if elected County Commissioner? Why are these three priorities important? How will you fund the priorities?

My top three priorities are health, education, and economic security with a focus on improving racial equity and sustainability. Funding for all County priorities comes from property taxes, local sales taxes, occupancy taxes, fees, flow-through funds from the state and federal levels, and grant funding. The goal is to look for internal efficiencies first and eliminate funding for programs that aren't working before raising taxes for new funding. But I will consider raising taxes if the investments will work for our community by having a positive rate of return by improving the quality of life for Durham residents, especially those for whom Durham's prosperity has by-passed.

4. Describe your experience creating, interpreting, and managing budgets. How did you manage limited monetary resources during times of numerous "worthy" needs?

I have had extensive budget experience in my 12-year role as a member of the DPS Board of Education, where the board oversees a budget of approximately \$450 million. I have had another three years of budget experience as a County Commissioner overseeing the management of the County's \$625 million budget. I am the County Commissioner representative on the Alliance Health Board of Directors and help oversee their \$500 million budget for behavioral health services. I have also had budget experience as a member of many boards or commissions, such as the Durham County Board of Health and Student U Board, to name a couple.

One of our primary challenges as Commissioners is addressing what feels like unlimited "worthy" needs with very limited funding. While I will consider tax increases when other means of providing essential services are not available, I also know that we must balance the need against the reality that many in our community are on fixed or limited incomes and will have financial trouble with tax increases. That is one reason the Board of Commissioners and the City Council have asked our staff to analyze the legality and economic consequences of having a local property tax exclusion that is based on income. We are awaiting the results of that study.

I also support the Manager's Management for Results approach to governance. The County is

making proactive analyses of its programs to sunset those that may not be effective and support those that have evidence of working to achieve goals. The County could also conduct a comparative review of its spending benchmarked against “peer” counties and analyze areas where there may be unnecessary surplus spending.

5. Describe your public policy experience.

I have had public policy experience as a member of the Durham County Board of Health for 8 years, the DPS Board of Education for 12 years, and the Durham County Board of Commissioners for 3 years. I have a master’s degree in Public Health with a focus on health policy-making. My approach to policy-making includes seeking advice from management, listening to input from stakeholders (especially those whose voices have not been heard, historically), analyzing the research and data, and trying to make a wise decision that will benefit the most people over time, all while using a racial equity lens.

6. Do you support Sheriff Birkhead’s initiatives (as proposed to the County Commissioners)? Explain why or why not.

I want to do as much as the County can do to support the overall success of Sheriff Birkhead’s goals. It is very important that the Office of the Sheriff has the resources to uphold NC General Statutes, serve civil orders, promote safety and welfare within the detention center, provide animal control services, curb violent crime and more to keep Durham County safe.

I strongly support the Sheriff’s position on ICE detainees, and I also applaud the work of the Sheriff and District Attorney DeBerry to reduce the number of detainees in the detention center to a record low level. They both campaigned on these issues and have done an excellent job.

The County Manager recommended about \$39 million in funding out of the nearly \$42 million requested by Sheriff Birkhead. While I thought the Sheriff made a good case for many of the new 29 FTEs that he requested, I went with the Manager’s recommendation to hold FTEs steady, along with the rest of the Board of County Commissioners. I did push for additional funding for Animal Control and Patrol officers, but County staff indicated that there were numerous unfilled positions within the Office of the Sheriff that could be reclassified as needed by the Sheriff.

The Sheriff came back to the Board after the budget was approved with a request to make a reclassification. The request was to discontinue plans and funding positions for the Female Mental Health Pod within the detention center. Commissioners were concerned about not moving forward with the female pod and asked for more data on the number of female inmates with severe and persistent mental illness, as well as more data on the number of unfilled positions in the Sheriff’s office.

7. Do you agree with the County Commissioner’s support (budget and initiatives) of Durham Public Schools and Durham Technical Community College? Please explain your response with examples.

Yes, I agree with the many ways in which the County supports Durham Public Schools (DPS) and Durham Technical Community College (DTCC). Here are some of the ways the County provides

support, both through local funding and other County initiatives:

- Education funding for DPS and DTCC accounts for 35% of all local expenditures.
 - The County provides the third highest local funding for DPS of any County in the state at \$3,647 per pupil, an increase of \$205 per pupil from FY2018-19. I support continued increased funding to approach the full funding levels the Superintendent and Board of Education request in order to better meet the needs of its student population.
 - The County funded Community Schools Coordinator positions in two schools, along with 2 others funded by DPS. This is a pilot and is in partnership with the National Education Association.
 - The County provides \$145 million for DPS operations and \$1.37 million for capital funding for ongoing maintenance of DPS. The County increased its ongoing maintenance funding this year to address pent-up district needs. The County also holds bond referenda for school district and DTCC capital needs, and many projects are in the works as a result of the 2016 bond, including \$90 million for DPS projects and \$20 million for DTCC. The County's current 10-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) includes a General Obligation bond referendum scheduled for the fall of 2022 for an estimated \$149 million, with \$120 million for DPS and \$22 million for DTCC. An additional non-GO bond of \$50 million is also set aside for DPS capital needs associated with the new Northern High School.
 - The County and DPS are currently working together to sequence the planning and construction of two new elementary schools, and this could lead to some revisions of the current CIP. I support the County's efforts to provide capital funds for new Elementary C construction to begin as soon as possible.
 - A dedicated Article 46 sales tax allocation of about \$500,000 directly supports the DPS preschool efforts. The County also provides an additional \$4.5 million to expand access to high quality pre-K, and this is the Durham Pre-K initiative that supports both quality improvement and increased access for families by working with both DPS and community-based providers.
 - The County provides financial support for DTCC for the acquisition of land, erection of buildings, and purchases of motor vehicles; current expense funding for plant operations and maintenance; and support services including building and motor vehicle insurance. The County also provides large capital projects support through long term debt issuances, mainly General Obligation bonds, including \$20 million in support from the 2016 bond. Total funding in 2019-20 was nearly \$8 million.
 - The County also provides \$1.5 million for the Durham Tech promise scholarship for Durham high school graduates. This scholarship provides \$1000 per semester for students.
 - The County funds 30 school resource officers (\$2.7 million) and public health initiatives related to school nurses, nutrition education, and Project Build (\$3.4 million).
 - Nearly every County initiative indirectly supports the success of DPS students. Here are a few: funding for Rebound to work with suspended students; funding for El Futuro to support the mental health needs of Latinx students; System of Care; increased support for child welfare social workers; family support programming through the Cooperative Extension, including Welcome Baby and Kids Voting; funds for nonprofit work to promote food security; about \$300,000 for local produce in DPS school meals; and many more.
8. Acknowledging the need to distribute our tax dollars equitably, should the Black Durham

Chamber of Commerce receive equitable funding as the Durham Chamber of Commerce? Please quantify and justify the dollar amounts that should be allotted to each organization (for all candidates).

Incumbents only: Explain why the Black Chamber of Commerce was not equitably funded this year.

If the County Manager recommended it, I would support funding for the Black Durham Chamber of Commerce to carry out the contracted services the County seeks in order to meet its commitments to expanding opportunities for historically underutilized businesses, minority-owned, and women-owned businesses. The County Manager did not recommend funding for the Black Durham Chamber of Commerce for assistance in meeting our MWBE objectives and recommendations from the City/County Disparity Report.

The County management put out an RFP for help in reaching our MWBE goals and maximizing participation in the County's procurement and contracting opportunities through direct outreach, training and assistance with MWBE certification. The Institute for Minority Economic Development was awarded this contract initially in 2015, and it has been extended annually since then. I do not know if the Black Durham Chamber put in a proposal, but the recommendation from the Manager was for the contract to be awarded to the Institute for \$100,000.

The County also supports minority economic development in other ways. The County increased resources for the MWBE program when the Board of County Commissioners approved two full-time MWBE positions within the Purchasing Division, along with the contract with the Institute. The County also supports bonding assistance and access to capital programs through the Institute. Other efforts to increase minority business opportunities include on-line processes with an e-bid system; new MWBE ordinance and MWBE Program Plan Manual; internal and external MWBE Steering Committee; and others.

I know that disparities still exist in the economic development sphere, and we must stay focused on increasing opportunities for minority businesses. The County is making progress toward its goals of 25% participation. When the disparity study was done, overall MWBE participation was 6% and has increased to 20% in 2016-17, 17% in 2017-18, and projecting it to be 17% in 2018-19.

CJ Broderick, the President and CEO of the Durham Black Chamber of Commerce, emailed commissioners this past year with proposals for the County to work with the Durham Black Chamber. I read his proposals and responded to his emails. I contacted members of County staff for more information in response to his proposals. I thought the qualifications of his organization looked strong, and I would encourage him to bring his proposals forward, to the County Manager and staff for consideration, as soon as possible in the fiscal year 2020-21 budget cycle.

9. Have you ever attended racial equity training? If yes, which one(s) and what resonated most with you? What made you most uncomfortable? If no, why haven't you attended a racial equity training class?

Yes, I have attended phases I and II of Racial Equity Institute training, and I consider it to be

one of the most significant learning and growth experiences I have had. I learned much about the fact that race is a socially constructed difference, rather than a true biological difference, and that it was created in order to preserve the privileges that have accrued to those in the white race category in order to maintain white supremacy. I learned that the African American demographic group tends to have the worst outcomes in nearly all leading health, economic, education and other social indicators of success, even when controls for economic class are put in place. It became very clear that these poor outcomes for the so-labelled “black” race are the result of centuries of policies and practices that have been devised at the system level to protect and promote special privileges for those who fall within the “white” race category, all based on skin pigment alone.

Knowing that the pervasive racial inequity that we see is based on unfair systems that give advantages to white people made me uncomfortable and ashamed when I was at the training. The training helped me understand how critical it is for us to evaluate all our policy decisions based on what impact they might have on racial equity, so that we can work harder to improve outcomes for those who have been unfairly harmed by centuries of discrimination and for whom the advantage needs to be shifted.

10. About you:

- a. What would you like the DCABP PAC to know about you that is not identified in your above responses?

I believe that the endorsement of the DCABP is a badge of honor because it is an indicator of how well the African American leaders in Durham think someone either has done or will do in our community’s quest for greater racial equity. I have worked hard for the past 15 years to put policies in place that foster racial equity, and I covet the endorsement of the DCABP as a sign of trust in my efforts.

- b. How have you collaborated with or contributed to the mission of the DCABP over the past five years?

I have made financial contributions to the PAC and have worked earnestly for the best interests of African American children and families, both as a school board member and as a county commissioner. I participated in the jointly sponsored forum of the DCABP and the People’s Alliance on the topic of Prevention of School Suspensions.

- c. What does the DCABP mean to you?

I believe DCABP is a highly revered organization that advocates on behalf of Black people for fairness and just outcomes. I admire the current work of the organization, and I have deep respect for your history of fighting against racial discrimination, for the civil rights of African American residents, and for racial equity.

- d. If elected, how will you collaborate with the DCABP? Give specific examples.

I will meet with the DCABP leaders whenever invited and seek out the input of

the DCABP on policy issues in Durham County. I will work to determine the racial equity impact of all decisions. I will keep a listening heart and open mind with all my interactions with DCABP leadership and others with similar goals. I will seek DCABP participation on County-wide committees that might be formed to study issues and make recommendations. I am open to other suggestions, as well, for better collaboration.