

## **Candidate Information**

1. First name \* Bakari
2. Last name\* Burns
3. Campaign Website\* bakariburns.com
4. Campaign Facebook \* <https://www.facebook.com/BakariBurnsForD6>
5. Campaign Twitter\* n/a
6. Campaign Instagram \* @bakariburnsford6
7. Please list the LGBTQ+ organizations you are affiliated with and any donations you have given. \*

Through my many affiliations, I have supported and advocated for different LGBTQ+ youth and health initiatives. My office launched our Business of the Month program and has supported and recognized LGBTQ+ businesses in my District and throughout the City of Orlando.

8. Please summarize your history of community involvement. This may include city boards, civic associations, non-profits, etc. \*

I have always been committed to serving my community throughout college and in my personal and professional career. Outside of my leadership position with the Orange Blossom Family Health which provides healthcare services to include the uninsured and people experiencing homelessness, I have served on the City's Municipal Planning Board as well as the County's Charter Review Commission. I am a member of Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church, where I serve as a Member of the Board of Trustees and a proud member of the Chi Tau Chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

9. Please summarize the work you have performed in the past five years to further LGBTQ+ rights.\*

When I was first sworn into office, I had an extensive one-year plan to serve the residents and businesses of District 6, which included different initiatives that supported LGBTQ youth. However, my plan was quickly halted as we were hit with the COVID-19 pandemic. I immediately had to refocus and turn my attention to meeting the immediate needs of the residents I serve by hosting testing sites, free food, and resource giveaways, and making sure our seniors were safe and healthy. Although I have supported many LGBTQ initiatives throughout the City and have supported businesses through my business program, I am looking forward to my opportunity to do more, specifically for our LGBTQ+ youth in my district who may need support and resources.

10. Please list other endorsements you have received. \*

AFL-CIO, CFHLA, Fraternal Order of Police, Orlando Professional Fire Fighters.

## **About Your Campaign and LGBTQ Issues**

11. What motivated you to run for this position?\*

I was raised in the Richmond Heights neighborhood and have long resided in the Isles of Catalina in Orlando's District 6. I attended Orange County Public Schools, Eccleston Elementary, Carver Jr. High, Memorial Middle, and Jones High School where he graduated with honors. I have been dedicated to serving the community that has meant so much to me my entire life. I was motivated to run because while District 6 has made some strides, we still have a long way to go to ensure that every resident can live, work, and thrive.

12. What does being an ally or advocate for the LGBTQ+ community mean to you?\*

Being an ally and advocate for the LGBTQ+ community means recognizing the importance of equality, inclusivity, and social justice for all residents of our city, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. It means standing up and making sure all residents of District 6 feel safe, respected, and valued. It also means listening and learning to the concerns, experiences, and needs of LGBTQ+ individuals and communities.

13. Have you attended an LGBTQ+ Pride Month celebration or Orlando's Come Out With Pride? \*

Yes

14. Have you attended or supported a drag show or drag performance in our community? \*

Yes

15. How would you ensure that your office acknowledges and celebrates the LGBTQ+ community?\*

I will work to foster and advocate for safe spaces where LGBTQ+ individuals can live, work, and socialize without fear of discrimination or violence. This includes addressing issues related to bullying, homelessness, and mental health within the community. My office will also be dedicated to collaborating and partnering with LGBTQ+ organizations and community leaders to address their concerns and develop meaningful solutions.

16. Will you ensure that you and your staff receive competency training on the LGBTQ+ community, emphasizing unconscious bias? \*

Yes

17. Would you condemn instances of hate speech in your organization and the community at large? \*

Yes

18. Legislation from Tallahassee has caused a sharp increase in discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ+ community in Orange County. How would you go about reducing discrimination in your District or local community? \*

Education and awareness are very important to me. I would initiate a series of town hall meetings and community forums to hear directly from LGBTQ+ residents and advocacy groups. I will also advocate for the expansion and enforcement of local anti-discrimination ordinances that explicitly protect LGBTQ+ individuals in areas like housing, employment, and public accommodations. I will also, as mentioned before, launch safe spaces for youth programs for LGBTQ+ individuals, especially for at-risk youth who may face discrimination or rejection at home or school.

19. There is a lack of knowledge when it comes to the transgender community. Sometimes, the services offered in public offices are often unfamiliar with the needs of the transgender community. What actions would you take to ensure that the services your office provides will be cognizant of the needs of the transgender community? \*

Promoting inclusivity and equitable access is extremely important to my office. The action I will take is the implementation of mandatory training programs for all staff members to educate them about transgender issues, terminology, and cultural competence. Training should cover topics such as gender identity, gender expression, and the challenges faced by transgender individuals. I will work with advocacy groups to seek their input and expertise on existing policies and procedures to ensure they are inclusive and do not discriminate against transgender individuals.

20. During a town hall in your District, a constituent describes being gay or transgender disparagingly. How would you constructively respond in this situation? \*

I would first listen actively and with respect to the constituents until they are finished and then clearly state my commitment to fostering an inclusive and respectful community no matter sexual orientation

or gender identity and immediately condemn any form of disrespect. I believe it would be a great educational opportunity for that constituent and any other community member who may feel similarly in the audience. I will also share some of the initiatives that I am planning to launch and my commitment to making the district a safe place for everyone!

21. How would you respond to a person intentionally misgendering a transgender or non-binary person? \*

I would correct them immediately, and respectfully, and educate them on the importance of properly gendering everyone. I would emphasize the importance of treating all individuals with respect and dignity, regardless of their gender identity.

22. Orange County continues to embrace urban sprawl despite a plethora of data that links urban sprawl to severe strains on our housing, employment, healthcare, and public transit systems (to name a few). What are your thoughts on Orange County's growth? \*

Infrastructure has been one of my main priorities as a City Commissioner. Adequate infrastructure investment is necessary to support the demands of a growing population. My focus is on upgrading roads, utilities, and facilities to enhance the quality of life in Orlando District 6. Another way to address the growth is affordable housing, which is another one of my priorities. Encouraging policies that promote affordable housing within existing urban areas can help reduce the negative effects of sprawl. Additionally, addressing the shortage of affordable housing can enhance economic stability and quality of life for residents. It is also important to engage the community in the decision-making process regarding growth to get their input and feedback. Their feedback must be included in our long-term plan to address the continued growth of our city.

23. To expand upon the prior statement, what could Orange County do regarding development that would better serve the communities in your District? \*

The city can continue supporting community land trusts to ensure long-term affordability. Also investing in schools and education because quality education is essential for the well-being and future opportunities of residents. And access to quality healthcare. We need to ensure new developments include access to healthcare facilities and promote public health through the availability of recreational spaces, walking and biking paths, and healthy food options.

## City of Orlando Commissioner Questions

24. What steps will you take to increase your office's visibility with the LGBTQ+ community, including encouraging voting participation? \*

Our office plans to host community engagement events and participate in community LGBTQ+ events including festivals and forums. We will also continue to encourage voting through various community events, voter registration drives with community partners, and voting resources shared through our email lists and social media platforms.

25. As a City of Orlando Commissioner, how would you support creating an LGBTQ+ Advisory Board that would directly link the City of Orlando and the LGBTQ+ community? \*

First, I will initiate conversations with local LGBTQ+ organizations and advocacy groups to understand their perspectives and needs regarding the creation of an advisory board. Their input will be invaluable in shaping the board's mission and structure. I will also advocate for a diverse representation of the board and work with the council to support resources that will help carry out the mission effectively. We will be sure that the board's activities are shared through city channels to increase visibility.

26. According to research, 40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ+ (Source True Colors United). What immediate actions would you take as a City of Orlando Commissioner to reduce and prevent homelessness amongst LGBTQ+ youth? \*

I have spent my entire career addressing homelessness and access to affordable housing and healthcare. I will continue to advocate for safe and affordable housing and work to find options specifically tailored to LGBTQ+ homeless youth. These facilities should offer culturally competent services and affirming environments. Will also continue to work with mental health services in our district to provide services and counseling for this population as well as support public awareness campaigns to educate the community about the prevalence of LGBTQ+ youth homelessness and encourage support and empathy. I am dedicated to providing opportunities, resources, and programs that empower and uplift the youth of Orlando District 6.

27. Where do you believe the focus should be for Orlando in preparing for and preventing the damaging effects of climate change? \*

The City of Orlando has set ambitious goals to reduce energy consumption and increase efficiency, ultimately reducing carbon emissions associated with our operations and critical services. But there is still work to be done. I believe in prioritizing climate equity to ensure that vulnerable and marginalized communities have equitable access to resources, services, and climate adaptation efforts. We must address social and economic disparities exacerbated by climate change. We also can continue to increase urban green spaces, parks, and tree planting initiatives.

28. A 2021 study found that the Orlando metropolitan area has the 8th highest wage gap in the nation. The estimated hourly wage is \$12.94, but the wage required to afford a one-bedroom apartment in Orlando before the COVID-19 Pandemic is \$23.60. What actions would you take as City of Orlando Commissioner to decrease this wage gap and promote affordable living in Orlando?\*

I have and will continue to advocate for living wages and affordability in the City of Orlando. I will continue to advocate for affordable housing in my district, workforce development initiatives for our residents, specifically our youth, and support small businesses, including minority owners, who need help accessing affordable loans and grants to help their businesses thrive. It is important that we continue to engage the community, including low-wage workers and advocacy groups, to gather input and feedback on policies and initiatives aimed at reducing the wage gap and improving affordability. I have and maintain my commitment to addressing the affordability issue in Orlando, specifically within District 6.

29. As a City of Orlando Commissioner, what actions would you take to help struggling parent(s) and make Orange County an affordable place for families?\*

As mentioned, I will continue to advocate for living wages and affordability in the City of Orlando, specifically with affordable housing. Over the years, our office has hosted various workshops and community events to help support struggling families with food, financial support, and resources to help families stay afloat. We will continue to ensure that families have access to quality healthcare through the different services and resources available to children and families in the District. We also support nutrition programs to address food insecurity and promote well-being and collaborate with local organizations to offer financial assistance programs, job training, and workforce development opportunities for parents seeking better employment prospects.

30. Despite mental illness among adults and children being at an all-time high, Florida ranks next to

last on per capita spending on mental health programs. What are your immediate and long-term plans for addressing this epidemic in Orange County? \*

I will also advocate for mental health awareness and support. I will continue to support increasing funding for youth, seniors, and homeless mental health programs. It is important that we allocate resources to support mental health services and expand access for residents. It is also important that we advocate for these resources and increase funding at the state level that can be used for our city initiatives.

31. The Florida Republican Party is passing legislation that strips away LGBTQ+ rights, starting with our children. These shamelessly discriminatory bills force LGBTQ+ families to reconsider their future in Florida. What would you tell the parents of LGBTQ+ children in your District who feel they must leave Florida to protect their children? \*

First, I will let them know that they are valued and respected and reassure them that I am committed to inclusivity in the city. I will also share resources of support groups for the LGBTQ+ community and families who can assist with providing safe spaces and support. I remain an ally, advocating for their rights. LGBTQ+ rights. I want parents to know that their concerns are taken seriously, and I am dedicated to working to make our community a place where all families, can thrive, feel safe, and be treated with dignity and respect.

32. The Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ+ Youth Mental Health found that 45% of LGBTQ+ students seriously considered suicide, and 1-in-5 LGBTQ+ attempted it. How would you lead on this issue and work to decrease these statistics during your term in office?\*

The high rates of LGBTQ+ youth considering and attempting suicide are deeply concerning, and addressing this issue is a priority for my office. I will continue to advocate for increased funding for mental health services and collaborate with local mental health organizations and nonprofits to expand outreach and access to mental health resources, particularly in schools, community centers, and LGBTQ+ youth-focused spaces in my district. It is also important that we support anti-bullying initiatives within our youth and promote suicide prevention training for teachers, counselors, school staff, and community members to recognize warning signs and provide timely intervention and support.

33. What are the top environmental concerns you are seeing in your District, and what solutions do you plan to bring forward if you were elected? \*

Land waste is one of our major environmental concerns in District 6. It creates breeding grounds for pests, such as rodents and insects, which can pose health hazards to nearby residents. It can also lead to odors and other nuisances. Our office has been working with the city to incorporate proper disposal bins to help address this issue. We are working with residents and businesses to promote educational programs and initiatives that raise awareness about environmental issues, engage the community in conservation efforts, and promote sustainable practices.

## **Additional Questions**

34. Is there anything else you want us to know about why the Rainbow Democrats should support your candidacy?

I remain committed to creating an inclusive, equitable, and welcoming community for all residents, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. I have prioritized public safety, mental health, infrastructure, affordable housing, and resources for youth and seniors in District 6 and will continue to be an advocate for all residents and businesses in the city of Orlando!