

Public Advocate Candidate:

Below is the Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club's Public Advocate Candidate

Questionnaire. Please fill it out and return to jimowles@gmail.com

**Candidate Name:** Melissa Mark-Viverito

**Campaign Address:** N/A

**Campaign Website:** <https://melissamarkviverito.com/>

**Campaign Telephone:** N/A

**Campaign Social Media Handles (Facebook/Twitter):**

**Campaign Contact (name/phone/email):** Sara Catherine Valenzuela, Campaign Manager, (210) 379-9376

- 1. Do you now support or have you ever supported an openly LGBTQ candidate for public office?**

Yes, I have supported openly LGBTQ candidates for public office such as Melissa Sklarz for NYS Assembly, Rosie Mendez for City Council, and Aubrey Lees for City Council. While I was speaker of NYC Council, my Deputy Majority leader was Out Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer.

- 2. If applicable, what legislation directly affecting the LGBT community have you introduced or co-sponsored? (indicate accordingly)**

#### CONVERSION THERAPY

- While Speaker, the Council overwhelmingly passed legislation that banned people from charging individuals for conversion therapy that aims to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity.

#### HIV/AIDS

- While Speaker, the city allocated \$23 million a year on a new plan to end the AIDS epidemic. The plan included:
  - Using pre-exposure measures — drugs that can prevent contracting HIV — at the city's STD clinics,
  - Ensuring that clinics will stay open longer hours,
  - Ensuring that clinics will rapidly start treatment with antiretroviral drugs for people who do get infected,
  - More money for housing help for people with HIV
  - Life insurance coverage for people living with HIV

#### BULLYING

- In 2017, while Speaker, DOE committed \$8 million system-wide to expand anti-bullying measures and create new programs, including an online complaint portal for families and providing targeted support for 300 schools with high rates of bullying.
- While Speaker, the Council advanced legislation that requires DOE to provide additional support for LGBTQ students, release data about bullying and identify which schools maintain Gender and Sexuality Alliances.

#### DATA COLLECTION

- While Speaker, the Council passed bills requiring that city agencies use a new form to collect information on gender identity and sexual orientation.

#### GENDER NEUTRAL BATHROOM BILL

- While Speaker, the Council passed legislation to make single-stall bathrooms in the city go gender neutral

#### LGBT LIAISON

- Partnered with Council Member Dromm to secure \$200,000 in funding for an LGBTQ liaison with the DOE.
- Secured \$50,000 for Teachers College to do a full-day workshop for 150 instructors on how to integrate LGBT issues into curricula with a special emphasis on the intersection of race and sexual orientation.

#### MUNICIPAL ID

- While Speaker, the Council approved the creation of a municipal identification card that allows members of the LGBTQ community to self-designate the gender by which they wish to be identified.

#### SEX-ED

- As Speaker, I pushed the city to investigate how prevalent the teaching of sex education is in the public schools. A poll of 314 public and charter school students in grades six through 12 in NYC in 2016 found only 64.5% of those kids had received sex ed lessons at school

### **3. What LGBT organizations have you been involved with, either on a volunteer basis or professionally?**

I have never worked professionally for an LGBT organization, however the organizations I have worked for, like SEIU 1199, have LGBT services and emphasize supporting LGBT visibility in the workplace. Outside of my professional career, in 2017, I organized a wig and makeup drive for transgender women in Cuba, as well as a condom drive for LGBT individuals in Cuba who otherwise have poor access to contraception.

### **4. If applicable, what LGBT organizations have you allocated funds to?**

LGBT Community Center

SAGE

Lambda Literary

Hetrick Martin Institute

Queens LGBT Health Services Network

Queens Community House  
New Alternatives for LGBT Homeless Youth  
Gay Men of African Descent  
Gay Men's Health Crisis  
Long Island Gay & Lesbian Youth  
Anti Violence project  
PFLAG  
Queens Lesbian & Gay Pride Committee  
Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund

**5. Do you consider yourself a member of the LGBT community?**

I consider myself one of the strongest allies of the LGBT community.

**6. Have you marched in Pride? Which marches and for approximately how many years?**

Since being elected to the Council I marched in Heritage of Pride in Manhattan. In addition, I have marched or participated in Pride events in all five boroughs during my time as Speaker.

**7. Have you employed openly LGBT individuals previously? Do you employ any currently?**

Yes, I have previously employed openly LGBT individuals including in the Council, which also had an LGBTQ Liaison. In addition, I currently have openly LGBT individuals on my campaign team.

**8. If you receive the endorsement, do you agree to identify the club using its FULL name on all literature and electronic materials where you list endorsements?**

Yes, I agree to identify the club using its FULL name on all literature and electronic materials where you list endorsements.

**9. What press conferences, demonstrations, rallies and protests in support of LGBT issues, pro choice legislation, criminal justice issues and the Resist Trump Movement have you attended?**

- Demand a Clean Dream Act outside Trump Tower in Sept. 2017
- Transgender Rights Rally in Times Square, July 2017
- As Speaker, every year I joined with the gay and lesbian caucus of the Council to host an annual LGBT Pride Celebration. In 2014, Jim Owles President Allen Roskoff was honored
- LGBT Solidarity Rally at Stonewall Monument in Feb. 2017  
Participated in pride marches in Queens, Manhattan and Brooklyn as well as Pride events in all five boroughs
- My Annual State of the City addresses as Speaker talked about the accomplishments we had made around LGBTQ rights and criminal justice reform as well as the work we still ad to do.

**10. Have you ever been arrested? If so please explain why and outcome of arrest.**

Yes. In September 2017, as Speaker of the City Council, I was arrested along with Congressmembers Espaillat, Gutierrez, and Grijalva as we joined immigrant New Yorkers in front of Trump Tower to demand a clean DREAM Act.

Also, I was arrested during a sit in protesting the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court in 2018.

**11. Will you advocate in Albany for legislation to mandate the review of sentences of incarcerated individuals over the age of 55 who have served in excess of 15 years to determine if they warrant release?**

Yes

**12. Do you commit to visit constituents who are incarcerated in state prisons such as Bedford Correctional Facility?**

Yes - and this is something I publicly committed to at the LGBTQ Public Advocate Candidate Forum that Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club co-sponsored.

**13. Do you believe sincere remorse, risk of reoffending and actions taken while incarcerated should be considered over the original crime in determinations of parole?**

Yes

**14. Do you consent to having your name added to a letter of elected officials to the New York State Parole Board advocating for the release of Judith Clark?**

Yes

**15. Have you participated in any demonstrations or protests in relation to the issues of clemency and parole?**

Yes. For years, I advocated to have the White House commute the sentence of Oscar Lopez Rivera, the jailed Puerto Rican nationalist. For years, human rights advocates and political supporters both on and off the island have demanded his release, saying he is being held for his political beliefs. Additionally, along with U.S. Rep. Luis Gutiérrez from Illinois, I organized a group visit to see Lopez Rivera. Other prominent Latino lawmakers, including U.S. Rep. Nydia Velasquez and members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, have supported Lopez Rivera's release.

**16. Will you affirmatively seek to hire formerly incarcerated individuals?**

Yes

**17. Do you believe in the legalization of sex work?**

Yes

**18. What proposals will you advocate for the protect immigrants and the further New York as a Sanctuary City?**

During my time as Speaker, I worked to become a national leader in pioneering and enacting policies to protect our immigrant communities. This included passing legislation to establish a Municipal ID to provide all New Yorkers a right to a government-issued ID card regardless of immigration status. And I worked to remove ICE from Rikers Island and secured funding to provide unaccompanied minors with attorneys.

I used my platform as Speaker to call for the Obama administration to establish the DACA program to provide DREAMERS with protection from deportation. My leadership predates the Trump administration's draconian immigration policies and the strategies that I have pioneered are now being replicated throughout the country.

As Public Advocate, I will continue to lead on immigration issues and will work to pass the New York State Dream Act and support efforts to provide undocumented immigrants with access to a New York State Driver License.

**19. Will you advocate, including introducing legislation, to remove public funding from religious schools?**

Yes

**20. What is your position on Amazon opening their headquarters in Queens?**

I am opposed to the current Amazon deal. As I have said in the past, 1.2 billion in incentives is not needed to lure a company that exploits working people and destroys organized labor. We all know Amazon deserves tax breaks about as much as Donald Trump deserves a Medal of Honor.

I am committed to working with members of the City Council, community groups, unions, and concerned citizens to seek answers and understand how we got to this deal and what it means for our city. Right now, several more hearings are scheduled on this topic: one each in the months of January, February, and March. The final one will be a public hearing. I assume many New Yorkers, including myself, will be coming out wanting to have their voice heard. The final step is the vote by the New York State Public Authorities Control Board, which has final say over the approval of the financing and construction of any project proposed by state public benefit corporations. Keep in mind, there is precedent for the board rejecting plans. In 2005, the board rejected a \$2.2 billion plan spearheaded by then-Mayor Bloomberg for a redevelopment that would have included a stadium on Manhattan's West Side.

**21. Do you support removing the loitering statue from the state criminal code?**

Yes

**22. Do you support the legalization of marijuana?**

Yes. Days after Mayor de Blasio overhauled the city's marijuana policy in 2014, I went further and called for outright legalization of the drug. The stance made me the highest-ranked city official to

support marijuana legalization. It is especially important that elected officials of color lead and frame this conversation as the harms of marijuana prohibition and criminalization overwhelmingly affect these communities.

**23. Do you support the establishment of supervised drug consumption spaces?**

Yes. In 2016, while I was Speaker, the City Council allocated \$100,000 to the city's health department to study supervised injection facilities. The Council's supervised injection impact study assessed the feasibility and impact of New York City having a program that provides a safe, clean haven to high-risk, vulnerable New Yorkers and will help prevent drug overdoses and disease transmissions. The money came from a \$5.6 million pot of funding in the city's most recent budget that was targeted toward ending the AIDS epidemic. Harm reduction is a critical tenet in the New York State plan to end AIDS and supervised injection facilities around the world have been shown to reduce healthcare costs, decrease HIV and hepatitis B and C infection rates and prevent fatal overdoses.

**24. Have you ever endorsed any member of the IDC or any candidates who challenged IDC members? Please identify all candidates**

I did not endorse any IDC candidates. In addition, I did not endorse any IDC challengers due to my employment last year at the Latino Victory Fund. In my role at the Latino Victory Fund, I had to be very cognizant of which local races to get involved in because I wanted to make sure that I could actually contribute time to help candidates I endorsed. As a result, I supported two candidates that I had known very well - Catalina Cruz for State Assembly and Melissa Sklarz for State Assembly. In addition, I endorsed Cynthia Nixon for Governor. Aside from those races, my time was spent supporting progressive Latino Victory Fund candidates running for local, state and federal office across the country.

**25. Do you support reform of the CCRB? If yes, please explain.**

Increased transparency and accountability are essential to improving police-community relations and the CCRB should absolutely have a stronger presence in that process. Reforms need to include:

- Prosecutorial authority codified into the City Charter
- Enabling the board to give subpoena signatory power to the agency's highest ranking staff; clarifying and expanding the NYPD's duty to cooperate with CCRB requests for documentation and data; and
- amending the agency's budget to equal one percent of the NYPD's budget.

**26. Please identify 3 boards on which the PA serves and 3 appointments the PA makes that are of the utmost importance to you.**

1. The public advocate serves on the committee which selects the director of the New York City Independent Budget Office
2. The public advocate serves as chair of the Commission of Public Information and Communication
3. Member of Board of NYC Employees Retirement System Board of Trustees

Important appointments:

1. The public advocate serves on the committee which selects the director of the New York City Independent Budget Office
2. Appoint one member of the New York City Planning Commission.

**27. What reforms to the powers and duties of the office would you advocate for?**

- The public advocate should have unfettered subpoena power to bolster the office's investigatory mandate. This would require City Council action.
- Allowing the public advocate to sit on the boards of more city commissions and authorities, such as the MTA executive board and the CUNY board of trustees.
- The office should have an independent budget with enough resources to hire a dedicated investigations staff.

**28. Will you commit to hiring a member of the LGBT community to serve as a liaison to the community?**

Yes.

**29. Will you commit to ensuring diverse LGBT representation among your staff?**

Yes

**30. Who did you support for office in the following races A) Mayor and Public Advocate in 2013 B) President in 2016 C) Governor and Attorney General in 2018**

Mayor in 2013: Bill de Blasio  
Public Advocate in 2013: Letitia James

President in 2016: Hillary Clinton

Governor in 2018: Cynthia Nixon  
Attorney General in 2018: Letitia James

**31. Do you support Habitat for Humanity's proposal for gay-friendly low income housing on Elizabeth Street?**

Yes

**32. Would you speak in favor of an establishment applying for a liquor license when the opposition is based on Nimby and or unreasonable concerns?**

Yes, as long as the establishment was a good neighbor.