

PA PAC Questionnaire for NC House and Senate - 2022

Please return the completed form along with your resume or biographical statement describing education, work history, community service, and prior political experience, as well as a high-resolution headshot of yourself as soon as possible, but by Sat Mar 19 at 5pm, at the latest.

Please e-mail your responses to PAC Coordinators at papacboard@googlegroups.com by Saturday, March 19 at 5pm.

Please note that following the Saturday, March 19 at 5pm deadline, the People's Alliance PAC may publish your responses to this questionnaire and your resume.

When answering this questionnaire, please repeat the questions in your response document with each question numbered and organized as it appears here. Type your responses in italics, bold, or a different font to distinguish your responses from the questions. Do not use colors or shading.

Please try to confine your responses to no more than 300 words unless another word limit is indicated. Do not feel obliged to exhaust the limit for each question.

If you use words or ideas from another person, please attribute your source.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire and your willingness to serve the people of Durham.

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Why Are You Running?

1. What are the three most important issues facing North Carolina? What are your top priorities in addressing these issues?

Fighting for Justice - Following the death of Geroge Floyd. The nation paid more attention to what the black community has known for years. Black people are not treated fairly or equally in our criminal justice system. Whether it's our court system, or our laws, they are not applied equally and fairly. Here in North Carolina, following the death of Andrew Brown, I traveled to Elizabeth City, to protest and attend the funeral of Mr. Brown. Following that visit, I was one of seven black senators that met with republican leadership to push for additional reforms in the main criminal justice bill of the session SB 300. Some of the highlights of SB 300:

- Promotes recruitment of officers with diverse backgrounds and experiences and improves training so that officers are better equipped to be successful
- Requires early intervention mechanisms to identify and correct officers who use excessive force or other misconduct

- Furthers independent investigations of police-involved shootings
- Limits local laws that criminalize poverty
- Requires a first appearance in court within 72 hours of a person being arrested.

This legislation is by no means perfect, or as bold as other bills that I have filed with my colleagues in the Senate Democratic Caucus, but that bill includes needed reforms and changes. I also co-sponsored a bill that will automatically expunge old offenses from the records of those that have committed non-violent crimes, and a bill that will decriminalize the use of small amounts of marijuana.

Abortion access and reproductive rights - This is a core part of my platform and a reason that I ran for office in 2020. I am a pro-choice candidate and a woman that is tired of men telling me what to do with my body. Health care decisions are personal and private. These are decisions that a woman should make following consultation with her doctor, family and faith. Reproductive rights are under constant attacks and I will continue to work to preserve these rights that so many allies fought for for years. The extreme abortion ban enacted in Texas is further evidence that we must continue to fight for the right for safe and legal abortions each day. On the senate floor, I often speak against legislation that pulls back against these rights. I worked with the State Innovation Exchange to encourage my NC senate colleagues to sign onto and amicus brief in support of legal abortion. The brief, signed by 896 state legislators from 45 states, represents the strongest showing ever recorded of state legislators supporting legal abortion nationwide. I pledge to carry that mantle and fight for full access to safe and legal abortions, birth control and reproductive rights.

Protecting the environment - I am a self-proclaimed green brown girl. Communities of color are often the first to be subjected to unclean air, water and pollution. Black people were often provided with the least desirable land that is more prone to flooding. Climate change is real. We need a red, black and green new deal that will get our nation and state back on the right track. I support calls requesting that the Governor and President declare a climate emergency and urge Congress to pass the Build Back Better Act to release the millions of dollars needed to fund renewable energy platforms, pay for a just transition and build a robust electric vehicle network. I was honored to attend COP26 and represent legislators from across the nation that are dedicated to fighting climate change at the state level. As a state senator, I have filed over a dozen "green bills" and was awarded with the "Defender of the Environment" Award from the League of Conservation Voters. I will continue to not only fight to protect our environment, but to ensure that diverse voices are heard and centered.

State Revenues, State Spending, and the Economy

2. Is the current system of state taxation fair? What changes should be made, if any? Please cite specific examples

North Carolina's regressive tax code allows the richest 1% to pay 6.4% of their incomes in state and local taxes whereas those in the middle and lowest quintiles pay approximately 9.5%. Tax cuts targeting wealthy individuals and corporations have slashed North Carolina's public investment.

3. Are you in favor of reducing government spending in any specific areas? If so, please list your top three specific areas and explain your reasons. Are you in favor of increasing government spending in any specific areas? If so, please list your top three specific areas and explain your reasons.

This last session, the majority pushed and passed an effort to reduce corporate taxes to 0%. I oppose this and think everyone should pay their fair share. Funding for opportunity scholarships increased, I don't support this. We have failed to fund Leandro. These funds should be going towards our public schools. I would also eliminate state funding for harmful pregnancy crisis centers.

4. What is your stance on the state of North Carolina utilizing economic development incentives, such as the One NC and JDIG programs to attract and recruit corporations?

I support providing incentives to attract more companies to NC. I also support making those programs reasonable and transparent with accountability. A number of the recent job announcements in Durham County have been a result of recruitment and incentives. Those incentives can also be canceled for failing to meet goals such as local hiring requirements, that I support.

Secure Elections, Fair Elections, and the Right to Vote

5. What changes need to be made to NC law to protect the right of all people to vote in free and fair elections?

Voting is a right. Election Day should be a state holiday and we should be automatically registered to vote. I applaud the hard work of Rep. Hawkins and Sen. McKissick to preserve Saturday voting and to ensure that student IDs could be accepted from various universities across the state. As a state senator I will continue to strive to make voting accessible. The state must establish automatic voter registration, make election day a holiday, and guarantee that voters continue to have access to at least two weeks of early voting dates, including the Saturday before an election.

Housing

6. What, if anything, should the NC government do to promote affordable housing and home ownership? What specific policies or programs would you use to do that? Do you support downpayment assistance for first time homebuyers? Rent control? Inclusionary zoning? Please detail your answer.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on housing will permeate every aspect of our lives for years to come. Those that are most vulnerable, working on the frontlines each day, will need long-term support. Eviction moratoriums have held off a massive crisis, but it's a ticking time bomb. Nationwide, over 40 million Americans are at risk of losing their homes. Our state, local leaders, and organizations will need to provide long-term support for the most basic of needs: housing and food. Since 2010, the cost of buying a home in Durham County has risen by 40%. Further, a modest two bedroom apartment in Durham County costs an average of \$990 per

month. For that to be considered affordable, a resident would need to make at least \$39,600 per year – much more than the average salary for our local jobs in food preparation and service, child care, sales, and construction. And across our District, people that have lived in their neighborhoods for decades are struggling to keep their homes.

I will continue to work to remove legislative barriers that prevent local communities from utilizing the creative and innovative tools that neighboring states are using to fight gentrification and keep people in their homes. We can work to expand public-private partnerships, incentivize homeowners to stay in their homes, and provide tax credits to communities that need help with home repairs to maintain the value of their homes. Renters need additional rights and support; I will continue to push to fund eviction diversion programs.

It's imperative that residents have a fair living wage in order to continue renting or owning homes, especially near their places of work. As the cost of living rises, wages remain stagnant. I support raising the state minimum wage and providing living wages. I would support a bill that would raise the minimum wage comparable to local cost of living adjustments.

Policies which could make housing more accessible to those in need include:

- **Invest in strong low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.** The General Assembly needs to allocate funds to create neighborhood associations in low-income neighborhoods. The state must also commit to keeping North Carolina's public services--like libraries, parks, schools, roads, and community centers--public.
- **Subsidize low-income renters.** The General Assembly should establish a progressive tax on luxury properties to subsidize low-income renters and homeowners in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods who commit to investing in their neighborhoods, like attending neighborhood association meetings and beautifying their streets.
- **Cap rent hikes.** North Carolina needs a percentage cap on yearly rent increases.
- **Fund eviction diversion programs.** Rising housing costs appear to negatively impact renters more than homeowners.
- **Get community input.** The General Assembly must establish a law stating that new city planning and housing regulations must undergo a thirty day public review period by community members before being enacted to ensure minimal burden on homeowners.
- **Fine bank-owned properties in blight.** North Carolina needs to create a fine for every day that bank-owned properties remain in blight to ensure property owners are investing in community properties.
- **Hold landlords accountable.** Renters need an easy-to-use method of reporting landlords who break contracts, unnecessarily raise rent, and exploit their tenants.

- **Encourage homeownership among low- and moderate-income families.** To encourage homeownership among low- and moderate-income taxpayers, the state should convert home related tax deductions into refundable tax credits.

In my first term in the Senate, I was able to sponsor and co-sponsor four bills to address several housing related issues.

SB 203 - Allow Durham Public Schools to Provide Housing

SB 386 - Expand Workforce Housing

SB 426 - Inclusionary Zoning/Affordable Housing

SB 588 - Low-Income Housing Tax Credits

7. What should the NC government do, if anything, to avoid an eviction crisis following the lifting of the COVID-era moratorium on evictions?

We need to fund eviction diversion programs, subsidize low income renters, cap rent hikes, and hold landlords accountable.

Wealth

8. What is your stance on the minimum wage? What do you consider to be a livable wage? What role should the NC government play in regulating wages?

According to MIT's [living wage calculator](#), the minimum wage in North Carolina is far below the wage necessary for a person working full time to support themselves--that is, to pay for food, shelter, medical care, and transportation. Further, in Durham County, transportation and housing make up almost 60% of a single person's yearly expenses--20% and 40% respectively. 16% of Durham County residents live below the poverty level, and a community health assessment recently identified poverty as one of the top three community priorities for Durham County residents. To combat poverty and ensure a living wage that can support people's livelihoods, the General Assembly must commit to increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2024 for all North Carolina workers.

9. How can we bring more progressivity to North Carolina's tax code?

I filed legislation, SB 710 that works to bring more equity to our tax system. The bill - Tax Plan for a Just Recovery - provides \$1.7 billion in equitable revenue to invest in community priorities for a just recovery—a sound, basic education for every child, a quality early education system in every community, a commitment to safe, affordable housing for all families and the infrastructure to steward natural resources and support the health and well-being of North Carolinians.

One percent of North Carolinians would see their taxes increase. The personal income tax changes raise taxes paid by the top 5 percent. North Carolina's tax code asks the top to pay less as a share of their income than taxpayers with poverty level income.

The corporate income tax changes impacting in-state residents are also concentrated at the top. 69 percent of the taxes raised would be paid by the top 20 percent of taxpayers. This tax change would still allow our state to have the lowest corporate tax rate in the region.

Guns

10. What, if anything, should be done to reduce the proliferation of firearms and reduce gun violence in NC?

At the core, we have too many guns on the street and gun sales continue to rise. I support universal background checks for all gun purchases. So many other countries have reduced gun violence with gun buyback programs and common sense gun laws. We must get the rapid rise in gun sales under control. Assault weapons and accessories such as bump stocks should not be commercially available in North Carolina.

Waiting periods are also essential. I support Rep Morey's work on HB86 in 2018-2019, which would establish a three-day waiting period.

I also support the work Rep Morey has done on HB 525 and Extreme Risk Protection Order legislation. We need to enable family members, friends, partners, law enforcement, and health care providers to file a petition to the court if they are concerned about the safety of an individual to themselves or to others.

We need to better support gun violence intervention programs in Durham and throughout the state. Improving and investing in organizations which use public health approaches to gun violence can help:

- Detect and interrupt conflicts.
- Identify and treat individuals at high risk of involvement in violence.
- Change social norms that tolerate violence in the community.

Civil Rights and Race Equity

11. What should the state do to promote racial equity and diversity, such as increasing opportunities for under-represented and under-served people of color? Can you provide an example of your advocacy for race-equity and diversity?

There is so much the state can and should do to promote opportunities for people of color in our state. As a brand new senator, when a piece of legislation was going to have a disproportionate impact on women of color, I spoke against it and worked to kill the bill. During floor debate I suggested that we apply a racial equity lense to each piece of legislation that we consider.

Two legislative examples I will share is my work with other black caucus members to increase funding for our HBCUs, that funding has never been competitive with PWIs. I also fight for more funding for minority business programs, each session we have to fight for this funding. During the pandemic, black businesses were severely impacted, they need resources as they continue to fight to keep their doors open.

All legislators should also be required to complete racial equity training.

The Environment

12. Addressing the climate crisis through transformative, intersectional policies will be essential to keeping NC communities safe, healthy, and vibrant. What do you see as the most critical environmental and climate justice issues facing NC and your district? If elected, how would you leverage your role to address them?

We all have a right to clean air and water. We need all legislators that know climate change is real and are willing to do something about it. Studies show that even a fraction of offshore wind energy resources could help meet North Carolina's energy needs by 20%. A 2019 Emissions Gap Report from the United Nations states that mass transportation is necessary to curb emissions and reduce the impacts of climate change. I continue to commit to implementing evidence-based solutions to address our gaps in air and water quality, and will increase state investment in renewable energy and programs that preserve and conserve our water.

Policy Solutions:

- **100% renewable energy by 2050.** The North Carolina legislature needs to commit to funding projects necessary to reach Governor Cooper's goal of producing 100% renewable energy by 2050, including funding Cooper's offshore wind farm job study in full.

- **Higher water treatment standards.** While the Federal Administration rolls back regulations on coal ash disposal, North Carolina must lead the nation in continuing to uphold Obama-era standards, as well as moving toward proactive, higher standards for our air and water with clear consequences and means of enforcement. This includes reevaluating state water treatment processes to ensure that in cases of water contamination, contaminants are properly removed or inactivated.

- **Expand mass transit.** The General Assembly must commit to expanding mass transit across the state, with an emphasis on low-cost or free public transit systems. This will drastically reduce emissions polluting our air and help reduce the effects of climate change.

- **Greater energy efficiency.** The state legislature needs to implement energy efficient building code and appliance regulations. Companies need to internalize the negative externality created by carbon emissions through 1) environmental taxes on unsustainable production and 2) cap and trade policies for companies over 50 employees.

- **Repeal harmful policies.** The NC Farm Act of 2018 and House Bill 56, "Amend environmental Laws" has the potential to allow for more pollutants and contaminants in North Carolina air and water. It's time to review and amend these laws and commit to higher environmental standards.

- **Invest in STEM.** North Carolina has the brightest minds in the country. We can lead efforts to create a sustainable world by creating STEM project grant funds to get young people excited about environmentally-friendly innovation.

13. Duke Energy's monopoly on our utilities has severely curbed the expansion of clean energy across North Carolina and locked us into the expansion of harmful gas plants – with disproportionate pollution and cost burdens falling on Black and Brown communities. What creative ideas will you bring to the Legislature to push back against Duke energy to create a more safe, affordable, and resilient electricity sector?

House Bill 951 was very much a compromise bill - perhaps one of the most bipartisan that has made it to the governor's desk in 2021. We moved very quickly through this process and did not have the opportunity to have a lot of robust public engagement or with other stakeholders. I am excited, however, that North Carolina will be the only state in the South where our carbon reduction goals are codified in statute.

Where the bill falls short is that we cannot have that compromise on the backs of low income individuals, who will not have the ability to pay their energy bills, even though they have access to energy and utilities. What does that really mean? It means the ability for mothers to turn their lights on and warm bottles for their children. It means our ability to make sure we have a stable power grid since we know that black and brown people are more susceptible to having to move in the event that there is some extreme weather emergency.

We are still dealing with the pandemic. North Carolina needs to implement a "just transition" process, where if you lose your job due to a shift in environmental technology, we will spell out how we will assist you by providing other skill sets to get jobs in the clean and renewable energy sector. What's most concerning is for Duke Energy to have access to multi-year rate making where we know energy bills could go up 4% in a single year.

Energy is not optional. It is something we all need. It is one of the most basic utilities that we can provide. I could not support this bill, but I do commend my colleagues for all of their hard work. This is a first step, but we can do better.

14, Other states like California and Colorado have rolled out "Climate Corps" programs that create thousands of good jobs increasing community resilience to climate change, reducing pollution, and building out renewable energy. What ideas do you have for how North Carolina can promote green jobs and workforce development, while addressing the climate crisis and reducing pollution in our most-impacted neighborhoods?

As a green girl, it would be exciting to see North Carolina start Climate Corps programs. National service can be a solution to the intersecting challenges of climate change, unemployment, and racial inequity facing our country today. By focusing on areas such as mass transit, we can create new jobs and help reduce air pollution.

These green good paying jobs are also new to a lot of folks, this program provides folks with exposure to this new and exciting field. As we fight to phase out fossil fuel and reduce our dependence on coal, a "just transition" is needed. We need to support our workforce throughout what will be a promising but difficult transition. I also would like to follow the Colorado model by forming an Office of Just Transition here in NC.

State and Local Government Relations

15. In what ways should NC preempt local governments? In what ways in which it currently does so should it not?

Like many other states, conservative dominance of North Carolina's state legislature has provided the opportunity to thwart progressive local policies. This will get worse if they regain a supermajority. Many of these preemptive state laws are part of a long-term strategy by corporate interests to consolidate power at the state level and end local authority over a variety of issues. We need to be mindful that much of this effort for state laws to misuse preemption has been orchestrated by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

Education

16. What is your record of support for community colleges and what do you see as the role of community college in increasing access to economic mobility and higher education for those who want it?

Community colleges act as a platform for many students to attain a high-quality education with skills and training that are imperative for their success as well as our economy. However, "community college students end up with lower incomes and default on their loans at higher rates," Young Invincibles Report. We need to push for funding for public education and free tuition at community colleges.

We also need to increase the pay for staff and update the formula they use to determine pay. Depending on their classification, some instructors are paid by instruction hour, not office hours, or the outside work they do with their students, that needs to be addressed in order to keep some of our best instructors in the community college system.

17. What policies would you pursue to increase access to four-year college, community college, training programs, and workforce development initiatives?

To restore our middle class, we need to focus on secondary and higher education attainment.

When students and families are required to take out high-price loans, it is much harder to enter the middle class. Though numbers for Black and Latinx students are on the rise, their ability to enter and succeed in college often declines, contributing to the debt that they acquire. "Among the 75 million Millennials, about 40 percent are people of color – African Americans, Latinx, Native Americans, and Asian & Pacific Islanders – significant growth from the previous generation...Simply put, people of color will become the new majority in educational and workforce settings during our lifetime. At the same time, our country is plagued by deep and persistent inequities by race and ethnicity from classrooms to boardrooms..." Young Invincibles Report says. We need to invest in our future by ensuring everyone has access to education on all levels, which includes a high-quality and affordable postsecondary education. "Increased education attainment for communities of color can improve income and economic security," The Asset Value of Whiteness: Understanding the Racial Wealth Gap.

The causes in higher education attainment and affordability are often systemic barriers like

the school-to-prison +pipeline, access to resources and opportunities, discrimination, and public policy that does not give everyone a fair chance to succeed. In addition, these same barriers exist for those who attend higher education but are not successful in completing their degrees. We need equity-focused solutions that address gaps based on what has historically been institutionalized by racist and classist agendas.

Here are the key issues I would focus on:

- **Student support services.** Students wishing to attain a higher education need access to programs to support them with college applications, loan resources, budgeting, scholarships, and FAFSA completion. We especially need to expand these services and programs to communities of color and assess current Student Support Services to reach more low-income, Black, and Latinx students.
- **Protect students from predatory colleges.** For-profit colleges enroll low-income students at higher rates than public and private non-profit colleges. Among them, African American students make up 30 percent of those at for-profit institutions while only making up 14 percent of all college students. “For-profit colleges only enroll about 9 percent of all college students, yet they cause nearly half of all student loan defaults,” *Why the Feds Should Regulate For-Profit Colleges*, Huffington Post. We need to ensure that we protect people from fraud and false advertising through consumer protections and hold for-profit institutions accountable for their failing rates, especially when these practices are targeting vulnerable populations.
- **Free-tuition community colleges.** Community colleges act as a platform for many students to attain a high-quality education with skills and training that are imperative for their success as well as our economy. However, “community college students end up with lower incomes and default on their loans at higher rates,” Young Invincibles Report. We need to push for funding for public education and free tuition at community colleges.
- **Reevaluate Pell Grants and Federal Work Study.** “When subtracting grants awarded to students, college costs still eat up 48 percent of African American families’ income,” US Department of Education. When students leave to pay back their loans, Black and Latinx families still dedicate large portions of their income to loan payments. We need to reevaluate Pell Grants and Federal Work Study to accommodate for these gaps and keep pace with rising college costs.

18. What, if anything, should the NC government do to promote the education of youth in the history of civil rights, racial inequality, and the legacy of racial discrimination in the United States and NC?

We need to teach all of our American history. We need to teach the good parts and we need to teach the bad. I’m a North Carolina native and do not recall learning about the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot during my K-12 education. We are in the midst of reconciling with a lot of our history, which makes people uncomfortable. Republicans want to shy away from that because they don’t want us to have these critical conversations. When you target teachers and children, you’re asking teachers to censor themselves and become fearful from sharing all of the history

of this state. The conversation around Critical Race Theory continues to distract from the real fact that we continue to fail our students and teachers.

We must begin to engage in open and honest discussions. Encouraging conversation, learning, and empathy are key to having real conversations around race, class and a number of other difficult conversations. We will need to get comfortable with the uncomfortable. Our schools need to build generations of critical thinkers. Not students that are shielded from truth and facts.

We need to be building our children up so that they can ask those difficult questions and obtain the information to become critical thinkers and form their own opinion. I enjoy collaborating with parents and teachers and am always thrilled to do so. With that said, as legislators we also need to know when to step out of the classroom and allow teachers to do their job. We should fund education but not try to micromanage our educators across the state.

Party Politics

19. If you find your party in the minority in your elected body, what do you see as the role of the minority party? Please detail the role of deal making with members of the opposing party, especially on issues on which deep divisions exist. Please give specific examples from your past.

As a member of the minority, we have to work with the majority. I have no issue doing this because I believe in getting things done, to do that, you must work with those in power.

This includes sponsoring bills with those in power and reaching out to them to share the issues you are facing in your community.

Here in North Carolina, following the death of Andrew Brown, I traveled to Elizabeth City, to protest and attend the funeral of Mr. Brown. Following that visit, I was one of seven black senators that met with republican leadership to push for additional reforms in the main criminal justice bill of the session SB 300.

Another example is that as a member of the NC Legislative Black Caucus, I shared the need to provide Medicaid to women 12 month postpartum with Republican leadership. Currently, new mothers lose Medicaid coverage after 60 days. We worked with Republican leadership, and that provision was included in the final signed budget.

It is my no means easy, but reaching across the aisle is something I do each day as a legislator.

Campaign Funding

20. Does your campaign have specific policies regarding from whom it accepts donations? Please specifically detail any contributions from corporations to your current and prior campaigns. How do you see the influence of donors on policy, both for yourself and for others?

I raise funds through call time, virtual and in-person fundraisers, targeted mail, fundraising emails and organizational PAC money (I don't accept funds from corporate PACs).

During 2021, I was funded primarily from individual donors who usually contributed between \$25 to \$100. In addition, I received no contributions from PACs and only had one contributor that maxed out their contribution for 2021.

If I could change the rules, I would want to see the “Citizens United” ruling overturned. Our national political dialogue is being poisoned by the endless stream of corporate dark money that has been pouring into the country since 2010. Winning campaigns should be powered by the people, not by unknown actors with unlimited bank accounts.

Your Politics

21. For whom did you vote in the 2020 United States Senate and presidential elections?

2020 President: Joe Biden

2020 US Senate: Cal Cunningham