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# 2023 Council At-Large Questionnaire

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## CANDIDATE CERTIFICATION

Candidate Name Amanda McIlmurray

I have read the attached questionnaire responses and certify that the information provided is accurate and the opinions stated accurately reflect my own positions.

Candidate Signature: 

Date: 1/12/2022

Please complete, sign and return this form via email in Word format to: [info@phillynn.org](mailto:info@phillynn.org) and Gloria Gilman [gmgilman@gmail.com](mailto:gmgilman@gmail.com). Also mail a copy with the signature page to

Gloria Gilman  
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## I. INTRODUCTION

Although many of the questions in Section III below call for a simple yes or no answer, please feel free to provide an explanation for any of your choices. If you have not yet come to a final decision, or don't currently have enough information to provide an informed answer, please so state.

## II. BACKGROUND

1. What, if any, elected or appointed government office(s) have you held?

I've been elected as a Delegate to the Democratic National Convention and as a Democratic State Committee Member.

2. With respect to your other qualifications for the office of At-Large Council member:

**a. What community or policy issues have you worked on, and in what capacity? (Please provide the names of two or three individuals who can provide information about your previous work.)**

I am a community organizer and an electoral campaign worker. I started organizing to survive. I continue doing this work so we can all thrive.

I co-founded Reclaim Philadelphia in 2016 and built it with a team of dedicated leaders from non-existent to an organization that has won big, has more than 800 dues-paying members and most importantly — has given our neighbors a say in what happens in our neighborhoods.

I ran the campaigns of Nikil Saval and Elizabeth Fiedler. We recruited our neighbors to run for committee person and we democratized 2 wards in South Philly. We asked our communities to join us and they rose to the occasion — and we've won big citywide. And last election, when our rights were on the line and the stakes were higher than ever, we turned up — turnout was up in areas we've organized and we elected Fetterman and Shapiro.

I believe in the power of electoral organizing, not just to elect new progressive elected officials, but to develop leaders in our neighborhoods who re-energize and mobilize our neighbors around the shared issues that matter to all of us.

I've collaborated with Neighborhood Networks on most of my work over the years so NN leaders such as Gloria, TBah, Stan, Bo, and Margaret can speak to my work but feel free to reach out to State Senator Nikil Saval, State Rep. Elizabeth Fiedler, and State Rep. Rick Krajewski for more information about my previous work.

**c. What other endorsements have you received?**

**Elected Officials:** Senator Nikil Saval, Representative Elizabeth Fiedler, Representative Rick Krajewski, District Attorney Larry Krasner

**Organizations:** Reclaim Philadelphia, Philly DSA, Amistad Movement Power

**Labor Unions:** UniteHere Locals 634 and 274

**d. How do you plan to win?**

With contentious Mayoral and City Council races, turnout in Philadelphia will be at an all-time high. My campaign brings experience and is equipped to drive this turnout to ultimately win 55,000 votes and be victorious on May 16, 2023.

Our path to victory is informed by the following:

- I have long standing relationships citywide that have a history of delivering electorally. We'll lean heavily on these relationships while forging new relationships.
- I will be a top vote getter in places progressives are expected to do well: wards 1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 18, 21, 22, 27, 39A, 46
- I'll outperform in places where progressive candidates typically struggle to gain footing, like in the Northeast where I have deep roots.
- Anticipated support: I'll earn the support of organized labor because of my deep roots and relationships in the labor movement and my undying commitment to workers. I'll also earn the support of community organizations because of my history, relationships and policy priorities. Because of this support and my team's expertise, I'll have the most robust door knocking program of any candidate in the race.

- My team knows what it takes to win and will outwork the competition. We take nothing for granted and are vying for support everywhere.
- My campaign will raise \$350,000, and will invest that in an aggressive voter outreach strategy through mail, digital and canvassing.
- I am the most energizing candidate in the race. I'm young, passionate, and experienced – I will unite the city around me to win big.

**e. How much money have you raised?**

**How much do you expect to raise?**

As of the December 31, 2022 finance deadline, I raised more than \$100,000 from almost 600 individuals — 80% of whom are Philadelphians. We expect to raise \$350,000. This plan is based upon 20 hours of call time every week from now until election day, along with meet and greets and community fundraisers that will expand our base and bring hundreds of donors in.

**3. What three things would you most want to accomplish if elected?**

My priorities are a family and worker first agenda: building and maintaining affordable housing, fighting for the rights of workers, and investing in holistic approaches to community safety.

As a City Councilmember, I will always fight for workers.

That means protecting against misclassification of workers of workers, retaliation, wage theft, and discrimination on any basis including race and gender.

To that end, our office will have a dedicated labor liaison whose job is to communicate with and ensure that we have an ear to the ground of the most pressing needs of workers every day.

Fighting for workers also means fighting to make sure that there are good, sustaining jobs for every Philadelphian. We must work across city agencies to fill the thousands of open jobs and create new, good unionized government jobs at every level. We need to make it easier for Philadelphians to work to make our city better.

I will also fight to ensure that every Philadelphian has the right to affordable and safe housing. We must fully staff the office of Licensing and Inspection to ensure that new development is built with union labor and make sure that every home is safe to live in. The right to affordable and stable housing also means preventing unjust evictions—that's why I'll work to build on the past work of City Councilmembers and expand the Right to Counsel in eviction court.

We must invest in community approaches to safety that work, by addressing the root causes of violence: poverty. This means investing in our public schools, parks, rec centers, and libraries to make our neighborhoods safer, to give our youth places to spend time after school, and to make our blocks more beautiful.

My agenda centers around a belief that every single person deserves investment and resources to have their basic needs met. Furthermore, every single thing that we want to make happen in the world requires labor and workers and we must provide all workers with family sustaining wages and the right to collectively bargain. Although all issues are interconnected, when we fight for strong public services we create a structure for a

world where we can all thrive. When it comes to showing up for all Philadelphians, there can be no compromise.

### III. ISSUES

#### A. Economic Development

**What do you see as the current economic picture of Philadelphia and what would you do to make economic development more just, fair, and equitable for all Philadelphians?**

We must invest in workers across the city, and we must invest in neighborhoods and community spaces.

I stand with workers in every part of the economy in every part of the city. I know that what's best for workers is what's best for businesses, large and small, and what will make our city thrive.

We often hear elected officials say that we need more jobs – but we have too many jobs. For many years, I worked 4 jobs to survive, while also trying to afford to pay for college and complete work as a full-time student.

Every person deserves the opportunity to have just ONE job — a family sustaining job.

Growing up, I experienced all the joys of the city's robust network of parks, recreation centers and libraries which was foundational in creating the person I am today. I want every young person to have those same opportunities. I played softball for Bridesburg Rec and soccer for Fishtown Athletic Association. As a teenager, I became an umpire for the Northeast Peanut League where I officiated games and mentored youth. As a young person, I spent countless hours in the Fishtown Community Library and Tacony Library — diving into books, using the internet and benefitting from programs.

Every single Philadelphian deserves the same opportunities that I was afforded as a child. We can make this a reality by fighting for investment in community programs, economic development, and a worker-first agenda.

**Would you back legislation to:**

- 1. Impose an impact fee on businesses failing to pay workers \$15/hr to reimburse the City for the costs of relieving poverty?**

Yes. Businesses should not be allowed to pass on the costs of operating a business (one aspect of which is paying workers a living wage), by relying on government subsidies to sustain their workers. It is unconscionable that Pennsylvania's minimum wage is still \$7.25, and that Philadelphians have to work more than one job to survive.

- 2. Take \$200 million of City pension funds now invested in risky securities to invest in neighborhood economic development projects, through a public bank or otherwise?**

Yes. We pay over \$100 million each year in service fees to private banks that are managing our tax dollars. We should not be wasting precious resources when we could instead be using those funds to invest in our communities. City Councilmembers have already passed and supported the creation of a public bank and I'll work to push forward the implementation. What could it look like if Philadelphia invested its funds into

neighborhood development projects that beautify our neighborhoods and make them safer, more welcoming, and more accessible? That is the Philadelphia that I want to live in, and the Philadelphia that I will fight for as Councilmember At-Large.

- 3. Create a program to provide technical assistance and start-up funding for cooperative, worker-owned businesses and housing?**

Yes.

- 4. Take whatever steps are needed to create and fund a Bank of Philadelphia to hold all City deposits and invest them locally?**

Absolutely. We have the opportunity in this upcoming election cycle to hold our new mayor accountable and push them to include the budget for this creation. As a City Councilmember, I would seek to use my coalition building and organizing skills to fight for budget appropriation that prioritizes the creation of a public bank, investing in the longterm health of Philadelphians – because that is what we deserve.

- 5. Create a system of participatory budgeting that would allow City residents to control allocation of all or a portion of the funds allocated in the City budget? Yes.**

B. Education

**What are the root causes for the current state of Philadelphia Public Schools and what would you do to address these issues?**

Underfunding and privatization are two of the biggest problems with our current education system. Many of these shortcomings are driven by the contemporary education reform movement, which has eroded our public school systems through private “free market” interventions, such as private school vouchers, charter schools, overtesting, and the expansion of the education non-profit sector.

We need a massive and sustained investment in our public school system. We must hire more teachers and staff and provide educators with the resources they need to teach and mentor youth to enrich their lives rather than being forced to teach for testing performance. We must reduce class sizes. We must work to rehab, repair and remediate school facilities to make our public schools healthy, safe and green instead of diverting that funding to building new charter schools.

**Specifically, would you back legislation to:**

- 1. Regulate charter schools by making their budgetary practices transparent, ridding them of conflicts of interest, and stopping them from cherry-picking their student bodies? Would you be willing to attach that plan to a budget rider?**

Charter schools exist because cities have bought into a neoliberal “free market” approach to education based on competition, which, as a general matter, does not work. The way to fix our public school system has never been to take more money out of that system—which is exactly what funding charter schools does. Rather, it is to fund democratically-run and community-informed public schools for all Philadelphians. I support a moratorium on charter schools, and am willing to do everything in my power to work in deep collaboration with educational experts to fight for public education.

My mom was a cafeteria worker in our neighborhood school and directly experienced the poor conditions. Because of that she made the difficult choice to enroll me and my siblings in a charter school for middle school. I attended public school for high school and even though my school was under-resourced, I had a fantastic education and experience. That wasn't the case at the charter school I attended.

I understand why parents choose to send their children to charter schools. There's been a coordinated decades long divestment and dismantling of all public goods led by right wing forces to benefit capital. And it's been effective but education activists, parents, educators, union members and students have been fighting back and we'll continue to do so.

Everyone wants what's best for their kids. And in both the short and long term, what's best for our youth is robustly funded public education for all. Public schools serve as anchors in our neighborhoods. We must re-build faith and trust in our public education system. We must invest in our public schools for the good of us all.

**2. Make the School Board an elective office, or otherwise deepen community participation in School Board appointments?**

Yes, although there isn't currently alignment in the education justice movement about whether we should push for a fully or partially elected school board yet.

**3. Compute the cost/benefit ratio for the School District of all proposed KOZ zones before they're approved by Council?**

Absolutely.

**4. Increase direct City funding for the School District? If so, please explain.**

Students, educators and staff deserve safe learning and working conditions.

Our schools have been neglected and underfunded for too long. During the Corbett administration, my mom — a cafeteria worker and unionized worker represented by UniteHere Local 634 — came home from work every day worrying if she was next on the list of Philadelphia School District workers to be laid off during Corbett's barbaric budget cuts. As always, when elected leaders forced us into precarity, our union family delivered: parents, teachers, and school staff led a hunger strike and saved my mom's job.

Philadelphians are still suffering from these inhumane budget cuts executed by Governor Corbett's administration. We must heal these harms and ensure that every child in Philadelphia has a high quality education not determined by the zip code they live in or how lucky they were to have won a school lottery. School funding is equal for each pupil, but private funding organizations, special admissions criteria, and the rise in charter schools have created vast inequalities. This is an inherently racist and classist system that disproportionately affects Black and brown children in Philadelphia.

We can increase City funding to the Philadelphia School District through by holding Penn and other institutions accountable for paying PILOTS (payments in lieu of taxes), ending the 10-year tax abatement so that large developers pay their fair share, and continuing to work to flip the state senate and collaborating with electeds in the house and senate for fair funding.

## **C. Criminal Justice**

**What do you see as the current state of the Criminal Justice System in Philadelphia and what would you do to address any perceived problems/issues?**

Pennsylvania has one of the highest rates of incarceration in the nation, and Philadelphians, specifically Black and brown Philadelphians, are incarcerated and overpoliced at disproportionate rates in comparison to white people and other Pennsylvanians across the state. One of the most unconscionable and pressing problems in the criminal legal system is the practice of prosecuting and trying youth as adults. We must end this practice and ensure that there are no youth incarcerated in the city's adult prisons. Furthermore, we must work to reduce the overall jail population. I would push for a reduction of 50% in the prison population.

We have seen some councilmembers in recent history call for the re-implementation of stop and frisk. Currently, we are seeing state representatives call for the impeachment of Larry Krasner, one of the most progressive DAs in the country. These shifts represent a furtherance of radical right-wing politics infiltrating the politics of so-called moderate Democrats.

As councilperson, I would use my organizing skills to make it clear to my colleagues that stop and frisk is unconstitutional, and that these racist tactics make our city less safe.

**Would you back legislation to:**

**1. Fully end the stop and frisk program?**

Absolutely. It's also worth noting the work of Councilmember Isaiah Thomas through his Driving Equality bill which sets a precedent in the nation to reduce interactions between police and Black residents — an effort that directly saves lives.

**2. Change the Charter to create an oversight board to keep a check on Philadelphia prison conditions?**

Yes.

**3. Increase post-release counseling for jobs, housing and other support services?**

Yes, absolutely. Being imprisoned and removed from society impacts formerly incarcerated people's ability to re-enter society and survive, let alone thrive. We should make sure that returning citizens have all the resources available to them. Providing resources to returning citizens also reduces recidivism.

**4. Bar employers from denying jobs to ex-offenders without a specific job-related basis?**

Yes.

## **D. The Role of Community in the Economic and Political Systems in Philly**

**What do you see as the role of the community in our political and economic systems and what would you do to make it more fair, just, and equitable for all Philadelphians?**

**Would you back legislation to:**

**1. Bar or limit privatization of City property and work done by City employees? More specifically are there any circumstances under which you would sell PGW?**

No, I would not sell PGW. Rather, I would seek to democratize PGW and to bring PECO under public ownership as well. We must create a multi-stakeholder governing board with representation from workers, customers, and community-based organizations. We must also decarbonize PGW, with legislation that requires phase out of fossil fuels in line with principles articulated by the Climate Justice Alliance. Finally, we must prioritize protection of PGW workers with program that train workers for jobs at decarbonized energy utilities.

**2. Move Pension Fund investment decisions in-house?**

Yes.

**3. Reform PIDC, the City's main economic development funding agency, so that its Board has a majority of public and community members, rather than Chamber of Commerce appointed members?**

Absolutely. PIDC is explicitly a public-private economic development corporation, and its Board should reflect the needs and demands of the community.

**4. Require the City to withdraw subsidies from corporations that fail to provide jobs or other benefits to City residents? Yes.**

**5. Publicly finance City elections?**

**100% yes.** As a working-class person currently running for office, and as someone who has run successful grassroots campaigns in the past, I know how difficult it is to run for office — particularly for Black, brown, Indigenous and Asian people, queer people, women of all races and working people. Our government and people in power should be representative of the people who are being governed — instead of just by whoever, instead of whoever has wealthy connections, accepts money from real estate developers or corporate lobbyists, or can self-fund their campaigns through their own wealth.

**E. Housing**

**What are the root causes of the current Housing Crisis in Philadelphia and how would you address these issues?**

Housing in Philadelphia is too expensive, and unregulated development means that many Philadelphians are faced with increasingly unaffordable rents and unsafe housing conditions. Seniors are being coerced into selling their properties for pennies on the dollar by big developers because real estate taxes are increasing every year and their incomes are fixed. Most Philadelphians are left with no choice but to accept rising rents and unacceptable and unsafe housing conditions. We're seeing rents doubled and tripled while our incomes stay the same. Buying a home is increasingly unaffordable and out of reach. Moving is expensive and difficult, and on top of that, where else can we go? We stay in homes that are unsafe and that we barely get to see anyway because we just work all the time.

The federal government has consistently divested from affordable housing for the past 60 years, meaning that the state and the city have an increased burden on providing subsidized housing. In an often Republican-controlled state legislature, the burden falls disproportionately on Philadelphia. Historically, PHA and City Council have chosen to privatize public land, and has seen it as a burden instead of the asset it is.



I will fight to ensure that every Philadelphian has affordable and safe housing. We must fully staff the office of Licensing and Inspection to ensure that new development is built with union labor and make sure that every home is safe to live in. The right to affordable and stable housing also means preventing unjust evictions—that’s why I’ll work to build on the past work of City Councilmembers and expand the Right to Counsel in eviction court.

**Would you back legislation to:**

**1. Create a rent stabilization program?**

Yes, absolutely.

**2. End, limit or curtail Councilmanic prerogative over land disposition?**

Yes, I would seek to limit Councilmanic prerogative, and create more opportunities for communities themselves to have a say in how land is controlled. The Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities has crafted a vision for what community control of land looks like. Philadelphia has a surplus of vacant land, and establishing Community Land Trusts which establish permanent affordability and community control over land is a realistic and viable solution that can be accomplished. We must first create pathways towards community input, instead of giving complete power and authority to elected leaders themselves.

Kendra Brooks has brought community organizations into the process and has led on this. She has an established community liaison whose job it is to communicate with and bring in community leaders into important conversations and meetings. She is creating a more transparent and accountable city council office that responds to the needs of Philadelphians. As a city councilmember, I will seek to build on her expertise and organizing work.

**3. Create or support more affordable housing, both rental and home ownership? Please specify.**

Absolutely. My family has experienced the direct costs of increasingly unaffordable housing. When I was in middle school, my family was evicted from our home in Fishtown. We bounced around from house to house and endured poor living conditions and endless gun violence. If Philadelphia had protections for renters that prevented huge raises in rent, and clear pathways to homeownership for poor people, my family would’ve been able to stay in our home.

Philadelphia is home to thousands of vacant buildings and parcels of vacant land. We must expand the use of the Land Bank.

The creation of Community Land Trusts are also pathways towards establishing affordable housing. CLTs create permanently affordable land that can then be developed into affordable housing or other community uses.

**4. What would you do to curtail or limit the effects of gentrification in our neighborhoods that is displacing long term and low-income residents?**

For too long, Philadelphia has been a beggar city that has courted any and all development. This needs to change. We must transfer the cost burden of development onto large for-profit developers and landlords and away from long-term and low-income residents. Philadelphians who have stayed in the city during periods of decline should benefit from the market changes the most.

One way we can combat gentrification is by establishing a fee on the practice of “flipping houses,” with funds raised going towards preserving and expanding affordable, accessible housing and green space. This is a simple policy that would only affect large developers who are only focused on reaping a profit and extracting wealth out of our communities.

There are other currently existing City programs which can preserve affordable housing and make sure that Philadelphians can stay in their homes. These programs, such as the Basic Systems Repair Program, Longtime Owner Occupants Program, and Senior Tax Rebate are effective methods at preventing gentrification and supporting the most vulnerable.

## **F. Environmental Justice**

### **What are the major Environmental issues in Philadelphia and what would you do to address them?**

Philadelphia is among the top 25 most polluted areas in the country, affected specifically by pollution that is caused from the burning of fossil fuels. Black and brown communities, and working-class and poor communities always suffer the most at the hands of environmental degradation and toxicity. One of the biggest effects of environmental degradation is childhood asthma, which is further exacerbated when we have schools full of lead and asbestos, and severe environmental events such as junkyard fires that continue to occur in the poorest neighborhoods in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia is home to numerous refineries, and groups such as Philly Thrive have been on the frontlines of exposing the dangers that these refineries pose to our neighborhoods. I support Philly Thrives continued efforts to regain community control and accountability over remediation plans of the PES refinery site, and to hold new owners, Hilco Development Partners, accountable to listening to community input in the development of the site.

As Councilmember, I would seek to uplift the demands of organizers across our city and bring them into important conversations about the future of Philadelphia. We must organize coalitions that build power and exercise an inside-outside strategy to fight against the power that fossil fuel lobbyists hold over our city.

**Please answer the following specific questions:**

- 1. Would you use the City’s power of the purse to prevent SEPTA from continuing to build and use natural-gas fueled power plants in the City?**

Yes.

- 2. What will you do to support and promote the use of solar and other renewable energy sources in the City?**

There is currently a Philadelphia Solar Rebate Program which encourages homeowners to install solar panels on their homes. This program is exactly the type of initiative that we should focus on expanding to incentivize people to invest longterm in their own energy use and that of the city’s. I have participated in this program and just installed solar panels on my house this past year.

Unfortunately, this program has been put on hold due to COVID-19 budget cuts. We should seek to reinvest in necessary programs such as these to push for a green future in Philadelphia.

- 3. Do you support a plan for City government or the entire City to be fossil-free by a particular date? If so, how would you accomplish that goal?**

Yes. I am aligned with the demands of the Alliance for a Just Philadelphia, which Neighborhood Networks is a member of, which calls for complete transition towards a 100% renewable energy system by 2030. This is possible through a unionized job creation plan that prioritizes Philadelphia's working-class and communities of color, through transitioning PGW to 100% renewable energy, and divesting from fossil fuel investments. We can build coalitions with labor unions and elected officials to invest in renewable energy systems and create family-sustaining jobs at the same time.

## **G. Health Care**

### **What can the City do to provide and support adequate and affordable health care for its residents?**

Philadelphia Health Centers are vital to ensuring the health of our communities, and providing accessible, adequate and affordable healthcare for our residents. Right now, even the most basic healthcare needs are not being met.

A lack of adequate and affordable care hits marginalized communities the hardest. As Councilmember, I'll work to enforce existing protections for people with disabilities and work with disability justice organizations to ensure all people have a right to healthcare. I'll push to open public restrooms across our city. As a person with an invisible disability, I know how important it is to meet the varied needs of people — and that a world that's centered around disability justice and accessibility makes society function better for all of us.

I would work to assist home healthcare aides (what will soon be the largest sector of the workforce and is a field of work overwhelmingly filled by women of color) to organize, increasing wages and the quality of healthcare provided.

The quality of the care provided in our city matters and so does the working conditions for the workers who provide that care.

### **Specially answer the following question:**

#### **1. Would you support the construction of a City-owned Northeast Health Center?**

Absolutely.

## **H. Taxes**

### **Would is your plan for a fair, just and equitable taxing structure for the City of Philadelphia, addressing specifically your position on real estate, corporate, and individual taxing rates?**

The Uniformity Clause in Pennsylvania's Charter has been a nonstarter to enacting progressive taxation by Philadelphia City Council. This mandates a flat tax rate both on individuals and properties of different classes. I support changing this clause but we're a long way off from it being possible. However, there are things that City Council can do in the interim that would have huge benefits for working people. In April of 2022 Councilmember Kendra Brooks introduced a Wealth Tax bill in Council. If implemented, this would levy a 0.4% tax on stocks and bonds, excluding retirement accounts, and would raise 70% of its revenue from the top 5% of Philadelphians by income. This specific wealth tax would raise over \$200million that could be appropriated to funding desperately needed resources for our communities. Having organizers in office with a deep commitment to delivering for working people makes creative and visionary policy possible. I would love to expand on Councilmembers Brooks' work and make sure that wealthy Philadelphians, corporations like Comcast, and institutions like the University of Pennsylvania are paying their fair share. Two other ways we can do this is push for PILOTs (payments in lieu of taxes) from mega non-profits like Penn, which is the largest

landowner in the City of Philadelphia and fully get rid of the 10 year tax abatement which serves as a give away to real estate developers.

**Specifically answer the following:**

**1. Would you increase taxes if the programs you wish to fund cannot otherwise be paid for?**

Yes, and we can accomplish this through the methods listed above. The Philadelphia Wealth Tax is supported by a coalition of grassroots advocacy organizations and labor unions. This is a tangible and achievable goal that can be accomplished through deep and strategic organizing.

**2. Which taxes would you propose raising?**

As mentioned above, I fully support raising taxes on mega-corporations such as Penn through PILOTS, taxing the top 5% of Philadelphians, ending the 10 year tax abatement, and enacting a .4% tax on stocks and bonds (excluding retirement accounts). The PA Budget and Policy Center has done extensive research to show that this would raise an additional \$200 million each year, necessary funding that could be invested in our community.

**I. General Statement**

**Use this space to provide any further information that you would like us to consider about your candidacy, not covered by the questions above.**