

City Attorney Candidate Forum - March 30, 2022

Los Angeles City College

Auto-transcript

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Host - Kate Cagle (Spectrum News)

We're here to learn about one of the most powerful, least understood roles in LA City government, and that is the City Attorney. The LA City Attorney presides over one of the largest staff of any elected official in Los Angeles, with over 500 attorneys. They have the power to make decisions that impact all of us, particularly the most vulnerable in our communities. The City Attorney will determine which misdemeanors are prosecuted in L.A. from unpaid parking tickets to low-level drug offenses. These decisions can come with life-long consequences for people involved and a ripple effect on the public that reveals the City's moral character. This elected official will represent the City and its departments, including LAPD and all cases civil and criminal. They will advise the City Council and departments on whether their proposed policies are legal. This advice affects every facet of our city and is incredibly influential in this time of a pandemic — multiple crises — homeless crisis and the potential for civil unrest. And finally they will represent all of us and businesses on behalf of the people of California that engage in unlawful unfair or deceptive conduct. The City Attorney will determine whether to use their enormous power of affirmative litigation to combat workplace abuse, tenant harassment, and corporate pollution. The City Attorney, in other words, will decide how the City fights for its residents. The candidates at this forum are hoping to make decisions that impact, all of us, especially the most vulnerable in our communities.

Thank you to the Los Angeles City College, the League of Women Voters of Greater of Angeles, and the City Attorney Organizing Committee for co-sponsoring this event. And now, I turn it over to Camille at L.A. City College.

Camille Goulet (Professor, Para-legal and Pre-law Programs, LACC)

Welcome to Los Angeles City College. We're so pleased to have him here. I'm Camille Goulet. I teach in the para-legal program and also in our pre-law program so I speak. And I'm proud to be part of hosting this event. If you have an interest in toning up your skills or, if you want a cyber security certificate or graphic arts design certificate, or you don't want to learn how to use a TV camera or you want to do journalism, we can do it all through here. We have some brochures in the back. We hope that you will consider coming to Los Angeles City College. We are mostly online right now, because of conditions. We plan to be at least half in person in the fall, and we would like to have you join us, however it works for you. I'd like to thank all of our community partners for putting this together today. Now, we'll be hearing from Nosh.

Ninotchka McTaggart

(Executive Director, League of Women Voters of Greater Los Angeles)

I'd like to give you a little about the League of Women Voters. We are a nonpartisan and not-for-profit organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to understand public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Our goal is to keep the residents of the City of Los Angeles, and other areas served, informed about the issues before them, engaged in the democratic process, and empowered to express their voices. No other community-based organization has the scope depth and history of service and dedication to ensuring that democracy here in Los Angeles is supported by an informed electorate and to have provided this service for over 102 years. We welcome members from all gender identifications and expressions.

Marissa Roy (Staff Attorney, Public Rights Project) - Moderator

The LA City Attorney Organizing Coalition is a collective of justice-driven organizations, advocates, and individuals, who are working to educate the public about the power and potential of the City Attorney's Office. We believe in an LA City Attorney who prioritizes care over incarceration and punishment, will fight against corporate polluters and abusive landlords to hold them accountable to the public, and will truly pursue justice for all. We're working to educate you, the voters, about this race, so that you can feel empowered to vote for your City Attorney. You can see our full platform at LACityAttorney.org and much thanks to Tony Weiss for his leadership of the coalition.

My name is Marissa Roy and I'll be your moderator tonight. I am an attorney at Public Rights Project, a national nonprofit that works with city attorney's offices and county council offices all across the country to support them in fighting for the residents' civil rights and fighting for economic and climate justice. But I actually got my start in the Affirmative Litigation Division of the LA City Attorney's office, helping to bring one of the first major wage theft cases of that division's history. So, I personally, deeply know the impact of this office, and I'm really excited to hear the candidates today.

Here's how the forum is going to work. We're going to have five prepared questions that the candidate have not seen beforehand. Some of those questions will be asked by me, but we also have a person here from the community, who is going to speak of the impact that the city attorney's office has had on her life. Each candidate will have one minute to answer the question and, since we have a lot to cover, I am really going to hold you to one minute.

If any of you in the audience have questions, please raise your hand and one of the ushers will come over with an index card and a pencil so you can write down your questions. Remember to write questions that can address all of the candidates and that are disparaging to none of the candidates. A couple of other ground rules, please silence or turn off all electronic devices. Remember, the candidates have been placed in a random speaking order, and we're going to keep shaking up the speaking order. To allow everyone to hear the answers, especially since we are live streaming, please refrain from applauding or reacting as the candidates are

speaking, so that everyone can have a chance to get as much information as possible from this forum.

Now let's turn to the candidates, our first introductory question is going to be getting at learning about who you are as a person, and what sort of values will bring to the office. The broad powers of the City Attorney are not exercised in a vacuum and very informed by the priorities and the discretion of the person who's going to get elected to that office. So what values are going to guide you as you use your discretion and set priorities for the City Attorney's office. We're going to start with Marina and will go all the way down in this order. Remember, you only have one minute for your introduction and answer to this question.

Marina Torres

I was recently a federal prosecutor here in Los Angeles, where we prosecuted a lot of corruption cases — money laundering and international drug cartels. I love this question, because now, you know, for me, it's my desire to fight for those who have no voice, my desire to fight for those who cannot represent themselves, cannot fight for themselves. That's what's going to guide me from day one being at the city attorney's office. It's been a privilege of a lifetime to be able to fight for people here in Los Angeles. I started off my prosecutorial career, doing domestic violence cases and sex offenses involving children and working up all the way to bigger cases. So for me, it's the constant fight for equity, the constant fight representation. I'm going to bring that every single day, as your City Attorney.

Kevin James

To answer your question, the three words – collaboration, fairness and inclusion. That comes from my most recent role as President of the Los Angeles Board of Public Works. Those values are very critical for any element of government, because what government does affect so many people. All the stakeholders are part of our government. The same is true for the City Attorney's office. It will be a very, very important part of the office to be collaborative, second fairness. I was in a quasi-traditional for seven years as the President of Public Works, and you sit in much like a courtroom setting. 1000 meetings and one of the things that I've shared, one of the things you get to be is inclusive, because we are the most diverse city in the country, perhaps one of the most diverse cities in the world. It's something that we did at Public Works — ensure that we provide service to everyone in the city fairly, and that would happen in the City Attorney's office as well.

Hydee Feldstein Soto

I was born and raised in San Juan Puerto Rico and yes, I am a Puerto Rican Jew. I incorporate both aspects of my personality into my values. Being Jewish includes justice and doing good in the world. Latino values include collaboration, getting the job done, solving the problem of transparency, accountability and not worrying about who takes the credit. That's what I've learned in my lifetime. And that's what I will bring to this office. I do want to add one dimension to what the office does. The City Attorney drafts every ordinance, every resolution, every ballot

measure, every title and summary of the city. The City Attorney passes on every commercial contract and every [inaudible]. And a vow that I make to you is that, when you go to the ballot box and see a ballot measure, the title and summary will accurately reflect what it says.

Sherri Onica Valle Cole

Good evening Democrats, Republicans independents those vote and live and try to survive in the city of Los Angeles. They've made a name for me, you know. I'm an Afro Latina. My father is African American, my friends are from the South. And I actually grew up and was raised in Tijuana. English is my second language, so pardon of my gaffes. There's three things I bring to the office: Experience - 16 years as a Deputy City Attorney with an expertise in prosecuting consumer fraud. I bring compassion. My brother [inaudible] himself. I understand the importance of mental health. And I agree, ethics, and I am incorruptible. **Audio missed the end of this.**

Teddy Kapur

Audio missed the beginning of this. I realize my candidacy is providing opportunities for everyone, especially the most vulnerable. My parents immigrated to the United States 50 years ago. Opportunities that my brother and I enjoyed are simply no longer available in a big city like Los Angeles. The City Attorney's office can help change that. In addition to being the son of immigrants, I'm a father of two young children. My husband, I have led a nonprofit that mentors and serves formerly homeless families. I'm a teacher here at City College. I think all these perspectives are what I bring to this office

Faisal Gill

I came to the United States when I was eight years old. My father was a cab driver. My mother worked in various retail stores at the time. That's the perspective I'm coming from. I'm a criminal defense attorney and civil rights attorney. Most of my work has been defending people who've been subject to wrongful arrest, police brutality, and discrimination. Criminal Defense - I defend people every day of my life for the last 20 years, who have been charged with minor offenses and charged with big offenses. And with prosecutors who just want to lock them up. There's a different way we can do this. I want to bring that different way to the LA City Attorney's office, which deals with all of this, and I will.

Marissa Roy - Question #2 - Moderator

Those are generally understood as more minor level or petty offenses that can range from a variety of activities — from failure to pay a fine, failure to show up for your jury summons. So watch out for that. Low Level drug possession and even some street vending activities. From 2010 to 2019, LAPD's top three categories of misdemeanor arrests were “other,” public intoxication, and DUI. Misdemeanor prosecution is currently an enormous part of what the LA City attorney's Office devotes their time to, spending a third of its \$137M budget. Misdemeanor prosecution is not the only thing. The City Attorney is not obligated to prosecute every single

misdemeanor charge brought to the office. In fact the City Attorney can decide to decline to prosecute or to prioritize certain challenges for diversion. In fact, studies have shown that criminal prosecution of the majority of misdemeanors has minimal or even negative effect on public safety. Prioritizing restorative justice and diversion has a positive effect on the community. Are there certain categories of misdemeanors that the City Attorney's office is currently prosecuting that you would decline to prosecute or prioritize for diversion?

Kevin James

I actually think that, with the possible exception of DUI, every misdemeanor, potentially, other than domestic violence, hate crimes, DUI, I think that every misdemeanor should qualify for consideration for diversion. One of the things I put day one on my website is kind of an acceleration of diversion programs in the City Attorney's office. It's based on experience I have in City Hall. And what we did in City Hall was called the Evolve Entertainment Fund. It's for young people that can see the Hollywood sign but had no access to the industry. It was an internship {inaudible} a diversion program. And what we saw from that is that the young people that came through there really were interested in getting to the job not necessarily with a studio or an agency, but with the Union power. And so I've called my diversion program to jobs pilot. I've been endorsed by the laborers and [inaudible]. Both labor unions I've talked to already about this diversion partnership for a job at the end, instead of just a certificate.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you Kevin. We will go to Sherri next.

Sherri Onica Valle Cole

Thank you. I've spent 16 years as a Deputy City Attorney. I've been out of the Office now since 2018.

I've trained a lot of the prosecutors currently still serving underneath Mike Feuer. I've also worked my way as Master [inaudible] Deputy and Filing Deputy. Specifically, I'd like to talk about 12-500, which is driving without a license of the vehicle code. This is a big issue, particularly for those like myself in the Latino Community, because there's times that the DMV has issued licenses without checking for legal status and there's times not. I'd also like to talk about 14-601 of the vehicle, which is driving on a suspended license once you've been given notice. I would prioritize sexual battery and domestic violence, because i'm a victim of both. I am now thriving and in a happy marriage with my husband but that was not always the case, and I understand what victim's guilt is as they try to recover from some of the issues, including Trump.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you, Sherri, and also thank you for sharing your experiences. We'll go to Faisal next.

Faisal Gill

Day one I will put out a memo that basically states all the low level misdemeanors that I will decline to prosecute, very similar to the Rachel [inaudible] memo she put out. Trespassing on public property, loitering, sex work, things you mentioned. These are not crimes that should be prosecuted. These are not crimes people should have to pull out a [inaudible] to pay for diversion programs. There are a lot of crimes I'm not going to prosecute because they don't affect public safety. The ones that I do prosecute, my goal every single time we place someone in a diversion program, and I want to be very clear, I don't want to misuse diversion programs. I practice every day in the courts. A lot of times prosecutors will misuse diversion programs for charges that should be dismissed. That should never be bought here. Diversion programs you have to pay for still places a lot of burden, most of the burden on folks that can't afford it. So I will not misuse the diversion programs and will one be used for things such as domestic violence.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you.

Marina Torres

I say that I think we can't overstate the importance that having a criminal record does to people. I talk a little bit about this on my website, but one of the big reasons that I became a prosecutor was because of my own brother's time in the criminal justice system. He was charged at 16 years old with two strikes and ended up doing five years in state prison and that conviction has followed him everywhere. Even now to law school, where I have to sign for his leases still to this day. So I don't want to, you know, I want to make sure we put enough focus on that. And for a lot of people that pathway starts oftentimes with a misdemeanor. That would have been much better diverted or much better have not filed in the first place. And there are certainly categories you de-prioritize for prosecution. So again, I again I started off doing a lot of human trafficking and sex offense work so sex workers, I think that that should be something that we strongly consider not prosecuting or at least de-prioritize prosecution. Street vendors another one, broad category, first time [inaudible] offenders.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you Marina. We'll go to Hydee next.

Hydee Feldstein Soto

I may be the lone wolf on this one. I don't think prosecutorial discretion is something that is exercised to invalidate a lot. That to me is policy making. Prosecutorial discretion is exercised on a case by case basis from facts and circumstances, and in an individual situation. So first time offenders, nonviolent petty offenses, misdemeanors that on the books have a racially disparate impact on prosecution, that's what should not be enforced. So if it were me I would do retroactive racial impact reports on penal sections of our municipal code and on the Penal Code as the state of California, with a city attorney represents the people of the state of California and

the city of Los Angeles, but I do not believe it appropriate for the City Attorney to substitute [inaudible] judgment for the legislatures. Thank you.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll finish off with Teddy.

Teddy Kapur

Yes, I agree with most of the candidates that we should prioritize and I would prioritize diversion for first time offenders and low level offenses. Criminal justice system and it on the record does have cascading effects on someone's life, their ability to get a job, pay their rent, keep their immigration status. so we need to be very careful in how we use that criminal record and the prosecutorial actions that we take. The City Attorney's Office does have a neighborhood justice program that I would invest more in. It is the diversion program that I think is a key part of the city attorney's office where if someone's arrested for a misdemeanor they won't be prosecuted as long as we can get them into alcoholics anonymous or some kind of drug treatment facility. And if they fulfill that commitment then there's no criminal record. I do think there is a benefit for having that leverage of a possible prosecution. I've talked to so many social workers and doctors insist that that's a helpful tool to get people the help they need.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you and thank you everyone for sticking to the one minute. I'm really impressed.

I'm sure everyone will appreciate on this panel that tough legal questions rarely, if ever, have a straightforward answer so legal advice that people give or receive depends heavily on who's giving the advice. City Council relies heavily on the LA City Attorney for advice, particularly as it's considering the ordinances. Let's talk about two recent housing examples. In 2021 the LA City Council passed a new version of Los Angeles municipal code 41.18, which allows city council members to designate public spaces, where it will be in fraction to sit, sleep, lie, or store personal property in a way that obstructs passage. Just two years before the ninth circuit Court of Appeals in [legal case] had struck down a very similar municipal ordinance as violating the eighth amendment rights of individuals experiencing homelessness by criminalizing their position and their circumstances. Despite the ninth circuit case the La city attorney advised the City Council that 4.18 was Constitutional. In our second example, when the LA City Council was considering whether to pass blanket eviction moratoriums of April 2020 which was being passed by cities in California and all over the country they ultimately did not pass this blank eviction moratorium. In part, because the LA City Attorney advised that it would interfere with private contractual rights. If you had been City Attorney what advice would you have given the Council in both of these instances.

Let's start with Hydee on this one.

Hydee Feldstein Soto

You don't like to ask easy questions, do you? [inaudible] Where the city of LA agreed not to prosecute sit, sleep, lie without providing housing, we could possibly do that. So the first thing I would tell you, is that before we enforce the homelessness ordinance, we need to be able to provide housing to the folks who need it. And I start with, we can't prosecute our way out of homelessness we can mitigate our way out of homelessness that takes five years. We can't settle. We've got to build housing and, at the current price of two to \$3,000 per square foot, we can't build our way out of homelessness. So the first thing I would do is really focus on the positive side of providing housing. I don't want to ignore your eviction moratorium. The issue with a, I think, with the emergency power is we need to declare a state of emergency, but it's clear that for something like the pandemic, you can't issue an eviction moratorium, in my humble opinion.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

It is a lot to get through in a minute, I admit. We'll go to Faisal next.

Faisal Gill

So I'll be very clear on this issue, as far as 41.18 is concerned, I think it's absolutely unconstitutional. [inaudible] So my advice would have been that the current City Council could not have passed 41.18 as is, or at all. As far as the blanket eviction moratorium goes, you'd have to do something with the City Attorney and absolutely the City Council could have passed the blanket eviction moratorium and that would have been my advice, given the pandemic, given what's going on. So he has emergency powers to absolutely pass the blanket eviction moratorium. Let me go back to 41.18 one more time. 41.18 is not only unconstitutional but it's also immoral. How can you arrest someone or take their things away just because they're houseless. That to me is the prevailing thing. But beyond that, Jones case, case after case, the ninth circuit has held that [inaudible] unconstitutional. How long does the City Council meet? Thank you.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll go to Kevin next.

Kevin James

Very important. The Boise case from the Ninth Circuit, there are two very important elements to the homelessness crisis. There's the person that needs to sleep on the sidewalk in this instance versus personal possessions. The Boise case expressly ruled on the person and the public right of way and said that before a city can enforce an anti camping ordinance and to first make a reasonable offer of shelter. They expressly input note 8, that said that we are not ruling on if we have personal property that obstructs the public right of way. That's the case that we need now. And as City Attorney this is a big part of my platform, one of the reasons I ran. As City Attorney, by not settling these cases that we have, including the LA Alliance case and the existing Garcia case we can get a standard legal process to solve the problem. With 41.18 we have 15 new rules

around our public right of way, in addition to the 87 rules that we have in other cities and the county. So now we have 102. With my plan, going to court, getting an [inaudible] ruling, we have one standard legal ruling. And your answer on [inaudible] convictions, I was in the City Hall when the pandemic hit and we have strong emergency powers we could have to push the envelope there.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

I'm going to tell all council members to pretend you're in court and I'm the judge and I will cut you off at the one minute mark. I will hand it over to Teddy next.

Teddy Kapur

Sure. In addressing the homelessness crisis, we have to lead with passion in delivering shelter services and the ninth circuit has told us this Boise decision that if you don't have shelter, you can't enforce the camping rules. So with 4118, we have to make sure we have shelter available first and [inaudible] providing housing, shelter, and services to get people to a safer, more stable place.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you, Teddy. Marina.

Marina Torres

Well, we'll start off by saying that I think this has been such an abject failure of leadership for our current elected --- the fact that we continue to spend, and I think now, the amount is \$800,000 per unit. That doesn't include any kind of services, doesn't include therapy, or food. It's predicted that next year, that number is going to go up to \$900,000 a unit and a million dollars, even, and yet the homeless situation is worse than ever. (It's up 45% since the passing of Proposition HH.

To answer your first question, I do think it's constitutional, unless we're willing to [inaudible] It's going to depend on how it's implemented, as Kevin mentioned. There are 15 different districts, and there's [sic] going to be 15 different ways of implementing (it).

I believe it's not constitutional, unless there's a credible offer of housing or shelter offered to individuals. Without that, we can't even begin to talk about permanent housing. We also need to remember that the homeless population is not [inaudible], so there's going to be different needs of individuals that may not simply be addressed with housing.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

And, we'll finish off.

?Candidate

Thank you so much for that question. My family, I'm going to just put it "on blast," My family was homeless. When I was a child, I grew up very, very poor. And God has blessed my family. But, I haven't forgotten. Our experience was one of the values that I take to the office. I'm probably the only person on this panel that has actually prosecuted someone for trespass. It's called Penal Code 602K and has many sections. And I will say this, you cannot penalize someone for being unsheltered. We should not penalize people for being poor; We should not penalize people like the poor man I prosecuted who have mental illness, okay, cannot intellectually, given his disability, understand he was no longer in place to protect that location. We need to get the mentally ill out of our criminal justice system and off our streets.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. Our next question, I'm going to give an intro to it, and then turn it over to our Community Speaker. The City Attorney's office is empowered under California State law Business and Professions Code 17.202, (with the right) to represent the people of California in affirmative litigation against any businesses that are engaging in conduct that unlawful, unfair, or deceptive.

The City Attorney's office has currently used this power in lawsuits against Wells Fargo for deceptively opening up bank accounts without customers' permission. Against trucking companies for misclassifying drivers as independent contractors; and the deducting of hundreds of thousands from the wages of home health care workers. Employers and car washes have been committing wage theft against predominantly immigrant workers.

One of those workers is here today. Josephine Biclar, who was a victim of wage theft. She's a caregiver, and she worked with the office in 2017 -2018 to vindicate her own rights. She has a question for the candidates about affirmative litigation.

It was a challenge (for her) to be able to come up here. Thank you for coming today.

Josephine Biclar (Community Member)

My name is Josephine Biclar and I have been a caregiver for more than 10 years here in the United States. I love my job, taking care of elderly here in America.

I love my work and it allows me to help with the basic needs of my family, such as food, housing and education. However, I became a victim of wage theft.

I learned the hard way that wage theft was happening to me, when the Agency denied me pay, minimum wage and overtime pay. The agency paid me less than half of what I was owed.

I decided to recover the stolen wages, when the daughter of my patient told me they were paying us \$30 per hour.

I became involved in the case against the Agency in 2017 together with more than 20 caregivers. We filed against the employer for violating the minimum wage and overtime pay for domestic

workers. The case was handled by the LA City Attorney's office. The Agencies settled, and more than \$250,000 in wages were distributed to more than 200 caregivers. The Agency is located in the San Fernando Valley. But, in spite of this victory, this still happens in LA every day. Many caregivers and hard working people are still not being paid correctly and the wages are stolen by employers.

How will you stop this? What are your options for effective enforcement strategies to address these issues?

Marina Roy - Moderator

Thank you.

?Candidate

Thank you very much for sharing your story, and thank you very much for fighting for your rights. [inaudible] The litigation office is woefully understaffed and they don't have the resources to go after the Wells Fargo Bank someone just mentioned, that's all over the U.S.

Our local office can go after corporations for depriving (workers) of their wages, and also corporations that are doing other things that [inaudible]

But without the adequate resources, the attorney's office has not gone after all the things.... they should go after.... My thing is to really be for the litigation and then make this a priority! This has to be the priority! And keep ourselves engaged.

Next, I want to thank our guest speaker (for her) participation...Know about your rights!

I think the key challenge in our city is... over \$25 million dollars are stolen from workers every week in our city. Lawn care workers, construction workers, hotel workers. In too many industries, Los Angeles leads the nation in wage theft. It has to be a priority and I think it starts with advertising what the laws are, so people in workplaces know that they have rights... who to call, better, have hotlines.. information available to know what to do when you're being exploited. We need more inspectors, more litigators. What, we have over 500 lawyers in the office; we have the resources we need. We just need to make it a priority, and I will do so.

Marina Roy - Moderator

In case anyone missed. [inaudible]

?Candidate

My mom put my dad through medical school by babysitting 12 other children than her own four. She also later became a CNA and then an LVN and I'm very proud of her work and her dedication to support my brothers and I, Mike, and our family. I was a consumer fraud prosecutor for eight years; and the affirmative litigation unit was born out of consumer fraud; it's the civil law. My specialty was taking on both civil and criminal action... I remember one case against **FlorEsposito (???)** who stole the identity of a legitimate business and defrauded them. I

brought the undocumented to court, and protected them so they can vindicate their rights. That's my baby way and I want to expand that unit because, wage theft, fraud and identity theft that stems from that unit.

Thank you so much for having me.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you.

?Candidate

I want to give a shout out to the litigation unit in the City Attorney's office, not just on wage theft, but they also got the action against Turbo Tax for deceptive practices and they brought the action on [inaudible]

[redacted] is a good source for affirmative litigation against employers, but again, I believe that litigation, to me, is often the last resort, and I know what this is going to take....

But what I'd like also to do is partner with the taxing agencies, because, here's the dirty little secret: (Claims for payroll tax\$\$) are statutorily accessible against the officers and directors and chief financial (executives) who don't pay the taxes on the unpaid wages. And done very effectively to handle this is to assess those taxes against the individuals involved.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

And over to Kevin next.

Kevin James

Thank you, you have a question about what to do on this; there's another part of the equation, besides the City Attorney's office. That's the Bureau of Contract Administration in the Department of Public works. It has an office of [inaudible] standards, and partners with the City Attorney's office to bring these cases. Matter of fact, when we increase the minimum wage, the Bureau of Contract Administration, which was part of our department, was the partner with the business community. I've been helping to bring them along on the minimum wage. Here's where I disagree with something said earlier, I don't believe that we have the proper resources to prioritize this. You prioritize within the City Attorney's side, but you've got to match it with the departmental side. I've done seven budgets as President of Public Works.

If you don't have success on the department side, you won't have success with the Council and the Mayor's budget team and the City Administrative officer on these things. I don't prioritize the City Attorney like this, because that is critical. If you can't get the department side, you're not going to have success on the City Attorney's side. And those budgets are key. You can make a lot of promises about your priorities, but you've gotta have the resources.

Marina Torres

I am the daughter of undocumented immigrants from Michoacan and Jalisco. My mom worked at a chicken canning factory and my dad worked at an orange packing facility. Daily wage theft was a daily reality. It actually led me to be an Americorps Fellow right before law school. I spent a year working with my peers in the fields of Illinois and helping sue employers on behalf of my farm workers for exactly that, for wage theft. For me, this is obviously incredibly personal and very much an area where we need to fight. I would disagree a little bit with what was said before, and I think we need to litigate more. I think we need to go after these employers who are committing fraud and theft of the most vulnerable in our society, and we need to do it more. We need to go after them civilly and going after them criminally, if that's an option. It's a thing we need to pursue, because right now it's not a priority, and it should be. I didn't get it there by electing a prosecutor to do a prosecutor's job.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you.

So, before I ask our final prepared question, I'll just say again, if anyone in the audience has any questions for our candidates. You got to hear a little bit more about their positions. Now maybe you're feeling a little more comfortable. Raise your hand, and an usher will come to you and they can write your question on an index card. We'll have one more prepared question. I'll open it up to the audience for questions. But if not, we can keep asking some more prepared questions of the candidates.

Next one. A good attorney provides robust representation in court if the client has been sued. But, perhaps a better attorney ensures that the client doesn't get involved with litigation in the first place. While he represents the City when they are being sued in court, there's an important compliance role that the City Attorney needs to play in ensuring that all departments follow the local state and federal laws and particularly with regard to LAPD in that officers are respecting, rather than abusing, people's Constitutional rights. How would you use the role of City Attorney to support and implement policies that reduce officer misconduct and hold the department accountable to respect the people's rights.

On this one, we'll start with Teddy.

Teddy Kapur

I think it starts with transparency and accountability. As the city attorney works with the Council to the LAPD. Last year, the Governor signed a host of criminal reform measures. To me, one of the most important ones was Senate Bill #2, which would hold officers accountable for their misconduct. So I want to make sure we shine a light on this misconduct. Don't let enforcement laws that we have, not let a police officer who commits an egregious violation move across our state or the nation to be a police officer somewhere else. But in doing so, we have to have good communication with the police officers themselves to make sure that they are following these new rules.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll go to Hydee next.

Hydee Feldstein Soto

I'm so glad you mentioned compliance, because one of the things I'd like to bring to the city is the implementation of best practices in every aspect of the City's business. So, for example, the City did not even have a portal. I wish to work on sexual harassment and discrimination. Before the last couple of years in the wake of the [inaudible] Jacobs scandal. If you take a look at the My Voice LA Portal, it doesn't really work. It doesn't guarantee non-retaliation. It doesn't guarantee confidentiality, and it doesn't set up an independent [inaudible]. So, one of the things that I would do across the board, including for the LAPD, is to rely on best practices. I do want to take two seconds to point out. That the LAPD operated under a consent decree for more than 20 years, and there are at least six or seven different law enforcement agencies operating within city limits. I don't like targeting our LAPD necessarily for every misconduct of everybody in uniform across the country. So we need to make sure that we are in compliance, and we need to deal with cases of excess force through disciplinary matters.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. I'll go to Marina now.

Marina Torres

I think, fundamentally, we need to begin that conversation with the recognition of the past history that LAPD has had with our communities of color. And I'm not talking about the last five years, I'm talking historically. We're still mending those relationships. We still have a lot of work to do. I always believe that we need better quality policing, not less police. And so, as the City Attorney, I would work with partnerships and community groups, partnerships with law enforcement officers for retraining, especially de-escalation training. We need more of it for officers, especially the ones that are on the streets all the time. We know that good cops hate bad cops. And I think if there were more structure in place to ensure that there was better reporting, and there would be repercussions for those bad cops, we could have all of the good cops supporting this position. So, we need again better quality policing.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll turn to Fasil next.

Faisal Gill

It would be great to think the police are just going to police themselves. It would be great to have community partnerships and dialogues and all that sort of stuff. Unless you have a City Attorney who will look them in the eye and say, "I will hold you accountable if you violate somebody's rights." LAPD is not going to do a damn thing, not a damn thing. I'm the only one

here who actually defends people who have been wronged by the LAPD, whose rights have been violated, and who have been wrongly arrested because they were Black or Brown. Nothing happens, nothing happens. What happens right now, if you follow claims with the City Attorney's Office, they will send you a letter within a month that says LAPD did nothing wrong, and then we'll have to file suit. You need a City Attorney who will look at the LAPD and say, "I will hold you accountable. I will make sure you pay for what you have done." I'm the only one on the stage to even come close to saying that.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll go to Sherri next.

Sherri Onica Valle Cole

Thank you, Mr. Gill. I think one thing you and I have in common is that we both agree that a prosecutor should be independent and not take money from the law enforcement pacs, and I agree with that. I disagree with you, as a former criminal Defense attorney, in my career, I stood and held a lot. I told and made it clear my job as a City Attorney is to protect the people of Los Angeles. Not just their pockets from excessive verdicts, but the people. I'm the only Black person in this race. I'm the person that when I got pulled over two months ago was afraid that I was going to be taken out of my car by my hair. I promise to prosecute cops and not defend them when they're sued. That's what we call accountability. I think that's going pretty far.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We're going to finish off with Kevin

Kevin James

Thank you, Marissa. You asked us about defending city departments. I want to tell you there's a lot of clients. It's a risk management-type issue. As the former president of Public Works, the second largest department in the City. Just by the very nature of the work that we do, we end up suing a lot and in court. [inaudible] So it's very important. And Marissa referenced training. That's a very important element. Compliance and risk management. So is data and input, and two of those go together with technology. So one of the things that I would do, one of the best practices, as well. The City Attorney represents every department, including Los Angeles City. The best way to do that is through a relationship based on trust and mutual respect. And respect is key. It has to go both ways. But to have the best police force so that lawsuits are reduced, de-escalation training is key. Equipment and data. So you hold everyone accountable.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you.

This is the conclusion of our prepared questions. I would encourage people in the audience – we've got some great questions on index cards. Keep those questions coming and raise your

hand if you have a question. A volunteer will come over to you with index card and a pencil or pen for you.

I can help provide a little bit of context for this first question. The City Attorney's Office is currently embroiled in a scandal, because in the process of defending the Department of Water and Power in a lawsuit where individuals and consumers were alleging that they were over billed, the City Attorney hired an outside counsel that – it was later revealed – ended up working with plaintiffs' counsel, a settlement that was very favorable to the city. Generally, counsel is not supposed to work together against their own client. That is essentially not allowed. [inaudible] Ethics 101.

So a little bit of context to this question. I encourage everyone to read more about it, having it reported in the Times. So this question is about that.

In the DWP billing corruption scandal where the City Attorney's Office was raided by the FBI, would you hire outside counsel in that case? And I'll add this, too. What are your policies as City Attorney for hiring outside counsel in the office's cases?

Let's start with Sherri.

Sherri Onica Valle Cole

Great question. Again this came from consumer fraud and the 17-2, what we call the 17-2 unit of my office. I know the individuals that were directly involved, in fact, I ended up leaving the city attorney's office after I wrote an email to ... [inaudible]... I think you are abusing your power, I think you are doing things incorrectly. In my sixteen years of experience, sir, we need to do what we know to be right, we need to have the ethical walls up, that means the criminal and civil side of the office are not supposed to be working together at the same time. And I am a big proponent of if you don't know how the office is organized, then you can't figure out what the problem is. Mr. Feuer is a micromanager from personal experience, and I know that he knew every step of the way. We've got to have someone at the very top that's incorruptible and that's who I am. I stood up and I lost my job

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you Sherri. We're going to go to Marina next.

Marina Torres

So I'll start off by saying that my friends are on the other side. It was my office and my colleagues that are in charge of that rate. They have great stories which I can't share any of right now, but my personal opinion is that corruption in that office is at the very top. There are a lot of wonderful, amazing city attorneys working, you know, almost 500 of them, but at the top there is just such an entitlement. There is such a way of thinking that just harbors corruption and entitlement. The folks that lead think that they're above the law. I say this and I'll say this as many times as I need to, I think the folks that are responsible for that corruption at the top all need to go to prison. You know, I think it sends such a bad signal to people in Los Angeles,

because when public corruption gets to the very institution of government, it means people don't have faith in their government, people stop voting, people stop wanting to be involved because they don't trust the government.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll go to Teddy next.

Teddy Kappur

This is how we address and fix this time of corruption. I think, first and foremost, we have so many lawyers in the office, we should look to them first. We shouldn't have to go to external counsel. But in circumstances where we do, we have to have much better oversight. We have to make sure that we have controls in place. And those outside counsel, in this situation, apparently the lawyer for the DWP started another company that got a \$30 million dollar no-bid contract. We should not be able to allow counsel hired by the City to create a new company that provides other services without full disclosure and that should not be permitted unless there's a special circumstance.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll go to Kevin next.

Kevin James

Now getting to it, much in the weeds on the type of case that was brought. The first option, class action settlement. That process of settling a case when you're basically taking both sides, that should be while technically legal in the privacy law, should not be legal when one of the parties is a public entity. So the City of Los Angeles city attorney would never ever do that to begin with. So beyond just the issue of choosing outside counsel, just the settlement process is a problem and should be illegal for public agency. You mentioned that calling the LA Times, a shout out to the Daily Journal. A year before the LA Times was on this case, the Daily Journal was really covering this in great detail... [inaudible] And I think this had something to do with why we ended up with the ring we did. I will start an anti-corruption task force that includes partners from the US Attorney's Office, the Attorney General's Office, the Controller's Office, the Ethics Commission, and the District Attorney's Office, because we need some independent oversight in what's happening in the building, and people need to know that they have someone to go to if they don't want to do this alone.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. For everyone, the Daily Journal is a kind of legal industry newspaper. So I think some of their articles are behind a firewall, but they did do some excellent reporting. For the LA Times to bring us more publicly accessible . . .

Kevin James

They released a lot of that coverage beyond the firewall.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Oh wonderful.

Kevin James

It was fairly recently, yeah.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Well then, you can learn everything you want to know about legal ethics. We'll go to Faisal next.

Faisal Gill

So the number one thing we need to do is oversight. That's how you prevent this problem, you have adequate oversight. But I firmly believe first and foremost, that City business should be done by City employees. Now, there might be some cases where you might not have the expertise needed, so you'll have to find outside counsel, there will be very few. I plan to, first of all, have a committee that will select the outside counsel. So it'll not just be me selecting outside counsel, so there is no impropriety, no appearance of impropriety, and we select the counsel that is best suited for the job. Then, it's not just that, the problem that occurred here is that, to read the reports, our chief deputy was involved and knew what was going on. There shouldn't be just one person. There should be a committee watching what's going on. Just because you have outside counsel doesn't mean you lose your responsibility to see what's going on, and that's what was let happen. You need to have oversight and you need to have transparency. Also the work that can be released will be released.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. And now we'll finish with Hydee.

Hydee Feldstein Soto

I'll take it from the top. My office never would've been raided by the Department of Justice. The issue there was that the City Attorney's office sat on a pile of documents, folded its arms, and said these are all privileged. There's a way to deal with that. You create a privileged log, you go to court, and you ask for a protective and a motion to quash. And once you're in court, the court gets to decide. Basically tempting the DOJ saying "naner naner naner" is not not usually an effective approach to protecting documents. Secondly, at the core of this was a no-bid contract. I've been opposed to no-bid contracts for over a year, that is a problem in our City. We need to enforce the bidding procedures of our City Charter and shut down that avenue to corruption. Thirdly, is a best practice called the four-eyes rule. The four-eyes rule is that you have at least two independent people approving every contract that the city enters into without a relationship

to one another. If you implement the best practices and our procurement process, you will not have the issue of outside counsel. And finally, I do think when you have a conflict of interest, you need to refer it out. Then at the end of the day, if our City Attorney's office is being investigated, someone else needs to do the investigation.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. Now this question is also extremely timely. There was a feature today in the LA Times about hospice care fraud, which if any of you have been in the exceedingly tragic situation of having to making decision about loved ones final days in care, you know how much this pains families who are trusting the decision makers, who are trusting the hospice care system. So how would your office work to protect seniors from hospice fraud, we'll start with Marina on this one.

Marina Torres

Similar to my answer before, you know, with hospice fraud you're preying on the people that are the most vulnerable, you're preying on the senior citizens that are in the hospice, you're preying on the families as Marissa mentioned, are facing some of the worst days of their lives, having to take care of individuals and their families that are just not able to take care of themselves. Here too, you know, the sole purpose, I think, of the City Attorney's office is to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves. You need to have the tenacity and courage to go after people and litigate and take them to court. It's all a question of a limited amount of resources as a prosecutor always. This is why the federal government doesn't want to prosecute marijuana cases, because you can decide where you're going to put those resources. And here, fraud against the most vulnerable individuals in our society should absolutely be a priority in the City Attorney's office. And it would certainly be a priority under my administration

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll go to Kevin next.

Kevin James

It's fraud on our most vulnerable, as Marina said, but also one of the most vulnerable times in life. I have some experience from my earlier years actually working around the hospice issue. I moved to Los Angeles in the 80s as an openly gay man in the years of AIDS. I was the chairman of the Los Angeles Aids Project through the 90s. We had a lot of our clients, a lot of my friends that went through hospice care. We saw treatment throughout the mid 90s. So the potential for fraud is significant. In the City Attorney's office, there at my website, you'll see a number of new units. Those are entry points for people who need assistance from the City Attorney's office. There is, of course, one designed for our senior community to partner with the Department on Aging that we have in the city of Los Angeles. This is the kind of fraud that on two levels we're making a civil opportunity of course, but there may be a criminal opportunity beyond

misdemeanor that might be something the US Attorney's office or the DA's office could handle. That we'd transfer over.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll go to Hydee next.

Hydee Feldstein Soto

You hit close to home for me. My father died in hospice care in March of 2020 and my mother was the subject of hospice fraud last fall when she moved in with me. So senior fraud and abuse is front and center for me. But I find with the elderly, you have to do outreach. There are so many of our older folks who have trouble keeping up with technology. Having a web page where people go to a portal isn't necessarily the help that they will need. We have to make examples of people who say they're home health providers and then have a 90-year-old woman sign away all of her medical rights by signing a piece of paper to the hospice care. We have to educate, do outreach, and prosecute the devil out of anybody who breaches that trust.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll go to Sherri next.

Sherri Onica Valle Cole

In Misdemeanor language, we call the charge elder abuse. There are provisions in the penal code that allow for elevated penalties for targeting the elderly. As part of my consumer fraud experience, I would add those enhancements to the charge and complaint, because the law recognizes when you're older. When we all get older, or in my case when I developed multiple sclerosis at age 49, we become more vulnerable. Some people reach out and try to help, and some people take advantage of it. I prosecuted those cases, because families were coming together and swallowed their pride to try to help mom only to have... [inaudible]...brother kidnap their mom and take her to a [inaudible]. I put him in jail. That's where he belonged.

Marissa Roy

Thank you. We'll go to Teddy next.

Teddy Kapur

I think you can hear that protecting the most vulnerable should be a high priority for the office. I would ask the City Attorney's office to lead an initiative that borrows an example of what we've done to combat human trafficking. The City Attorney's office partnered with community-based organizations and put up notices. In many places where trafficking might occur, massage parlors for instance, so you can call a hotline if you're a worker there and you might be a victim of trafficking. We should have similar notices all around elderly facilities and other places where there might be someone taking advantage of another person in these vulnerable situations.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

And we'll finish with Faisal.

Faisal Gill

So this is one of the [inaudible] litigation departments very helpful. I will go after this hospice like a [inaudible] to shut them down. Make sure they don't exist. I remember this case. This case is something of legend. The California Department of Health knew about hospice, knew what they were doing and still gave them a license. That's what this case is about. Now I will go after them, shut them down. You could prosecute them all you want, I would refer that to the DA's office. But as City Attorney, my goal would be to make sure no other office like this, no other hospice like this takes advantage of vulnerable seniors. And the best way you do that is hurt them where it counts, hurt them in their pocketbooks. This group was basically degrading Medicare, Medicaid, out to get more money. Now you go after their profits, you bankrupt them, you set an example for others not to do that.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. I just want to acknowledge that we have gotten so many wonderful questions. I am going to take the chance to ask two more questions. So, that is going to cut down your closing statement to one minute from two. But, I think you will appreciate hearing the thoughtful questions from constituents. Two more questions then we'll close out. The first one, several city agencies do not comply with California Public Records Act response time and some aren't even responding at all. What would you do to ensure compliance and hold leaders accountable? If you can get it to 45 seconds, that would be amazing. We'll start with Kevin.

Kevin James

If you look at the list on my website I talked about earlier, there is a CPRA unit as well. The reason we're going to have a CPRA unit as a department head is because this is a big issue, especially when you have the second largest department. And there's a lot, a lot of litigation around the work that we do. And we affect so many communities across the city. We need to be much more responsive. I can tell you from being on the other side as a litigator to those kinds of CPRA requests, but it does take a lot of time for city departments. That's why I want to have an appropriately budgeted unit in the City Attorney's office to liaison with all the City departments so that there's one contact point in each department that's responsible for this work. 45 seconds.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Nicely done. We'll go to Sherri next

Sherri Onica Valle Cole

I actually agree with Kevin on this. And the reason is that there is one person in this LA City Attorney's office that was tasked, part time, to work on the Public Records Request Act. And that's for every city agency, and I think that's woefully understaffed. I personally made a request to the State for documents, and they gave me 12 two-week continuances before they showed me the documents. By the time they showed up I had no idea that I had requested them, I had forgotten it. And I think that's a little ridiculous, we need to be more efficient with our resources, including time, and move the office to a more paperless environment. Thank you

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Love these 45 second answers. We'll go to Faisal next.

Faisal Gill

So, as a [inaudible] once said "Sunshine is the best disinfectant." That's exactly what I believe, I will make this a priority. We need to apply with public records requests. The departments need to understand that this is a priority that has legal consequences for not complying. Right now the departments do not understand that, and therefore sometimes they don't respond several times when we've done it. When I'm City Attorney, I will make sure that from our office, we always comply, as an example. And I will work with every single department to let them know this is a priority. This is not something that should get stuck in storage somewhere and put the onus on them. Get the documents, get them out quickly. If there's a legal technicality, that's fine, but the goal should be to release all documents.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll go to Marina next.

Marina Torres

You know, I think as Sherri mentioned, if there's one person handling this ridiculous amount of work. It's really a question of resources and our innovation, so I actually disagree. I would not seek legal consequences until we address what is a fundamental issue of resources, we need to streamline. I love the idea of digitizing it, and making it as easy as possible for government workers that are trying to do their job, to actually get the job done. Without those resources it's impossible for that amount of work. It's never going to get done. We need more bodies and to make it more of a priority.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll go to Hydee next.

Hydee Feldstein Soto

Thank you. Marina stole my thunder. I was going to raise technology as an issue. I think digitizing the City's documents, making it easy to search. You don't need lawyers to search this

with search terms. You could really put it down to a level where people are responding in accordance with the law within 10 days, which is what it's supposed to be. It takes a little bit longer. There's no reason why it should take 24 weeks [inaudible].

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll finish off with Teddy.

Teddy Kapur

We've come up with some great ideas: technology, transparency, accountability. I would identify what's a reasonable amount of time: 30 days or 60 days to complete the task and hold ourselves accountable. I would assign somebody to the task and make sure we are setting a reasonable goal.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. All right, one last audience question. I just want to thank you all so much for the thoughtfulness you put into these questions. Cash bail creates two systems of prosecution, one justice for people with financial means to post bail and one for people who can't afford bail. Almost one half of the current LA county jail population is pre-trial, which means people who've been partially not convicted and they're in jail, because they cannot afford bail. Gascon has committed to not requesting cash bail for misdemeanors. Can you make the same commitment? I'll start with Hydee.

Hydee Feldstein Soto

No, I'm not gonna make that commitment. I would not enforce cash bail in nonviolent first time offenders or (inaudible). I do think that when I come to the office, I would want to sit down with the criminal division of the city attorney's office. I have not spoken to them. And I think that management 101 is a rule that says you don't walk into an office as the new boss and top down and issue a memo of pending policy. So, I'd want to walk into the office, talk to the prosecutors there, speak to the public defenders and develop a policy that makes sense. I, from the outside, am not going to make that kind of commitment.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

We'll go to Faisal next.

Faisal Gill

Absolutely, I will make that commitment. I deal with cash bail on a regular basis in defending my clients. I see firsthand how cash bail affects people, how there's two different systems and there's plenty of newspaper cases where you can see folks who are well off can just pay their way out of jail or folks who don't have the resources. Sometimes 500 dollars, 1000 dollars, 250 dollars affects them. Being in jail or not being in jail should not depend on your pocketbook.

We're dealing with misdemeanors. There is absolutely no reason to hold somebody in jail while awaiting trial. That's the key to our justice system here folks. This person is right now innocent, they have not been convicted of a crime yet. Yet, at some point we place them in jail for a long time until they get to trial. That's not right, and it's even more not right when you basically say it depends on how well off they are. So I will absolutely make that commitment.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll go to Kevin next.

Kevin James

I will not make that commitment. There are instances in the misdemeanor list as you know where you have domestic violence, DUI, hate crime elements where there might be an identifiable victim that could be a minor. And in that instance there, I think there may be a need to go that has to be considered. Otherwise, you can take these on a case by case basis. I agree with Hydee on the fact that I don't think it's healthy to walk into the office with a blanket commitment like that and giving them the parameters under which I would operate.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll go to Teddy next.

Teddy Kapur

It's not right for someone who commits the same crime, who if they're wealthy to walk free and someone who's poorer to be stuck in a pre-trial detention. Last year, the Supreme Court, the California Supreme Court ruled in its Humphrey decision that we must take someone's ability to pay into consideration. The traditional cash bail system is not working. There are alternatives. We can use electronic monitoring, we can get transportation vouchers, we can do other things to ensure that people show up for their court hearings. And I would lean on those efforts, rather than the traditional bail systems we have today.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. We'll go to Marina next.

Marina Torres

I'm in favor of a pre-trial detention system that mirrors what I've been doing for the last several years. It's what we do in the federal system. And what that means is we as prosecutors and defense attorneys will argue in front of a judge and will argue that the individual that we're trying to have held is a danger to the Community and or they're a risk of flight. So the judge makes the decision, that way if somebody is at risk of fleeing or such a danger to the community, cash doesn't even play a role. So I do want to get rid of the role that cash plays in the system, but you have to have something in its place. And I don't actually agree with Mr. [inaudible] because

these are misdemeanors, they're low-level. Some of the most horrendous cases I have prosecuted have been misdemeanor offenses because there's some domestic violence cases. There's some rape cases that I haven't been able to prosecute as a felony and had to prosecute as misdemeanors. So there's some very serious misdemeanors out there, and so I agree that I don't think that making blanket rules are any good.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

And then we'll finish with Sherri

Sherri Onica Valle Cole

I am probably the most experienced person here with arraignment and argument of bail for misdemeanors. It's something I've done at least 2000 times. I'm very good at it and there's two considerations. One is the person gonna show up. And two, what do we allege they do and what does that mean about public safety. When you argue about whether someone's going to show up you look at their rap sheet. If they've got 16 failures to appear, you know that [inaudible] against a certain decision. I agree that we need to modify it. I agree that, as a prosecutor it's been very [inaudible], please, or I would not have. I disagree with Mr. Gil, and I'm going to agree with Marina that we need to be able to have bail to ensure the safety of individuals. To impose bail conditions, what we call stay away from locations and protective orders for domestic violence or sexual battery cases. I have seen the prosecution of a man, as a misdemeanor, who set his girlfriend on fire.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you. So I'm going to give everyone one minute for closing statements. We'll start with Faisal then move left to right.

Faisal Gill

Thank you very much for the opportunity for us to give you our visions for this office. I hope I've [inaudible]. As some may think this is not a policy office, that it's just a management or lawyer office. It is very much a policy office. What you charge, what you don't charge; do you prosecute protestors, do you not prosecute protestors; that's a policy decision. Do you go for cash bail, do you not go for cash bail? That's a policy decision. These decisions are all made by the City Attorney's office. What kind of legal advice you give? That's a policy decision. I guarantee the City Attorney in Mobile, Alabama [inaudible]. I hope you know what my vision and what my policies are, because that's very important. The most important thing that you can know about any one of us, what kind of philosophy we're going to bring. I don't want to prosecute just to prosecute. I want to do justice.

?Candidate

Thank you all for joining this evening. It's great to be here, especially with such diverse candidates in our field that I'm proud to be up here with. It's a pivotal time for our city, I feel like I bring key experiences to meet the challenges of today. For over 20 years I have volunteered my time and energy to helping people who have experienced homelessness. I think it's the number one challenge in our city today. I have also worked in affordable housing. I will lead with compassion and urgency, to make sure we declare a state of emergency on homelessness. Streamline and cut red tape for housing approvals and protect our renters and workers who are constantly losing their own homes. We can do a lot with the affirmative litigation department. [inaudible] step is a key issue. I wrote an article with [inaudible] in which that will be a priority in our City Attorney office. Lastly, I'll finish by saying we have the strongest grassroots support. We have the most individual donations and lowest average donation amount. I'm excited about our campaign. I'm excited that you all came tonight. I hope I can earn your support.

?Candidate

Thank you for listening. I'm the only mother of small children, and that's one of the reasons I'm running. I have an autistic little boy. And I'm now working as a (inaudible) by day and I'm studying the school-to-prison pipeline. There is so much we can do in this time. Not only do I bring my compassion, my personal life experience. I actually have experience within the office in areas that are very important. I have the hearts of my colleagues back at the office who want to get back to work and do justice. That's it. I'm a mother. I'm a fighter. And I'm a lover. I think I'm the person that needs to step up at this time and to help get Los Angeles back on track, put me back to work, put me back to work for the same tools for Los Angeles.

Hydee Feldstein Soto

I'm Hydee Feldstein, so again I want to make a few points. One is I am a lifelong Democrat. I registered to vote as a Democrat in 1976 and have never been anything else. Two, I've never run for office before. I am 63 years old, and I am not coming to this job as a stepping stone in a political career or landing place. I am being pulled out of semi-retirement because I want to serve the people of the City. Three, this is not a DA role, I understand there's been a lot of conversation tonight about criminal law. The district attorney prosecutes felonies and related misdemeanors; that's what the district attorney does. The bulk of the role of the city attorney is outside the criminal justice system entirely, and we have abandoned that part of our City Attorney's office for far too long. It's not a policy making body, even if it exercises prosecutorial discretion, it's a body that has to respect the rule of law and issue legal opinions. Thank you.

?Candidate

Thank you. I moved to Los Angeles in 1988 to start my legal career, so I've been a lawyer since then. As Hydee just mentioned and Marissa said earlier 1/3 of the office is criminal that leaves 2/3 of the office in the civil branch. This job, this office is the most important office on the ballot in 2022 when it comes to homelessness. Here's why. All these issues of who can sleep on the

sidewalk [inaudible]. All of these issues are being decided in the courts and the city attorney is an authorized liaison to the courts. This is where the critical issue of homelessness is going to have to be solved. I was able to work on amazing programs in the city, everything from raising the minimum wage to the implementation of a targeted local hire program to help Angelenos. Most in need get a union card and city employment. I got the endorsement of lots of labor unions. And I hope I can earn your endorsement as well because I have the endorsement of environmental and business organizations as well. Thank you

Marina Torres

My name is Marina Torres. And as a federal prosecutor, I shared with you, I've seen the worst of the worst that LA has had to offer. I've seen fraudsters, corrupt public officials, drug cartels. And in my position I got to hold them accountable and I got to bring them to justice. I'm a longtime trial attorney who's not afraid of a tough fight and that's what Los Angeles needs right now. LA is a city that my family came to this country for. It is a city that I came back from DC, the White House for. And it's a city I still continue to believe in because when I look at my city right now, I don't just see encampments, I don't just see businesses that aren't functioning, I don't just see people that are feeling unsafe, I see a lot of promise. I see a lot of people working together to try to bring our city back to try to make our city better, who believe in our city's future. And I'll tell you what. Running for office is hard. But watching by, sitting by and watching your city being burned to the ground by corrupt and inept politicians is even harder. So I want to continue fighting for justice as your next city attorney.

Marissa Roy - Moderator

Thank you all for your really thoughtful questions, I will say I hope this has taught you a little bit more about the City Attorney's office and its importance. Yes, 1/3 of the office is devoted to misdemeanor prosecution that's a very important third. It's a third that can affect families, tear them apart or can make sure to protect someone from going to prison. So looking for a city attorney that values that, cares about punishment and incarceration. Looking for city attorneys who are going to prioritize equity and justice, I hope you heard today, the diverse array of powers the city attorney can engage in. From affirmative litigation to protect our rights to policy advice that's really going to be relied on by the city council and is going to define policy decisions. From compliance and make sure our city's departments are following the law and respecting people's rights to prosecuting misdemeanors or prioritizing diversion and restorative justice in a responsible and justice centered way. Thank you again for all of your consideration to these issues. You can visit the city attorney coalition's website for more information about the city attorney's office and our platform to Center equity and justice in this office and I'll let Kate close us out.

Kate Cagle

You can learn more about the candidates by visiting the city attorney coalition website. That's www.lacityattorneycoalition.org. Thank you to LA City College and the League of Women Voters for partnering with everyone on this and, of course, be sure to vote election day is June 7th. But you'll get your ballot sometime in May. Thank you.