

## **PA PAC Questionnaire for Durham Board of County Commissioners – 2024**

**Please return the completed form along with your resume or biographical statement describing education, work history, community service, and prior political experience as soon as possible, but by Wednesday, January 3 at 5pm at the latest.**

***Please also include a high resolution headshot for the PA mailer in case you are endorsed.***

**Please email your responses to the PAC coordinators at [papacboard@googlegroups.com](mailto:papacboard@googlegroups.com) by**

**Wednesday, January 3 at 5pm**

**Please note that following the Wednesday, January 3 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.**

Candidate's name: Dr. Mike Lee

Address: PO Box 2241 Durham, NC. 27702

E-mail Address: mikelee4durham@gmail.com

Phone: 919-415-1320

Website: votemikelee.com

### **Government and the Public Good**

**1. Of all the issues confronting Durham County, which single issue is most important to you and why? What would you do about it if you are elected?**

*The significance of education in Durham cannot be overstated, as it is the cornerstone of our community's prosperity and well-being. As a former chairman of the Board of Education, I hold Durham Public Schools in high regard for their efforts in educating our children. DPS staff play a pivotal role in our community, and we must continue to invest in our schools to maintain and enhance the quality of education. As your county commissioner, I will advocate for fully funding our public schools and enhancing our education system.*

*Our collective goal should be to achieve excellence in our educational system. Historical evidence suggests that when public schools improve, a ripple effect can be observed: the local economy expands, prosperity increases, and there is a subsequent rise in job creation and business development within the community while crime and violence decrease.*

*The path to enhancing the effectiveness of Durham Public Schools extends beyond the classroom. It involves a comprehensive approach that includes the support structures integral to a student's success. Access to mental health resources is a prime example—students perform better when their emotional well-being is addressed. Similarly, ensuring food and housing security removes barriers to learning, allowing students to focus on their studies rather than where their next meal will come from or if they will have a stable place to live.*

*Also, exposure to local businesses, technology, and career-related experiences can significantly impact a student's ability to thrive post-graduation. Introducing students to potential career paths and providing hands-on experience can inspire and prepare them for the future workforce.*

*When we, as a community, unite to provide Durham Public Schools students with the necessary tools for success and opportunities that extend beyond the classroom, we can begin to alleviate many of the pressing issues facing our city. Education is not just about teaching children; it's about equipping them to be the problem-solvers and leaders of tomorrow. Hence, the focus of Durham County should include strengthening the various pillars that support and enhance our students' educational journey. By doing so, we are not merely investing in individual futures but in the collective future of Durham itself.*

## **2. How can county government use its authority and its resources to direct jobs to those who most need them and to lift the wages of the lowest-paid workers in Durham?**

*County government has a multifaceted role in fostering job creation for those most in need and enhancing the wages of our lowest-paid workers. This can be achieved through a strategic and pragmatic approach that leverages the county's resources and authority.*

*Firstly, the county can extend policies, that encourage the growth of industries that provide living wages. By offering tax incentives, subsidies, or grants to businesses that commit to paying higher wages, we can create an economic environment that rewards responsible employers. Additionally, the county can prioritize projects with union companies committed to pay fair wages and employment opportunities for underserved populations.*

*Secondly, investing in workforce development programs is essential. As a county commissioner, I will prioritize the growth of the BULLS Initiative where County government collaborates with local educational institutions and trade schools to create training programs tailored to the local economy's needs. The expansion of DPS's partnership with Durham Tech to increase students in trade programs. By*

*aligning these programs with the skills employers demand now and in the future, we ensure that our residents are competitive candidates for higher-wage positions.*

*As a county commissioner, I will advocate for creating public works projects to improve our infrastructure and provide jobs to those who need them most. These projects should prioritize hiring residents and paying them a living wage.*

*Lastly, the county should further support small businesses and startups, as they are a significant source of employment. Providing them with the necessary support can lead to job growth and, in turn, higher wages. This support can provide easier access to credit and business development services and reduce bureaucratic hurdles.*

*In conclusion, the county government has various tools to direct jobs to those needing them most and raise wages. We can create a stronger, more equitable economy for Durham by incentivizing fair employment practices, investing in education and training, directly influencing wage policies, creating job opportunities through public works, and supporting small businesses.*

## **Education, etc**

**3. What issues do you see with school construction and student school assignments? What role should race equity play with regard to school construction and student assignment? Please address cost overruns that have reduced the reach of the last education bond.**

*Ensuring every DPS student has access to a top-tier educational setting is paramount. It is unacceptable for students to attend schools that are less well maintained than other county facilities. Due to constrained capital budget allocations from the county, school construction and major maintenance have lagged in recent years. Traditionally, many of the DPS Board of Education's requests for essential building repairs have been relegated to a deferred maintenance list when faced with budget reductions.*

*Despite these challenges, DPS has successfully constructed two new schools and is in the process of rebuilding Northern High School, thanks to robust support from our county commissioners. Nonetheless, cost overruns and economic volatility have posed significant hurdles. The education bond in 2018 was intended to cover the entire budget for the new Northern High School. However, the bond was substantially reduced, delaying the completion of Northern High and other projects until subsequent funding could be secured. As chairman of the DPS Board of Education, I have consistently highlighted the risks of construction cost escalation—a concern that became a reality with the COVID-19 pandemic.*

*As a county commissioner, my expertise as a Project Management Professional (PMP) will be instrumental in advocating for more precise contingencies to prevent future overruns. Accurate forecasting and risk management are critical in our current economy, where predicting construction costs is increasingly challenging.*

*Student assignment is another complex issue. DPS's "Growing Together" plan, commencing in fall 2024, will introduce diverse programs in each zone. When developing this plan, we approached assignments by being committed to racial equity, ensuring all zones provide equitable access to the most sought-after programs. Accessibility is crucial, and our equity-focused strategy aims to eliminate barriers, enabling every student to engage with programs of interest regardless of their residential location in Durham County. This comprehensive approach ensures equitable school construction and fair student assignment practices.*

**4. What are your thoughts about the expansion of the HEART program to schools? How do you envision HEART interacting with the SRO program, both in terms of funding and within schools themselves?**

*The HEART program is a crucial initiative, particularly for mitigating conflicts that may not require law enforcement. As a proponent of this program, I endorse its expansion across the county and within our schools. As a county commissioner, I would support a strategic and thoughtful approach to navigating the complexities of integrating this program county-wide and within our schools.*

*One of my primary proposals involves the establishment of a specialized task force. This task force would be a collaborative ensemble comprising members from various sectors: the Durham Police Department, HEART Staff, the Durham County Sheriff's Office, school principals, mental health experts, students, and members of the Durham Community Safety and Wellness Task Force. The fundamental objective of this task force is to establish effective methods for safely incorporating the HEART program into our schools.*

*It is important to recognize that the HEART staff should augment, rather than replace, the existing SRO program. Therefore, financial allocations must reflect the significance of operating both programs concurrently in our educational settings rather than choosing one over the other.*

*A pivotal aspect of my vision for Durham County is prioritizing professional counseling services in each school. Although there are a few counselors across the school district, their case loads are up to 4 times higher than the national recommendation, and many times they have to travel to multiple schools each day. These counselors will be trained to support SROs by managing critical situations that may not require immediate SRO intervention. The synergy between mental health professionals, SROs, and school administration will be a key focus of the task force dedicated to the HEART Program's expansion. This collaboration aims to foster a more integrated and effective approach to addressing the unique challenges within our schools, ensuring a safer and more supportive environment for all students.*

**5. Library staff have asked for an increased workforce, in part to support Sunday opening hours, but in the bigger picture, to enable one of the highest rated County services to fully function. As County Commissioner, how would you support, preserve, and grow the staff and programs of the library? How would you get input from library staff in the process of doing so?**

*As a candidate for county commissioner, I deeply value our public libraries' role as cornerstones of community education, resources, and engagement. I would take a multifaceted approach to support, preserve, and expand the library's staff and programs.*

*First, I would examine the current budget and funding allocations to identify areas where resources could be reallocated to support increased staffing for the library, particularly to facilitate extended opening hours on Sundays. Access to library services seven days a week is essential for equitable access to all community members, including students, working adults, and families.*

*I also would advocate for exploring alternative funding streams, such as grants and partnerships with local businesses and educational institutions, which could provide additional support for library programs and staff expansion. This could include sponsorships for special programs or investments in technology that enhance the library's offerings.*

*To ensure library services' growth aligns with staff expertise and community needs, I propose regular consultation with library personnel. Their insights are invaluable; they interact with patrons daily and understand what makes the library function effectively. I would support the establishment of a library advisory committee, comprised of staff members across various roles within the library system, to advise the county commission on the needs and opportunities for the library.*

*Additionally, I would promote community engagement initiatives to gather input from Durham residents about the services and programs they value and wish to see in their libraries. This would be facilitated through public forums, surveys, and suggestion boxes within the library branches.*

*As County Commissioner, my commitment to our libraries would be unwavering, ensuring they have the necessary resources to continue their mission of service to the public. Through thoughtful planning, community and staff input, and responsible budgeting, we can ensure that our libraries maintain their high service standards and grow to meet the evolving needs of our diverse community.*

## **Housing, Planning, and Neighborhoods**

### **6. What planning policies and priorities do you wish to see emerge from the on-going review and revision of Durham's Uniform Development Ordinance?**

*Durham's growth has been rapid and remarkable, bringing a pressing need to ensure that development is balanced with the preservation and creation of recreational spaces. Section 12.5 of the Uniform Development Ordinance, which mandates the inclusion of active or passive recreational land in new developments, is crucial for maintaining this balance. Unfortunately, there appears to be a discrepancy between the policy and its implementation, with numerous new complexes and neighborhoods lacking the required recreational spaces. This not only impacts the community's aesthetic but also its health, well-being, and cohesion.*

*As a county commissioner, I will focus on upholding and enforcing this ordinance rigorously. I appreciate that it may not always be feasible for every development to include such spaces directly due to various constraints. Therefore, I propose a pragmatic solution: developments that cannot incorporate recreational areas should contribute to a county-wide recreational land fund. This fund would be utilized to create larger, more impactful recreational projects that benefit the broader community, ensuring that all residents of Durham County have access to quality outdoor and athletic spaces.*

*This approach recognizes the reality of development while ensuring that our county's growth does not come at the cost of our residents' quality of life. It also helps to grow Durham's rich talent pool by providing facilities that support and nurture our community's diverse abilities and interests.*

*By implementing such innovative policies, we can ensure that Durham continues to thrive, where living standards are high and the community's needs are met. Such strategic planning will enable us to foster an environment that is not only conducive to growth but also to the health and happiness of all our residents.*

**7. Should the County expand permanently supportive housing? What do you see as the role of PSH in community reentry? What other roles does it play?**

*Expanding permanent supportive housing in Durham County is a critical step toward addressing the complex issues of homelessness and housing insecurity. Every person within Durham County physically and emotionally, belongs here. PSH provides a stable living environment and combines this with essential services like healthcare, substance abuse treatment, and job training, which are fundamental to supporting the holistic needs of our most vulnerable residents.*

*The role of PSH in community reentry, particularly for individuals exiting the criminal justice system or transitioning from homelessness, is invaluable. It offers a structured environment that can significantly reduce the risk of recidivism by providing the stability and support necessary for successful reintegration into the community. The availability of consistent housing and supportive services through PSH creates a foundation upon which individuals can rebuild their lives, seek employment, and regain independence.*

*PSH plays a critical role in preventing homelessness by serving as a long-term housing solution for those with disabilities or chronic health issues who require ongoing support. It is also an effective platform for combating poverty and homelessness, contributing to public safety, and reducing the burden on emergency services.*

*As a county commissioner, I will champion the expansion of PSH in Durham County. By doing so, we affirm our commitment to supporting our most vulnerable populations and investing in our community's social and economic well-being. The implementation of PSH is not merely a housing strategy; it is a community development tool that has far-reaching benefits for all of Durham County.*

## County Finances, Transportation, Incentives, and Services

### **8. What is your position on providing public incentives to private firms to promote economic development in Durham? How can county government use development incentives to promote more widely shared prosperity, including better jobs and higher wages for Durham residents?**

*I support Durham County providing public incentives to private firms for economic development with important and strategic stipulations. The vitality of Durham's economy hinges on the ability to attract and retain businesses that contribute to the community's prosperity. However, incentives should not be dispensed indiscriminately; they must be part of a structured, performance-based system that ensures tangible benefits for Durham and its residents.*

*In providing these incentives, the county government must prioritize outcomes that align with broader social objectives. This includes not only creating jobs but also the assurance of quality positions that offer competitive wages and opportunities for advancement, particularly for underserved populations. Incentives could be contingent on firms meeting specific criteria, such as hiring locally, offering training programs, dedicating internships to DPS students, providing a certain number of well-paying jobs or union jobs, and demonstrating a commitment to environmentally sustainable practices.*

*As a county commissioner, I will advocate for a robust monitoring framework that is essential to evaluating the effectiveness of these incentives in achieving targeted economic outcomes. Such a framework would hold firms accountable for their performance against the agreed-upon objectives and ensure that the benefits of public investments are realized.*

*The county government should also consider non-traditional incentives that can drive economic development while fostering social equity. This could include support for worker cooperatives, small business incubation, and partnerships with DPS, Durham Tech, and NCCU to develop a skilled workforce tailored to the needs of incoming businesses.*

*By leveraging these incentives, Durham can cultivate a diversified economy that invites innovation and growth and ensures that prosperity is equitably distributed. Public incentives can be a powerful tool for building a more resilient and inclusive local economy through pragmatic leadership, strategic planning, rigorous assessment, and a commitment to Durham's community objectives.*

### **9. What non-traditional programs (such as public banking, community investment trusts, community development venture capital) could Durham County implement to reduce economic inequality in our community?**

*Public Banking: A Durham County public bank could be instrumental in driving equitable development. By reinvesting public funds locally, we could provide affordable loans to small businesses, support affordable housing projects, and fund infrastructure improvements, all while keeping profits within the community.*

*This model would ensure that our financial systems serve the public interest first, providing fairer banking services to traditionally underserved populations.*

*Community Investment Trusts (CITs): CITs are designed to allow residents to invest in their communities, building wealth locally. By enabling citizens to purchase shares of local assets, such as commercial real estate, we can ensure that the benefits of growth are shared. This model not only fosters economic inclusion but also encourages residents to have a vested interest in the development and success of their community.*

*Social Impact Bonds: Social Impact Bonds are a pragmatic way to finance social programs where investors only receive their money back from the government if the programs succeed in achieving their goals, such as lowering homelessness or enhancing education. It's a creative way to fund new social programs without upfront taxpayer expense and to ensure accountability for results.*

*In addition to these programs, I propose exploring other ideas such as a Durham Community Innovation Fund, Cooperative Business Models, Community-Supported Agriculture, and a Local Currency System. I would also advocate for other innovative programs such as the Guaranteed Income program that Durham County is already building to reduce economic inequality.*

*As a county commissioner, I would collaborate with financial experts, community leaders, and residents to tailor these programs to Durham County's unique needs. We would determine which initiatives resonate most with our citizens through town halls and community surveys. This inclusive approach ensures that our efforts to reduce economic inequality are well-supported and have the highest potential for lasting impact.*

## **10. What should be the principal components of a new public transit plan for Durham County?**

*The public transit plan for Durham County should be dynamic, addressing the needs of our growing population with foresight and inclusivity. The plan ratified in June 2023 provides a solid foundation, but we must ensure that it evolves with our community's changing demographics and development through 2045.*

*The plan should prioritize connectivity and accessibility, specifically targeting the expansion of services to burgeoning areas of the county—namely, the southeast, southwest, and northern regions around the Duke and Roxboro merge. As these areas are forecast to experience considerable growth, our public transit infrastructure must grow concurrently to provide reliable transportation.*

*An expanded public transit system in these key growth centers will serve multiple purposes. It will support residents moving further from the city center due to the rising housing costs, ensuring that all Durham residents, regardless of where they live, can access the city's amenities and employment opportunities. Moreover, such expansion is not just about facilitating movement; it's about nurturing the possibility for*



*all residents to live and prosper in Durham, aligning with my principle that those who work in Durham can also thrive here.*

*The transit plan should also be environmentally sustainable, utilizing clean energy sources to reduce our carbon footprint, such as expanding electric buses. Additionally, incorporating technology for real-time updates and improved rider experiences can make public transit a more attractive option for all.*

*As a county commissioner, I will advocate for a transit system that is not only far-reaching but is also efficient, affordable, and environmentally responsible. Doing so can ensure a future where public transit is a viable option for every Durham resident, contributing to the county's economic vitality and quality of life. This comprehensive approach to public transit is a cornerstone of sustainable urban development and social equity.*

**11. What, if anything, should the county do to distribute the property tax burden with greater equity and fairness?**

*Durham County's property tax system currently has programs designed to balance the scales of equity and fairness for all residents. The county implements impactful programs such as the Low-Income Homeowner Relief (LIHR) and regular homestead exemptions, which provide significant relief to eligible homeowners. These programs are vital in offering a reprieve to residents burdened by property taxes, potentially altering their lives for the better.*

*As a county commissioner, I will leverage my background in customer success to ensure that these programs are available and proactively communicated to residents who might benefit from them. The proactive engagement of tax advisors is key. They should reach out to homeowners at the first indicators of fiscal stress, guiding them through the various options for assistance, whether long-term or temporary relief.*

*To further this goal, the county must also be forward-thinking, developing proactive strategies that preclude the need for tax assistance. I propose an innovative tax relief approach that mirrors certain vehicle taxation aspects. This would involve a gradual reduction in property taxes for original owners over a period, such as a 30-year cycle, to lessen the tax load as the property ages. This reduction would only apply to owner-occupied homes, not rental properties, and would reset upon transfer of ownership. This could incentivize residents to retain ownership while alleviating the pressure of taxes over time.*

*It's important to note that the above concept is in the developmental stage and requires careful consideration and planning to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability. As a county commissioner, I am committed to exploring and bringing such ideas to fruition to promote greater equity and fairness in our community's tax system.*

**Justice and Law Enforcement**

**12. Explain how you see the County's role in overseeing the Durham jail. Under what circumstances, if any, should the county intervene to improve the lives of incarcerated individuals?**

*The County's role in overseeing the Durham jail is to ensure it operates fairly, humanely, and efficiently while focusing on rehabilitation and reintegration. In partnership with the Sheriff's office, the county must prioritize the well-being of incarcerated individuals, recognizing that they are members of our community who will likely return to their neighborhoods.*

*County oversight should also ensure that the Sheriff has the resources to meet the high standards of care, safety, and respect for the rights of the incarcerated. This includes adequate medical care, mental health support, and opportunities for education and vocational training. The county should also work to implement and support programs that reduce recidivism by providing inmates with the tools needed to transition back into society successfully.*

*Should there be an issue with transparency or accountability, the county must work with the Sheriff to quickly address any concerns brought forward. The county needs to maintain a system of checks and balances that includes independent oversight, community involvement, and clear reporting mechanisms.*

*The county must play a proactive role in supporting preventative measures that address the root causes of incarceration. By investing in social services, education, mental health care, and substance abuse programs, the county can reduce the number of individuals entering the criminal justice system.*

*The county's role is to ensure that the Durham jail operates not just as a facility for incarceration but as a place where individuals are treated with dignity and allowed to reform, aiming to foster a safer and more equitable community for all.*

**13. What is your position on expanding the HEART program to be county-wide, fully staffed, and available 24/7? Which of those are your top priorities? How would you work to overcome resistance to HEART from some in law enforcement?**

*The enhancement and county-wide deployment of the HEART program is an initiative I fully endorse. This program, offering support and co-response alongside Sheriff Deputies, is integral to our community's welfare. For the HEART program to be effective, it must operate with a full complement of staff, ready to respond 24/7. However, achieving this level of readiness requires significant preparatory work to ensure the program's infrastructure can sustain such an expansion.*

*As a county commissioner, I am committed to championing the formation of a dedicated task force. This task force's composition will be diverse, including stakeholders from the Durham Police Department, the City of Durham Community Safety Department, Durham County Sheriff's Office, city and county leadership, and community representatives. The mandate of this task force is to build a realistic and actionable plan to augment law enforcement's capabilities with the HEART program's social workers and*

*peer support specialists. The plan will outline strategies for both initiatives not only to coexist but also to continue to grow.*

*One of the challenges is potential skepticism or resistance from segments within law enforcement. To navigate this, it is essential to involve senior law enforcement officials in the planning stages and to demonstrate to them that the HEART program is designed to complement, not replace, their services. Law enforcement professionals understand the HEART program's advantages, such as de-escalation expertise and mental health support, while also understanding the important role of police response.*

*A collaborative effort from all corners of our community is required for the HEART program's successful county-wide integration. We need to construct a comprehensive plan that addresses the concerns, incorporates the insights, and utilizes the strengths of each stakeholder. Through a concerted effort, we can ensure the HEART program becomes a seamless element of our broader county safety and wellness strategy.*

## **Health Care and Social Services**

**14. As profiled recently in a 3-part *Assembly/WBTV* series, Durham County has the second-slowest reunification rate in the state for children in foster care. As a County Commissioner, what steps would you propose to help families thrive in Durham County and prevent involuntary family separation?**

*First, I would advocate for increased funding and resources for early intervention programs. These programs can identify and address family challenges before they escalate to separation. This includes expanding access to mental health services, substance abuse treatment, family counseling, and easily accessible direct aid to families through housing, nutrition, health services, and high-quality childcare. By providing these support services, we can help families overcome their challenges, thus reducing the likelihood of children entering the foster care system.*

*Secondly, strengthening community partnerships is crucial. Collaborating with non-profits, faith-based organizations, and other community groups can create a support network for families in crisis. These partnerships can offer additional resources such as parenting classes, emergency financial assistance, and childcare support, further aiding families in maintaining stability.*

*Thirdly, the foster care system needs reform to facilitate fewer family separations and faster reunification. While an analysis of staffing may reveal that this requires increasing the number of social workers to reduce caseloads, it may reveal that we need to change the emphasis within the department so that the mandate is to provide support to keep families together. An environment that trains workers to think it is "better safe than sorry" to remove a child discounts the profoundly traumatic experience of removal itself. Enhanced training for social workers in trauma-informed care can also lead to better outcomes for children and families.*

*I propose developing programs directly involving the community in supporting foster children and their families. For example, mentorship programs where community members are trained to guide and support struggling families can make a significant difference.*

*Lastly, it's important to regularly review and update the policies and procedures governing child welfare in Durham County to ensure they are effective and humane, always keeping the children's and families' best interests at the forefront.*

*By taking these steps, we can work towards a system that strives to reunify families more quickly and prevents involuntary family separations from occurring in the first place.*

**15. What do you think about the balance between confidentiality and transparency related to families impacted by involuntary separation in the foster care system? Should these courtrooms be open to the public? What should Durham parents do if they feel their child has been wrongfully taken from them? Would you meet with and listen to a parent in this situation?**

*The balance between confidentiality and transparency in cases of involuntary separation in the foster care system is a critical issue. Confidentiality is essential to protect the privacy and dignity of families and children involved in these sensitive situations. It prevents stigmatization and further trauma to the children. However, transparency is crucial for maintaining public trust in the system and ensuring that the processes are fair and just.*

*Concerning the question of whether these courtrooms should be open to the public, it's a nuanced matter. Open courtrooms can promote accountability and transparency, but they also risk violating the privacy of vulnerable families and children. A balanced approach might involve keeping courtrooms open as a default, using initials rather than full names when discussing children, and providing redacted case reports and judicial orders for public review. This hybrid approach permits public oversight of elected judges and public employees and the system's operation while protecting the identities of impacted children and families.*

*For parents in Durham who believe their child has been wrongfully taken, seeking legal representation or advice is essential. Understanding one's rights and the legal procedures is crucial in these situations. Additionally, they should be encouraged to contact local child welfare agencies, advocacy groups, or support services that offer guidance and support.*

*As a County Commissioner, it is important to be accessible and responsive to constituents' concerns. Meeting with a parent in such a situation is not only a matter of being empathetic but also crucial for gaining a deeper understanding of the system's impact on individuals. Listening to their experiences can provide valuable insights that could inform policy decisions and help advocate for reforms that better serve the community's needs. Open communication channels between elected officials and constituents are vital for a responsive and effective governance system.*

## Civil Rights

### **16. What are the principal issues facing the Latinx and immigrant communities in Durham and how should the county address them?**

*The principal issues facing the Latinx and immigrant communities in Durham are multifaceted and demand a holistic approach from the county. Firstly, schooling remains a critical challenge. Despite Durham Public Schools' (DPS) efforts to recruit teachers and support staff who can cater to the needs of these communities, there is a clear need for the county to step in with innovative solutions. We must strive to make Durham a desirable destination for Latinx educators by fostering an inclusive environment that offers professional and personal growth opportunities.*

*Affordable housing remains a barrier, even with existing mortgage and rental assistance and programs. The county must work to simplify and promote access to these resources, ensuring that the Latinx and immigrant communities can benefit from them. This includes a proactive approach to disseminating information in languages and formats accessible to all, coupled with community support services that help navigate the often-complex housing landscape.*

*An alarming uptick in crimes targeting Latinx and immigrants requires immediate action. The county should prioritize the mitigation of these crimes but also implement community-based programs that build trust and cooperation between law enforcement and the communities they serve.*

*The advancement of the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs is essential. This office should partner with local and national organizations to actively engage with the Latinx and immigrant communities, creating clear and accessible pathways to services that can improve their quality of life and ease the integration process.*

*Lastly, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive, unified plan that involves all three key bodies—Durham County, Durham City, and DPS. By uniting efforts and resources, a sustainable strategy can be developed to address the challenges Latinx and immigrant communities face effectively. This plan must be developed with input from the communities it aims to serve, ensuring it is responsive to their specific needs and aspirations.*

*As a county, we have the responsibility and the means to address these issues head-on. Through collaboration, innovation, and a deep commitment to inclusivity, we can create a Durham that truly welcomes and uplifts every member of our diverse community.*

### **17. At a time when the LGBTQ community is under attack by the NC legislature, what can the County do to provide as much protection to this community as possible?**

*In the wake of legislative actions that threaten the safety and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals, Durham County has a crucial role to play in safeguarding the rights and dignity of this community. With the legislative landscape becoming increasingly hostile toward LGBTQ+ youth, local governments must step in to provide sanctuary and support.*

*Durham County can strengthen protections for the LGBTQ+ community through several measures. Firstly, the County should use its resources to support and expand organizations like the LGBTQ Center of Durham. Increased funding for the center would allow for additional staffing and the development of programs specifically tailored to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly youth.*

*Education and advocacy are vital. Durham County should facilitate training for teachers and school staff on LGBTQ+ issues to foster safe and inclusive school environments despite state legislation. Creating a network of support within the school system is essential for the mental and physical health of LGBTQ+ students.*

*Durham County should also ensure that all public services and spaces are inclusive and affirming of all gender identities and sexual orientations. This includes adopting non-discrimination policies that explicitly protect LGBTQ+ individuals and providing gender-neutral restrooms in all public facilities.*

*In terms of healthcare, Durham County should work to counteract any state-level restrictions on medical care for trans youth by providing local resources and support. Partnerships with healthcare providers who are committed to serving trans youth can offer an essential lifeline for those in need of care.*

*Finally, Durham County should regularly engage in active dialogue with the LGBTQ+ community to understand their needs, desires and fears, particularly during this challenging time. By listening to and amplifying LGBTQ+ voices, Durham County can better advocate for their rights and well-being.*

*Durham County's role is not just to provide protection but to actively champion the rights and dignity of the LGBTQ+ community, ensuring that every individual can live openly and authentically without fear of discrimination or harm.*

*Thank you for completing this questionnaire.*

*Please do not forget to provide us with your resume or biographical statement.*