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2023 Council At-Large Questionnaire

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CANDIDATE CERTIFICATION

Candidate Name Isaiah Thomas

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: 1/12/23

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

**Gloria Gilman
121 S. Broad St., Suite 1710
Philadelphia, PA 19107**

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?

Committee Person, Ward 10

Current City Councilmember At-Large

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.)

A few of the top policy issues that I have worked on include public safety, education, and quality of life.

In the Public Safety policy field, I introduced the Driving Equality Bills. These bills seek to address the tension between police and community members by removing negative interactions while keeping the traffic stops that promote public safety and reclassifying 8 minor violations that promote inequality. I also introduced a collaborative approach to addressing gun violence after a summer of observing many cases in gun violence court. Immediate and collaborative action is needed to combat gun violence; by addressing systemic failures, pushing back on the perception of lawlessness, and enacting coordinated court reform - we can see tangible progress for public safety. This involves making systemic changes to District Attorney, Philadelphia Police, Attorney General, First Judicial District Court, City Council, Philly Counts, CLIP, and PHS. I have also prioritized violence prevention within my budget advocacy and understand that the City Council has allocated substantial resources toward gun violence prevention and intervention programs. We recommend an evaluation of how the Administration spent these gun violence prevention dollars and the effectiveness of the programs. Individuals that can provide information on this include the DAO and the Public Defender association.

As the chair of the education committee, former educator, and current coach I have always prioritized education. Since becoming education chair, I have visited many schools to see and hear firsthand from students, faculty, and others the issues they face on a daily basis. I have hosted forums & meetings on improving education that included many charter, public, and private school teachers/administrators to discuss topics such as transportation, mental health, school safety, Septa, and school culture/climate. I have also ensured that OST/sports are prioritized. During the winter of 2021, the school district was working within strict confines regarding OST during pandemic regulations; I worked with many high school athletic directors, coaches, and school district admin to ensure that games were safely held. This fall, I introduced the Philly NIL Youth Protection Act. The Philly NIL Youth Protection Act is intended to provide educational materials on NIL deals to student athletes, including information on likelihood of acquiring a deal, outlining the benefits and risks of a deal, and guidance on the most common kinds of NIL deals. The Philly NIL Youth Protection Fund also proposed to enable families of students with prospective NIL deals to work with lawyers and accountants, approved and vetted by the city, to represent them. Individuals that can provide information on this include members of Dr. Cooper and members of CASA, as well as PIAA District XII Committee Chairperson, Mike Hawkins.

I have also prioritized quality-of-life issues. In 2020, I worked to pass a package of bills with fellow council members called the Black Workers Matter Economic Recovery Package. This legislation covered workers in the tourism and hospitality industries that were hit hardest during the pandemic, many of whom are black women. The hotel industry, specifically, required contractors to keep workers on staff if the employer changed hands following the pandemic. These bills were made, in collaboration with unions like UNITE HERE, to ensure we are prioritizing worker protections in the city. In 2021, I introduced our Transparency in Healthcare Bill. This bill requires nursing homes, and other congregate care facilities, to report to the state adequately. The impact I saw with the abrupt closure of Hahnemann, I heard from many of the faculty and staff how heartbreaking losing their jobs was. Nursing home residents and caregivers need protection when homes are sold. Time and again these sales lead to lower job standards (including unaffordable healthcare and stripping away of sick days and paid time off) and poorer conditions for both caregivers and seniors. No essential caregiver should have to worry about job security and being able to afford a doctor's visit in the middle of the

pandemic. This legislation was passed with the help of many including Nursing home workers/leaders, 32BJ, 1199c, nurses, doctors, and legal aides. As the chair of the streets and services committee, I have heard dozens of complaints regarding the daily wellbeing of the city's residents. Philadelphia's illegal dumping problem has gotten out of control. In addition to worsening issues, this fuels the perception of lawlessness and apathy, but I know residents are upset, but also willing to be partners in the solution. I created the Citizen Watchdog Fund as a way to reward Philadelphians who help the government deal with illegal dumping, illegal alcohol sales, excessive noise, ATV usage, and vehicles that lead to car accidents. The reward, determined by the Managing Director's Office, will be decided based on the extent of the violation, the accuracy/specificity of the information provided by the Citizen Watchdog, and the Citizen Watchdog's cooperation with a potential investigation/legal proceedings. Individuals that can provide information on this include our Council cosponsors Councilmember Driscoll and Squilla.

c. What other endorsements have you received?

Amistad Law, DC 33, dozens of elected officials, and many others expected

d. How do you plan to win?

As an incumbent, I have set my standards for success higher than in past races. My minimum win number this cycle is 50,000 votes. In order to reach this goal, we plan to integrate an aggressive field plan. This involves knocking on thousands of doors throughout each of the city's 66 wards, and initiating a letter-writing campaign, thank-you notes, and several mailers. We also are putting together an elaborate campaign media communication plan including radio advertisements, television spots, and social media outreach. In addition, I am looking forward to the support and endorsements from community groups, political organizations, and labor unions. Finally, with the help of hundreds of individuals, PACS, labor groups, and family/friends, I plan to aggressively fundraise to help turnout the vote across the city.

e. How much money have you raised? How much do you expect to raise?

My end-of-year report will show over \$200,000 cash on hand and expect to raise an additional \$250,000

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

As the education chair, I have a focus on school climate, culture and curriculum. I want to increase transparency and communication between the city, school district, and private/charter schools. In my visits to schools, I have many issues with school infrastructure, outside of more than just the classrooms, huge sports facilities and sites are understaffed, underfunded, and dramatically rundown.

In addition, I want to focus on responsible and community-centered economic development. In the fall of 2020, I introduced the Keep It Local law that requires local business usage and raises reporting requirements in the City of Philadelphia's procurement process, as cities reimagine economic prosperity, my Keep It Local law encourages the City to find solutions in the local and diverse business community. I also want to continue to promote the arts and culture community with financial incentives, like the Illuminate the Arts Grants I have spearheaded.

I want to continue my support for the organized labor movement throughout our city. My staff member, the Community and Labor Liaison, focuses solely on open communication with unions. Every piece of legislation that gets introduced from my office has been made in tandem with or with feedback from the corresponding unions/locals. In 2021, I introduced our Transparency in Healthcare Bill which required nursing homes, and other congregate care facilities, to report to the state adequately. This bill was made in collaboration with 1199c, SEIU, 32BJ, and others to ensure our city's workers feel the support and respect for keeping the city running.

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?

In my time on City Council, I have been a part of three council budget cycles and have been able to see where our strengths and weaknesses are exemplified. As the biggest poor city in the country, we have to do more to ensure all our city agencies, businesses, organizations, and individuals are equipped to prioritize our city first. In my Keep It Local law ([Bill No. 21063200](#)) we encourage the city to find solutions in the local and diverse business community. I believe that in order to have a more equitable economic future, we must seek creative solutions within government, including quality jobs and an equitable workforce.

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?
 - As the child of a union worker and a supporter of raising the state minimum wage to \$15/hr, I see the necessity of paying our workers fairly while understanding the difficulty to legislate locally within state law.
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?
 - Philadelphia government should always look to diversify its funds, this includes reassessing the best way to make the City's funds work for us and its citizens on every level.
3. Create a program to provide technical assistance and start-up funding for cooperative, worker-owned businesses and housing?
 - As discussed in depth during our [procurement hearing](#), we heard from many business owners how difficult maintaining a business is within the city, and how we can do more to provide assistance. I know how vital Council's role is in encouraging city contractors to keep their spending local, thus helping the city's economy.
4. Take whatever steps are needed to create and fund a Bank of Philadelphia to hold all City deposits and invest them locally?
 - In January 2021, I cosponsored legislation signifying the intention of the City to organize the Philadelphia Public Banking Authority and as a member of the finance committee, look forward to hearing the bill and discussing details further. more yes
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?
 - Residents exert their power directly through representatives, and given the hundreds of pages of detailed documents, I understand that becoming a budget expert puts an unfair burden on working families. The budget process requires additional transparency with better communications tools to allow as many to participate as possible.

B. Education

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

As the newly appointed chair of the Education Committee, I hosted an education debrief with administrators, teachers, and other school faculty to hear concerns regarding transportation, safety, mental health, and OST/Extracurriculars. The dialogue was meaningful and often disheartening, however, in the coming weeks we will host another debrief with additional schools to address some concerns that were brought to us and continue to ensure that those on the school level know their city council is working for them and their students. We know that the funding formula for the state does not work as it stands. We need to do more to push for an improved climate, culture, and curriculum.

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?
 - As a former educator, I have always advocated for a more structured approach for not only how our schools are governed, but the plans in which schools are opened and closed. As it stands, we do not have a long-term plan for the growth and development of our educational system. I will support any actions needed to ensure we have a more strategic approach to education across the board which includes a responsible growth amongst the districts with clear educational targets.
2. Make the School Board an elective office, or otherwise deepen community participation in School Board appointments?
 - In 2020, I worked to promote a member to the fully appointed school board. Shortly after, the member needed to resign due to personal concerns combined with the mass quantity of work that goes into serving as a school board member. I believe that the school board should be partially elected and partially appointed, but not a voluntary position. This includes a salary and shared staff for members to keep their workload light and prioritize our students.
3. Compute the cost/benefit ratio for the School District of all proposed KOZ zones before they're approved by Council?
 - The city needs to grow our economy, and as the primary funder of the school district, there are places it may be disadvantageous so it can grow over time so it can be good for the school and city in the long term. The city needs to make sure its explicitly in the way it balances long-term growth and the lives of school district students. This should be transparent, and equitable, and should always be advantageous for our city's future.
4. Increase direct City funding for the School District? If so, please explain.
 - In this fiscal year, Council has allocated more money for the school district than any year in the city's history. Many aspects of the School District's budget require closer examination, specifically focusing on the finances behind school climate, culture, and curriculum.

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?

I have spent countless hours at community events, in schools, going door-to-door, etc. listening to the concerns of my neighbors about crime and the criminal justice system. Right now, there is a perception of lawlessness that has been exacerbated in recent years. In October 2021, I passed the Driving Equality legislation that ends the traffic stops that promote discrimination while keeping the traffic stops that promote public safety. In collaboration with the police, we were able to open the door to more positive interactions between police and

communities while increasing efficiencies within the City. The first interaction between city residents and the police should not have to be a traffic stop, I believe that bridging the gap will help promote a healthy police-community relationship. This summer, after sitting in dozens of gun violence court hearings, I proposed a collaborative gun report involving making changes with the police, DA, Council, and others. This is a specific set of plans for those working within the system to address inefficiencies with money, time, and effort.

Would you back legislation to:

1. Fully end the stop and frisk program?
 - I have been stopped by police, as a driver and as a pedestrian, more times than I can count. Knowing firsthand the issues surrounding discrimination in traffic and pedestrian stops. I believe that there are new and innovative answers, including investing in high-quality technology to promote public safety.
2. Change the Charter to create an oversight board to keep a check on Philadelphia prison conditions?
 - In collaboration with other Councilmembers, we are constantly having discussions on the importance of creating more transparency between the overall operations of prisons and Council, this includes having an oversight board in some form. We are in the beginning stages of detailing and planning for a charter change this year.
3. Increase post-release counseling for jobs, housing and other support services?
 - Through my Councilman Thomas Jobs/resource social media pages, we are constantly promoting jobs and opportunities, many of which apply to post-release individuals. I believe the opportunities and support systems can and should be more plentiful. I also sit on the PA sentencing commission which is centered around addressing fairer and more uniform decisions at sentencing resentencing and parole.
4. Bar employers from denying jobs to ex-offenders without a specific job-related basis?
 - There are not enough opportunities and jobs for those who have been released and we must do more as a city for developing our businesses and economy by including those who have records, starting with employers.

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?

As a father, coach, and former educator I understand how the community impacts every aspect of our political and economic systems. I often get opportunities to talk to different groups like RCOs, nonprofits, and other community events, where I make sure to communicate that my office is here for the community. I understand that public service means that every move I make in our government has the ability to impact thousands.

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?
 - As a member of the finance and appropriations committee, I have spent countless hours looking into the best options for city property and other entities like PGW. We have a crumbling infrastructure that creates hazardous problems like some of the flooding in subways with no plans to address this. The city must approach assets and needs as a holistic plan and must always center employees and city jobs without making drastic long-term decisions or consequences.

Only in a state of emergency or life-threatening situation would I consider supporting the sale of PGW

2. Move Pension Fund investment decisions in-house?
 - We have heard many arguments for the notion in countless budget conversations. This includes wanting to move the decisions to social venture index funds while examining best practices other cities have already undertaken. I am open to the conversation and to learning about all actors to see how best to use pension funds, this would include consulting with DC33 and DC47 to ensure our city's workers remain in the best position possible to keep the city running smoothly.
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?
 - Running PIDC requires a delicate balance. I believe there should be a joint design so there is an equal partnership between the proper parties in order to find neutral space for all involved to work together.
4. Require the City to withdraw subsidies from corporations that fail to provide jobs or other benefits to City residents?
 - The City should always periodically review the expectations we have for our corporations and business practices in the city. My Keep it Local law mandates that the administration annually set a goal for local procurement. I understand that we must prioritize the local businesses, jobs, and benefits to our communities.
5. Publicly finance City elections?
 - Nationwide but especially in Philadelphia, we are currently trying to develop some consistency in elections since the pandemic. We are looking at new methods of voting and are listening to the supreme court for the best ways to ensure our elections are safe and fair. During this budget cycle, I advocated for the commissioner's office to have more money than before. We have worked with many local organizations to ensure that the ballot is more accessible through our pushes for language access and we are open to exploring what changes in financing would look like for a fairer democratic process. While publicly financed elections are a concept that I do support, from an implementation perspective, I am not confident now is the best time.

E. Housing

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

The Housing Crisis in this city has been long-standing and deeply troubling for many, including those my office has worked with. We have listened to many constituents that have struggled with getting proper rental assistance, getting homestead exemption, and inadequate housing situations. I believe the lack of housing in the city with additional other issues will require a combination of solutions with rental assistance, utilization of the land bank, and transparency within departments.

Would you back legislation to:

1. Create a rent stabilization program?
 - The rental population has increased exponentially in Philadelphia. I want to talk to all stakeholders involved in the community to find a mechanism that works best for our residents. Rent stabilization programs have had success in other cities and I want to discuss all potential benefits and consequences in their areas to determine the best chance of maximizing safe and affordable housing in Philadelphia.

2. End, limit or curtail Councilmanic prerogative over land disposition?
 - As an at-large Councilmember, I have been able to observe how decisions around land have had positive or negative impacts. We have been involved and witnessed situations where council members have voted against the recommendations of district council members. The system is flawed but can be refined to best suit those seeking to create fair and equitable entities.
3. Create or support more affordable housing, both rental and home ownership? Please specify.
 - The housing crisis in the city is an ongoing, huge crisis with more renters than before. I believe that through a combination of land bank usage, leveraging pension funds to support rational development projects, and cleaning up zoning, we are able to create places affordable housing is adequate and safe neighborhood preservations initiative is a solid first set of steps that we are proactively taking on council
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?
 - One way I would like to explore curtailing gentrification in the city is by examining the impacts of Community Land trusts in collaboration with District council members, community members, and residents to see the most beneficial and fair-use spaces in our community.

F. Environmental Justice

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

Each year, Philadelphia is facing warmer, wetter environments that are disproportionately impacting historically disadvantaged communities. Temperatures vary drastically neighborhood to neighborhood, sometimes as different as 20 degrees at a time, causing health and respiratory issues. The city is home to many parks and outdoor spaces, including the largest urban park in the nation. In order to ensure that many generations to come can enjoy all the city has to offer, it is crucial to address issues within Philadelphia's air quality and pollution, emissions, and best address our city's standards for business.

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?
 - Following the peak of the pandemic, public transportation all across the country took a hit. SEPTA is amongst other cities' public transit that is still working to build back its ridership and services pre-covid. As the chair of the streets and services department, we have been able to work collaboratively with SEPTA to help hit their goals and milestones, while pushing them to prioritize their environmental impact including not using natural-gas fueled power plants.
2. What will you do to support and promote the use of solar and other renewable energy sources in the City?
 - I will continue to push our city and businesses to pursue the best, most environmentally sound practices. For example, this past spring, I held a hearing in the streets and services committee to discuss the potential of switching our road treatments from salt to a combination of beets, brine, and salt to prevent 1,500 tons of road salt that often ends up in local streets, creeks, and rivers, making some of them saltier than the ocean.
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?
 - In a meeting with the Philadelphia Energy Authority this past year, I was able to learn about the hazardous greenhouse gas emissions present in the city. I believe that the City has the ability to commit to being fossil-free in the near future. We must divest from these dangerous fossil fuels and reinvest in sustainable solutions.

G. Health Care

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

The city must continue to hold our healthcare providers accountable for their practices and actions. In 2021, we introduced our Transparency in Healthcare Bill which required nursing homes, and other congregate care facilities, to report to the state adequately. In collaboration with many unions, I held hearings regarding the disproportionate numbers of seniors in congregate care settings who have passed away as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also advocated to keep open the VA in west Philadelphia this year to assure our veterans were able to get fair, quality treatment. I believe that with increased transparency, our family members will be better cared for and our healthcare workers will be safer.

Specially answer the following question:

1. Would you support the construction of a City-owned Northeast Health Center?
 - I believe it is a worthwhile idea to pursue. I believe that it is best to ensure healthcare providers are responsive to the neighborhood population as the neighborhood shifts and changes. No matter the neighborhood, Philadelphians deserve quality, affordable health care.

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?

In order to help the city's economy grow, I believe we need to take steps to help small businesses. We learned that a competitive Philadelphia is one that is economically growing and prosperous for all. Elected officials in Philly are hindered by the commonwealth's interpretation of the state tax uniformity clause. This interpretation, as courts have ruled, bars most progressive taxation efforts. I will continue to work with state partners to find creative ways to address issues while balancing equity and economic competitiveness.

Specifically answer the following:

1. Would you increase taxes if the programs you wish to fund cannot otherwise be paid for?
 - Before raising taxes, I would look first to find other ways the city can generate revenue. In the past, especially during the pandemic, we saw cracks in the system highlighted, including addressing taxes that are not reliable. I believe that the burden of taxes has to be balanced against the need for good-paying jobs in Philadelphia. This requires reform to aspects of the city government while keeping the focus on high-quality services and tax fairness.
2. Which taxes would you propose raising?
 - The first thing we want to do is find revenue without raising taxes. In an emergency situation, similar to the pandemic, we would turn to raising taxes as a last-resort option. I am constantly examining other tax options to increase stability within our tax base. The city must find ways to meet its obligations to its residents while ensuring job growth that allows for funding to address historic inequities.

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.

In no specific order, I am a Council Member, a father and a coach - I wear all hats at all times. Whether on the court, in my house, or in my City Hall office - my priority is always serving the young people in my life. I see my children and Philadelphia's youngest constituents as a priority - not for the future but for today. Every race that I've run and every piece of legislation that I've championed is to further the goal of making Philadelphia work better in a youth-centric way. I've made parks and recreation a budget priority while running a basketball camp for students of all ages. As a Council Member (and father and coach), I believe in big policies that benefit

every neighborhood but also quality time spent in these streets with Philly's finest. I am seeking your endorsement because I know that we share this vision - of working in every neighborhood, with every family, to make Philadelphia better for all of us.