



2023 Austin DSA Endorsement Questionnaire

*For consideration and debate at the December 2023 General Body Meeting—12/12/2023
To be distributed to membership one week prior to endorsement vote—12/5/2023*

Tessa M. & Jay P. on José Garza

The Endorsement Subcommittee of the Electoral Committee of Austin DSA voted unanimously to recommend the endorsement of José Garza for re-election as Travis County District Attorney.

José Garza has had a long relationship with our chapter. He is a dues-paying member of Austin DSA and publicly and proudly calls himself a democratic socialist. Our chapter played a big role in the ground game of José's initial campaign in 2020 along with the campaigns of Heidi Sloan, Dominic Silvera, and Bernie Sanders. We hosted huge canvasses that brought in new members who are still a part of our chapter. Playing a role in this campaign will allow us to energize and grow our chapter in addition to honing our grassroots organizing skills.

In terms of electeds, José is one of the best our national organization's got, even in the face of an openly hostile state legislature and governor. José has kept many of his campaign promises, including aggressively prosecuting APD officer misconduct. As a result, José secured indictments against more than 20 police officers, many who injured protesters during the 2020 protests for racial justice, including members of our own chapter. This month, the Office of the District Attorney, the mayor, and the city manager approved an official request for the federal Department of Justice to conduct a "pattern or practice" investigation into the APD's culture of impunity in response to the protests, while also dropping charges against 17 of the 21 officers indicted. This poses a challenge for us as an organization engaging in electoral work: the victims and families harmed will not have their harms redressed here, but escalating this issue beyond Texas allows for the possibility of more substantive, systemic change in the department's practices. Though we believe abolition is the only way forward, we have an obligation to make sure that police can't commit acts of senseless, racist violence with complete impunity.

Since his election in 2020, José's office has also secured 5 wage theft indictments and is one of the only prosecutors in the state to pursue these types of cases. He has pledged, along with 4 other DAs across the state of Texas, not to get in the way of families who are seeking care for their transgender children. He also vowed, prior to the passage of HB 17, not to prosecute those in Travis County who are seeking abortion. He has committed to a plan to address substance

use disorder through community-driven harm reduction solutions. Making commitments like these are tangible ways to protect Austinites every day in the face of cruel legislation that has been passed at the state level. More broadly, José recognizes that “we cannot arrest and prosecute our way out of the majority of public safety challenges our community faces” and has worked to implement the alternatives to prosecution and incarceration that we need.

Though no elected official is perfect, José Garza has time and time again shown that his approach is focused on restorative justice and community-driven solutions, rather than arrest, prosecution, and incarceration. To secure real justice and power for the working class in Texas, we need more comrades like José Garza to win and hold office. We urge you to vote YES on our endorsement motion. ■

Don J. on Mike Siegel

The Endorsement Subcommittee of the Electoral Committee of Austin DSA voted unanimously to recommend the endorsement of Mike Siegel for Austin City Council District 7.

Mike has been a leader in citywide campaigns in which DSA has played a major role, including the paid sick leave ordinance and the Austin Police Oversight Act (which Mike authored). He is a member in good standing and helped organize an Austin DSA rally headlined by AOC in 2022. A long-time union member and staunch labor advocate, Mike is committed to leveraging city resources to expand union jobs through transformative climate jobs investment. As he states in his questionnaire he wants to work with us to implement a “maximal vision for what is possible for local climate action.” He also is committed to fighting for housing justice, high quality city services, and the civil rights and oversight issues to which he has devoted his organizing work and legal practice.

Even more importantly, Mike has a substantial theory of change aligned with that of DSA: using the election campaign itself to build a mass base of working people in the community that generates momentum from below for political change. As he puts it, “to build community power that leads to power on the dais.” With a large number of opponents for this Council race, that type of “campaigning as organizing” (or class struggle election, as we call them in DSA) will be essential to move forward his campaign’s goals of housing for all, bold climate action, quality city services, and police accountability and civilian oversight. We urge you to vote YES on our endorsement motion. ■

GENERAL QUESTIONNAIRE, all candidates:

Name of candidate, office, jurisdiction, standing

José Garza
District Attorney,
Travis County
incumbent

Mike Siegel
Austin City Council,
District 7
candidate

1) Are you a member in good standing of Austin DSA?

Yes, absolutely

Yes, absolutely

2) Why are you running for this office?

I'm running for re-election because we've seen the good we do when we listen to people, partner with the community, and defend the right of everyone to safety and justice.

I believe that an incarceration-only approach promotes neither safety nor justice. I believe that we have the power to fix our broken politics and that we have the power to build a criminal justice system that works for everyone. And we are.

Since taking office as Travis County's District Attorney, I led the effort to rebuild trust in our criminal justice system. We settled the lawsuit brought by survivors of sexual assault against the previous administration, worked with partners on a multi-faceted plan for gun violence prevention, and expunged the records of over one thousand Travis County residents arrested, but never convicted. ■

I'm running for Austin City Council District 7 because this council seat is very important and winning this office presents a profound opportunity to advance movements for social change locally, regionally, and beyond. Through my recent work both inside city hall, as an assistant city attorney, and as co-founder of a statewide advocacy organization, Ground Game Texas, I've seen how policy initiatives that originate here in Austin can impact communities across the state. Whether it's fighting for paid sick leave, civilian police oversight, justice for our immigrant community, or reproductive freedom, movements here often inspire movements elsewhere, and this is a power and responsibility we should not neglect or take lightly, especially in a context of rising authoritarianism and right-wing extremism.

I bring a unique set of skills and experience to this role, and believe I could maximize the opportunity of leading District 7 for a four-year term. I've had a layered professional career that includes seven years in public education and thirteen years as a civil rights attorney. [continued]

[*Siegel, continued*] Between 2015 and 2019 I was an Assistant City Attorney for the City of Austin, serving as a litigator and representing the city in high-profile litigation on issues of immigrant justice, tenant rights, and local control. For the last three years I've been building city electoral campaigns for Ground Game Texas, winning victories on issues like marijuana reform in San Marcos and Killeen and a \$15/hr wage for city workers in Alton and Edinburg. I've also had multiple experiences co-building and/or co-leading community coalitions and campaigns, both in my hometown of Oakland, CA (including campaigns to stop school closures and end racist "gang injunctions") and in my adopted home of Austin (including a recent successful lawsuit against Greg Abbott to protect school mask policies in Manor, Pflugerville and Austin).

I'm energized by the opportunity to fight for the people of District 7 and support movements for social change in Austin and beyond. ■

3) What is your current relationship with DSA, and how will you work with our leadership and membership to advance socialist politics in your elected position?

José Garza: DSA has been a crucial ally to me and the movements that I've been part of and DSA's support helps me connect to the people who I originally joined the race to serve in the first place. During the course of my time as Executive Director at Workers Defense, DSA was a critical ally to the low-wage, predominantly undocumented workers who make up our membership base. Together, in Austin and Dallas, Workers Defense and DSA waged and won a campaign to bring earned paid sick time for people who work. Our partnership in those campaigns was key to their success. I would like to think that I've been a key ally to DSA as an elected official and I know that we become stronger when we work together. DSA's boots on the ground, community-centered organizing inspires me to campaign similarly.

When I launched this re-election campaign in August, it was important to me to have my closest political allies standing with me in support. That's why I was proud to have members of DSA standing by me at the public announcement. As DA, I've worked with DSA from practicing picket lines to connecting on the organizing level. Earlier in my term, I worked with DSA members to organize a music benefit to support harm-reduction.

I plan to keep leadership engaged in the community outreach of my office and to continue to show up with DSA to advance our shared values. ■

Mike Siegel: I am an active DSA member and have been engaged in chapter work for the last three years. My goal is to earn DSA support and engagement with my campaign and to maintain that momentum into my first term on the Council. I've already opened lines of communication with multiple DSA leaders in different committees and areas of work and hope to continue to meet and engage with the diverse members who make this chapter great.

Specifically, I'd like to engage Austin DSA in developing a maximal vision for what is possible for local climate action. We are at a unique moment in history when (1) Austin voters are ready for big action (due to freezes and heat waves and consequences of both), (2) we own our own utilities for electricity and water, and (3) federal funding streams (IRA, BIL) are available to facilitate massive investments in renewable energy and good union jobs. This is a huge opportunity where Austin progressives and socialists can lead in creating a transformative regional initiative.

Beyond climate, I believe there would be numerous opportunities to collaborate and campaign together, including on issues like police oversight, housing justice, jobs, unions, and more. ■

4) How are you planning to message your relationship with Austin DSA?

José Garza: From the time of my original candidacy to now, I've been proud to highlight my membership in Austin DSA and my partnership with DSA and their members. ■

Mike Siegel: I'd be honored to have the endorsement of Austin DSA and even national DSA, if appropriate/possible. My messaging plan would be to talk about the incredible high stakes of this moment in history, with rising fascism and rapidly developing & disastrous climate change, and we need the entire Democratic coalition, from moderates to socialists, to effectively address the needs of the moment. I intend to educate normie Democrats about the work DSA members put in to build a better Austin. ■

5) How will you resist organized neoliberal and corporate elements of the Democratic Party during the election, and once in office?

José Garza: Since I started my campaign in 2019 to now, I've been clear that our criminal legal system weighs most heavily on working-class people and people of color. Since I won office, I've used that position to advocate for true public safety; access to good jobs, good schools to send our children, health care and mental healthcare. True public safety is stability.

As part of that work, my office created the first economic justice enforcement initiative in the state and has investigated and prosecuted acts of wage theft, workplace safety violations, and powerful actors who engage in misconduct. ■

Mike Siegel: This starts with the political base I've built already, without any reliance on corporate and neoliberal Democrats. I twice won the Democratic nomination for Congress in the former Texas 10th Congressional District, the second time in 2020 even though CD10 was now a "national battleground" district and corporate and neoliberal Democrats invested over \$3M to defeat me in the primary. I won that primary and runoff by leaning into my labor roots and building a broad coalition in support of Medicare for All and a Green New Deal. I earned near unanimous support from the Texas AFL CIO, despite building trades' concerns about my climate policy, because I was willing to sit down with dozens of union leaders from across the state, explain my background as a teachers union organizer and city worker union activist, and commit in good faith to ensuring that workers would be at the table when we implement climate solutions. I earned support from national [continued]

[Siegel, *continued*] progressive leaders like Sen. Bernie Sanders and Rep. Ocasio-Cortez because I combined bold policy demands with an effective, grassroots-driven campaign that was committed to talking to tens of thousands of people. I start this race with, most likely, the highest “name ID” in the field and with support from a lot of Democratic activists who respect my work in the community and for the Democratic cause.

My intent, with this campaign, is to build movement momentum that carries me to victory and continues in office. If my office is constantly engaging with both District 7 residents as well as activists and organizations across the city, we will have the security and stability to lead, not just follow.

My conviction derives in part from my familiarity with the voters of District 7, earned through over three years of steady campaigning in the Texas 10th, which overlapped with the highest voter turnout neighborhoods in D7. In the 2020 presidential primary, this was a Bernie/Warren district, not a Biden/Harris/Buttigieg district. This is a district that supports broad housing investments, that wants climate action, that has voted AGAINST more money for police and FOR community control of the police. As long as I keep lines of communication open, and keep organizing in the neighborhoods, I have confidence we can resist the chickenshit corporatist forces that represent a tiny minority of the electorate. ■

6) Are you willing to take qualified DSA members into your campaign team/leadership, or into administrative positions once in elected office?

José Garza: Yes. If there are openings I would consider hiring qualified candidates.

Mike Siegel: Yes.

7) If Austin DSA decides to endorse your campaign, are you OK with Austin DSA making our own campaign literature?

José Garza: Yes.

Mike Siegel: Yes.

8) Will you agree to appear periodically at DSA meetings in your district?

José Garza: Yes.

Mike Siegel: Yes.

9) What is your win number?

José Garza: 75,001

Mike Siegel: 25,000

10) What is your fundraising goal?

José Garza: \$380,000

Mike Siegel: \$250,000

11) What outreach are you planning to utilize in your campaign?

José Garza: We plan to utilize community canvassing, targeted distributed blockwalking, direct mail, and digital.

Mike Siegel: A diverse array of outreach tactics, including communication with organizations and attendance at community events; a paid field program to knock tens of thousands of doors; a volunteer field program to knock thousands more doors; earned media strategies; direct mail; paid digital; social media; relational; and more.

12) What outreach are you doing right now?

José Garza: We're currently engaging in digital fundraising.

Mike Siegel: I have been conducting dozens of 1-on-1 meetings with key stakeholders since the first week of August, including with multiple DSA members and committee representatives, as well as with leaders from labor, criminal justice reform, housing, environmental, and other advocacy organizations.

13) If you are currently hiring staff, are they unionized in some capacity?

Jose Garza: No

Mike Siegel: No

14) How are you planning to raise the money? Are there sources you are refusing to take money from?

José Garza: Fundraising is broken down between the following sources:

- **Digital fundraising** grassroots contribution (10%)
- **Call time** calls to donors in my network and beyond (35%)
- **Events and fundraisers** finance committee and hosts bringing in money through their own network (38%)
- **PACs** labor unions and national progressive groups (17%)
- We are refusing to take money from **police unions** and **bail bond** companies. ■

Mike Siegel: I'll have a diverse fundraising program including one-to-one outreach ("call time"), emails, texting, fundraising events, hopefully support from labor PACs and other progressive PACs, and other miscellaneous activities. I wouldn't take money from the APA or any right-wing groups. ■

15) What are your core demographics? How will you activate them?

José Garza: Our core supporters are people of color, working-class people, young people (under 35), women, and LGBTQIA+ people. We have our database from the 2020 election of both our volunteers and identified supporters to re-engage through community dialogue and neighbor to neighbor conversations. The work of my previous campaign did not end in November 2020 with my election. The movement for public safety and justice is strong in Travis County and I view activation as ongoing; not just something we do every four years. We do this by letting the community lead and using the resources from this campaign to spread our message of justice and investing in the work of our partner organizations to uplift the energy through targeted communication both online and in person to empower our communities to have their voices heard. ■

Mike Siegel: District 7 is relatively diverse, compared to other Austin neighborhoods, with a demographic breakdown including 48% white, 33% Hispanic/Latino, 8% Asian, 7% Black, and 4% other. The district is 53% homeowners and 47% renters. A lot of folks are struggling with affordability. For example, almost a quarter of homeowners and nearly 40% of renters in D7 are cost burdened, meaning they pay more than 30% of their income for housing.

My plan for activating the district is multi-layered. District 7 consists of several different cultural regions, including: (1) older neighborhoods north of 45th St and south of 183, where there are a lot of frequent Democratic voters; (2) a relatively conservative cluster of neighborhoods around the Arboretum; (3) the Domain; and (4) a wide swath of north Austin that basically runs east from the Domain along Kramer and Braker, includes some older neighborhoods like Gracy Woods, but also includes a lot of apartment complexes and semi-suburban areas. Each of these areas will need a different touch.

For the older neighborhoods, I start with a great advantage in that many of these households have already voted for me up to six times (primary, runoff, and general elections in 2018 and 2020), and I mainly need to remind them who I am and work to win their support again. My strategy in these areas will include a lot of volunteer-driven field work (I'm hoping to reactivate some of my congressional "super-volunteers") as well as doors I knock myself
[continued]

[*Siegel, continued*] (starting in my neighborhood in Crestview).

For the residents of the Domain as well as apartment dwellers in the northern reaches of the district, I'll need to develop a specialized campaign that includes layers of outreach including paid canvassing, volunteer canvassing, texting, and peer-to-peer outreach. A lot of these doors will be hard to access so we'll need to be creative.

In the more single-family neighborhoods of the Arboretum and northern District 7, my campaign will emphasize paid canvass, supplemented by other contacts.

For all of these areas, part of the strategy will be to combine block walking with public events. For example, knock doors in Allandale and Crestview and invite people to a "climate talk" at the local Black Pearl Bookstore. Build for town halls on issues like climate action or child food scarcity and knock doors to invite people to attend. Give people multiple ways to engage with the campaign. ■

16) Who is in your coalition (unions, community groups, etc.) and why? Have they endorsed you or is there a plan to be endorsed by them?

José Garza: Our coalition consists of local and state-wide labor unions, local and national community groups that represent and consist of working-class people, local community groups that are led by people of color, organizations aligned with our policy priorities (such as gun violence prevention and supporting survivors) and local democratic clubs and organizations.

From my time at Workers Defense Project, I worked closely with our labor unions and organizations like TOP and Texas Freedom Network across the state. These are important groups in our coalition and we are in communication with these organizations to move endorsements forward. So far, Local 23 UniteHere and IBEW 520 have already endorsed the campaign. We're working to move along endorsements from Working Families Party, Run for Something, Moms Demand Action and the Latino Victory Fund.

I also consider Austin Justice Coalition, SAFE, NAACP, ATX Kind, Jail to Jobs, Life Anew, Austin Texas Musicians, and Texas Gun Sense to be other organizations that are part of my coalition. While they do not get involved in electoral work and cannot endorse, it is worth mentioning because they each play an important role in our public safety landscape and a hallmark of my leadership style is community partnership. ■

Mike Siegel: It's a little premature to describe the full coalition, as the campaign has not officially begun. I hope to win broad union support but the union endorsement process will not begin until August/September 2024. Same with a number of political organizations. I plan to begin rolling out endorsements from a broad array of progressive community leaders and officeholders beginning in January 2024. These include some of the most popular progressive politicians in the area as well as leaders in the CJ reform movement and other progressive spaces. I hope to win a broad array of endorsements as those processes open up in the months ahead. ■

17) How will DSA fit into your campaign, if endorsed?

Jose Garza: If endorsed, we would like DSA to play a large role in the campaign; in 2020 our partnership and boots on the ground strength had a large impact to bolster our campaign's canvassing efforts. I would like to work collectively with DSA once again in our blockwalking efforts to get out the vote and empower the community to make sure our voices are heard in the electoral process. ■

Mike Siegel: I'd love to collaborate with DSA in multiple ways, to emphasize the class struggle aspects of my campaign and to advance political work in the community during the 2024 calendar year. I hope that DSA will embrace my climate platform, in particular, and collaborate to build community events and talk to voters about the need for climate action. I'd love to strategize with DSA to identify portions of the District 7 community that would most benefit from democratic socialist outreach and also to identify class struggle policy demands that represent alignment between DSA and my campaign. Of course, I'd most welcome DSA volunteers and donors and other layers of support for my campaign. ■

18) What are the big political demands of your campaign? (Please answer in one sentence, or three to five bullet points. The more simple, actionable, and bold, the better!)

José Garza:

- Standing with survivors: following data to continue to implement trauma-informed systems to be sure that voices of survivors are centered in the justice process.
- Leading on gun violence prevention: building a comprehensive gun violence prevention ecosystem.
- Delivering real justice for all: holding violent actors accountable while expanding diversion programs and reducing our reliance on incarceration. ■

Mike Siegel:

- Housing for All
- Bold climate action
- Quality city services ■

19) What do you view as the primary political question/divide in this country/society?

José Garza: During my time serving as a public defender on the Texas/Mexico border, I saw first-hand the ways our criminal justice system weighs most heavily on working class people and people of color. In my view, the primary political question confronting us is whether, powerful actors will continue to divide working class communities and communities of color in order to diminish our political and economic power, or whether we are going to use our collective power to rebuild our criminal justice system, our economy, and our systems of government so that they work for everyone. ■

Mike Siegel: The alliance of rapacious capitalists and theocratic conservatives against the vast majority of working people, with a special focus by the ruling class on advancing institutionalized racism, perpetuating misogyny, and targeting transgender folks and other vulnerable communities. ■

20) How will you fight for workers to have power in their workplaces through your office?

José Garza: We're fighting for workers to have power in their workplaces by holding employers accountable. We've created an Economic Justice and Enforcement initiative to prosecute wage theft and workplace safety cases and have grown our Civil Rights Unit, the unit responsible for prosecuting law-enforcement misconduct. Since 2020, our office has secured 3 total theft of service indictments. We've also secured other indictments in wage theft cases under other statutory provisions, like the labor code and misapplication of trust funds statute in property code. ■

Mike Siegel: In small ways, for example by encouraging my staff to become members of AFSCME Local 1624, and in larger ways, by supporting City policies to fight wage theft and protect the right to organize. Despite the repressive regulatory context in Texas, as expressed by the most recent "Death Star" preemption bill, the City can use its spending power to ensure that city resources advance worker organizing. For example, all City projects, whether funded by general operating funds, bonds, TIRZ, etc., should have protections for the right to organize and should guarantee prevailing wages and other community benefits. Most ambitiously, I hope to spearhead massive local and regional climate investments that will bolster the growing union movement in Central Texas by guaranteeing that new jobs [continued]

[Siegel, *continued*] will be good union jobs. The City can also work to inspire other cities to provide workplace protections and can invest in legislative advocacy (lobbying) in support of worker interests. ■

21) How do we in Texas affect laws and state actions despite a Republican state legislature, conservative courts, and conservative Democrats? What will it take to win our demands?

José Garza: While they try to bash on liberal cities and limit our rights to local governance, we have and will continue to find our ways to make progress by working together with our allies. In Texas, it's even more important that our local leaders collaborate and are aligned on our priorities to win our demands at the local and county level. That's what we're doing in Travis County. Our Office works with partners in Travis County and the City of Austin to help accomplish our goals, like implementing a gun violence prevention ecosystem, developing a behavioral health diversion center, and investing in alternatives to incarceration. Just like how we can build a movement from the ground up, we can change the systems in which we operate from the local level to invest in our communities and create stability for all of us. ■

Mike Siegel: We need to fight like hell to win local reforms and also keep investing in statewide political change. We can't be defeatist and lament that change is impossible as long as the GOP controls statewide offices. Austin has proven time and time again that we can do things despite GOP oppression. Most recently, we won adoption of the Austin Police Oversight Act, one of the most ambitious police oversight policies in the South. The City government controls billions of dollars in annual spending, has over 13,000 employees, and can deploy a broad array of tools and programs that can accomplish good in the world. The City can influence the actions of other well-resourced municipal agencies, including the county, ACC, Austin ISD, and Central Health. Democrats control local courts and the regional state court of appeals. Even if the GOP remains in charge at the highest levels of government, we can do a lot of good at home.

At the same time, we need to constantly be on the lookout for ways to build regional and statewide solidarity, whether it is by adopting bold policies that inspire action in other communities, following the lead of other communities when they lead the way, or identifying opportunities to turn a local or

regional fight into an issue of statewide or national concern. Victory is possible in Texas, but it won't happen without concerted and strategic effort over the years to come. I'm down to do everything I can for that cause. ■

22) What will you do to fight for a Green New Deal in Austin to equitably fund public schools for all, affordable housing, healthcare, transportation, and more? What does that look like to you?

José Garza: We can fight for the values of the Green New Deal by pursuing true public safety; that's access to good jobs, good schools to send our children, health care and mental healthcare. True public safety promotes individual and community stability, which can help invest in elements and support desired outcomes of the Green New Deal in Austin. We're doing this by:

- Expanding employment opportunities post-conviction by partnering with trade unions to promote economic stability and opportunities to reduce recidivism.
- Launching a pre-arrest diversion program for juveniles accused of assault family violence. Through the program, young people who face that charge have the option to go to a respite center instead of a detention facility. From there, the young person and their family have the opportunity to enter a restorative justice program that, once completed, results in no charge filed with the District Attorney's Office. The program is led and administered by three community partners: LifeWorks, the Amala Foundation, and the Excellence and Advancement Foundation. This ensures that we treat kids like kids and ultimately keep them in school and close to educational opportunities.
- Rolling out a plan in 2021 to address substance use disorder through community-driven harm reduction solutions. These strategies include raising awareness, providing life-saving drugs and training to vulnerable communities and ensuring that appropriate resources are available to support community-based response. I advocated to my colleagues in the County and City government to allocate resources to people with unmet mental health needs. As a result, Travis County is currently working to develop a behavioral health diversion center. This investment and program will reduce crime and improve public safety, while providing people with unmet mental health needs a pathway to stability and community engagement. ■

Mike Siegel: Out of these issues, I think I'd need to choose one to truly lead on in my first term, and I think that's climate action. That's the one where I see a confluence of opportunities, to build off of existing organizing, to take advantage of new resources, to mobilize public opinion and inspire Austin to lead the state and the South. To fight for bold climate action, we'd need a broad array of tactics and strategies, including:

- a large commitment of my time and key staff time;
- engagement of key movement partners including labor, environmental groups, and DSA;
- policy drafting and research;
- communications plans for earned media and voter outreach;
- public events;

- City Hall actions;
- and much much more [*continued*]

Basically, we'd have to organize the hell out of District 7 and City Hall over a multi-year period. Concentrate to make a breakthrough.

On public schools I'd support continued and increased investment in after-school programs, community centers, children's nutrition programs, child care, and other essential safety net supports. I'd also support using City lobbying resources to protect public education and expand public education funding statewide.

On healthcare, I'd support adding state healthcare programs to the City's lobby agenda, to fight for Medicare expansion and other programs on the path to universal coverage statewide. Locally, I'd advocate for Central Health to spend down its obscene \$500M reserve. And I'd work to ensure greater coordination among Central Health, City, County, and other healthcare providers in the region, to address gaps in coverage and work towards providing healthcare for everyone in our community.

On transportation, we need to fully implement Project Connect, including finding additional resources as needed to build out the light rail and bus service this community needs. Depending on what happens over the next 12-16 months, there may be an opportunity to impact the I-35 expansion. If there's any chance to divert interstate traffic around the core city and invest in a compact, walkable, and livable city core through amendments to the freeway plan, I'd love to support that. ■

23) Do you believe Texas officials should have the right to support the BDS movement despite state restrictions?

José Garza: I believe elected officials should have the right to advocate for policies and support movements that align with their values and the values of the communities they represent. ■

Mike Siegel: Yes. ■

END OF GENERAL QUESTIONNAIRE

CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE, District Attorney:

Name of candidate, office, jurisdiction, standing

**José Garza
District Attorney,
Travis County
*incumbent***

- 1) How will you contend with the restrictions on prosecutorial discretion passed by the state legislature this past session with HB17, making non-prosecution or refusal to prosecute (broadly defined) an act of official misconduct?**

The District Attorney's Office has always conducted an individualized case review for cases submitted to the office and will continue to do so as we are required by statute.

- 2) How will you handle messaging about public safety and crime during your campaign?**

We know what real public safety is. It is access to good jobs, good schools to send our children, and it is access to health care and mental healthcare. Public safety is stability.

We know that we cannot arrest and prosecute our way out of the majority of public safety challenges our community faces. Instead, if we are serious about our public safety we must implement strategies that address the root causes of crime in our community.

- 3) How will you follow through on the office of the District Attorney's progress in ensuring police accountability?**

The Civil Rights Unit in the District Attorney's Office is staffed by independent prosecutors responsible for reviewing allegations of police misconduct and, when appropriate, presenting those cases to a Travis County grand jury. To date, Travis County grand juries have determined over 20 felony indictments related to misconduct by law enforcement officers.

- 4) How will you pursue proven harm-reduction strategies in dealing with substance use?**

If we are serious about addressing this issue, it's time to treat substance use disorder like the public health crisis that it is. Since I've been elected, we have done this by limiting our reliance on conviction and incarceration. Instead, we've worked with Travis County Commissioner's Court, the City of Austin and other community partners to advocate for investments in alternatives to incarceration. *[continued]*

In the fall of 2021, our office rolled out a plan to address substance use disorder through community-driven harm reduction solutions. These strategies include raising awareness, providing life-saving drugs and training to vulnerable communities and ensuring that appropriate resources are available to support community-based response.

5) What is your plan to enforce wage theft in Travis County?

As an elected official, I am one of the only prosecutors in Texas who pursue work-related crimes and wage-theft cases. To our knowledge, from 2011-2020 there were only three wage theft indictments statewide in Texas before I took office. Since 2021, my office alone has secured five indictments in cases of wage theft. As DA and a member of AFSCME, I've also advocated for pay increases for city and county employees.

6) How can your office support trans rights and protect our trans friends, neighbors and family members from the state-level ongoing assault on their lives, including potential investigations into trans children and restrictions on public gay/trans existence?

As you may know, the Travis County District Attorney's Office is also responsible for representing CPS in child-welfare cases. In that context, the DA's office has made it clear that we will not use our resources to investigate parents who follow medical advice to care for their transgender children. I signed onto a joint-statement with other DAs across Texas to assure our residents with transgender children that they are safe to continue seeking the care their children need.

7) How will you work to preserve bodily autonomy as a fundamental right for Texans? How will you fight for a person's right to reproductive rights and safety?

Immediately after the Dobbs decision my office announced that we would not be using our resources to prosecute people who seek abortions or medical professionals who provide them. Following that statement, the Texas Legislature enacted HB 17 to allow for the removal of prosecutors who decline to prosecute entire classes of offenses. The Travis County District Attorney's Office will review every case that comes to our office and continue to uphold our statutory mandate to see that justice is done in accordance with the values and prerogatives of our community.

8) The office of District Attorney in Travis County has historically neglected and caused there to be a backlog of rape kits—how will your office address or continue to address that? And in particular, how has your office supported survivors of sexual assault through restorative justice?

Four years ago, survivors of sexual assault sued Travis County and the City of Austin. They alleged the District Attorney's Office and the Austin Police Department were not

investigating and prosecuting acts of violence against women, and the numbers backed them up. Survivors, the very people the criminal justice system is supposed to protect, lost faith in that system. Since I took office as DA in 2021, we settled the lawsuit with sexual assault survivors and made sure we were there partners. Together, we have developed new strategies to make sure survivors get the justice they deserve. We have worked with the Austin Police Department to increase the percentage of sexual assault cases that move forward for prosecution from 17%, four years ago, to 50%. We still have much work ahead of us. When you feel heard, you are more likely to report the assault in the first place. And the quicker an investigation can begin, the stronger the prosecution.

We know the good we are capable of in this community when we work together to make change. We're creating a criminal justice system where victims of crime are honored and welcomed. We've increased the size of our victim witness counseling team to be sure that voices of survivors are centered in the process. We have also built out trauma-informed processes and implementing terms of the sexual assault settlement through a community advisory board.

9) Beyond the issues mentioned here, what are your priorities in office?

When I sought the District Attorney role in 2020, I pledged to treat kids like kids and not to certify juveniles as adults. I have kept that promise and recently created the pre-arrest diversion program to ensure that young people accused of certain crimes are not taken to detention facilities at all. A review of juvenile prosecutions over the last ten years revealed that assault family violence is the number one charge juveniles in Travis County face. This past July, our office launched a pre-arrest diversion program for juveniles accused of assault family violence. Through the program, young people who face that charge have the option to go to a respite center instead of a detention facility. From there, the young person and their family have the opportunity to enter a restorative justice program that, once completed, results in no charge filed with the District Attorney's Office. The program is led and administered by three community partners: LifeWorks, the Amela Foundation, and the Excellence and Advancement Foundation.

In Travis County, we're serious about preventing gun violence through strategies guided by data and the community. We have made it clear in Travis County that if you pick up a gun, point it at someone, and pull the trigger, you will be held accountable. But we know that we will never prosecute our way out of crime and that we need to be proactive, not just reactive. That's why we are partnering with Travis County and the City of Austin to build a gun violence prevention ecosystem. We've already invested in hospital-based violence prevention strategies and resources for victims of gun violence so we can prevent gun violence before it happens. Upcoming priorities include formalizing a proposal to connect community-based partners with resources for people who are at-risk of committing acts of gun violence.

END OF CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE, City Council:

Name of candidate, office, jurisdiction, standing

**Mike Siegel
Austin City Council,
District 7
Candidate**

- 1) **As a city with a “weak mayor” system, one of the most important functions of city council is to ensure that the values and priorities that got councilmembers elected are represented—even and especially if they are in conflict with the agenda of non-elected officials. What are your plans to ensure the City Manager and city department leaders work for the working class of Austin?**

My goal is to build community power that leads to power on the dais. Through my campaign, I want to build a broad progressive coalition, with dozens and hopefully hundreds of committed volunteers, who in concert with a robust paid staff will be able to engage with tens of thousands of voters and build a strong base of support to win the election and create momentum for citywide political change. If I go into office with a strong footing in the community, I will be able to move deliberately to win support among fellow Councilmembers on key political priorities. And once we build consensus both in the district and on the dais, there will be leverage to set strong direction for staff with benchmarks and accountability.

For example, on police, there is no question that the DPS partnership conflicted with broad community demands for civil rights protections and a violence prevention agenda. We’ve decriminalized marijuana and deprioritized criminal abortion enforcement at the Council, and there’s no reason why we should have authorized state troopers to police our streets when we knew they would not respect local enforcement priorities. When the interim city manager announced this deal, my goal on the dais would have been to reinforce our community consensus through tactics such as placing agenda items that would have forced the city manager to publicly explain himself very early on, and as needed to force a vote that would reverse the partnership and restore the City’s policymaking authority. In my opinion, partnering with DPS was a policy choice that should have been made by Council, not staff. To discipline staff on issues like this, you need to build a majority on the dais who will stand together.

- 2) **What is your position on voting on consent agendas that may contain some items you are opposed to?**

I’d like to learn more if there is specific context to this question.

In general, my goal would be to encourage public discussion on items of public concern. In any given meeting there are time limitations, of course, and sometimes on Council you have to pick your battles. But if community voices ask for an item to be addressed, I

would consider pulling consent items and forcing discussion. At the same time, I'm sure there would also be times when I wouldn't pull a consent item, even if I didn't support a particular item on the consent calendar, in order to focus limited time and political capital on higher priority concerns.

In terms of these types of tactical decisions on the Council, my guidestar would be to maintain continuous engagement with community stakeholders so we can make calculated decisions about which items can be left on "consent" and which items need public debate and strong organizing efforts.

3) How do you intend to stand up to the Austin Police Department, and other city departments that defend the interests of APD (including City Legal), to hold police officers accountable?

We are in a critical moment to maintain the strong community consensus for police accountability and ensure that the City implements civilian oversight and other civil rights reforms. An essential precursor to winning policy reforms will be building a powerful organizing apparatus through my campaign and after the election that would mobilize district voters and impact politics citywide. Austin voters are with us in regard to spending priorities (i.e. minimizing cop spending and maximizing violence prevention and social programs), and they are with us on community control of the police and civil rights reforms. The key is to build power in the community and on the dais to implement the will of the voters.

My goal will be to organize several steps ahead of key moments like contract negotiations, hiring a new chief, hiring a new civilian oversight lead, etc, so that we can build majority support for the police reform agenda and also inoculate the dais (as much as possible) to interventions by stakeholders like the police association, Texas GOP, media interests, etc. The more organized we are, the more ready we will be to push back on staff shenanigans (for example, the recent revelation that the interim city manager hired a staff lead on civilian oversight without conducting a search).

In terms of city legal, I am uniquely positioned to cut through the bullshit and separate legal advice from policy guidance, given my 13 years of civil rights litigation experience and 3+ years as an Assistant City Attorney.

4) How will you work to ensure the implementation of the Austin Police Oversight Act?

I've been supportive of the APOA at every step of the way, including helping with policy drafting, leading Ground Game Texas to endorse the policy, supporting advocacy efforts to demand Council adopt the policy directly, knocking doors to win the May 2023 election, and now supporting the push for implementation. My hope is that through advocacy work and potentially legal action over the next year, APOA implementation will be well underway by the time I would join the Council. As a Council representative, I would work with Equity, Austin Justice Coalition, Austin DSA, and other stakeholders to monitor APOA implementation, reinforce and reinvigorate public support for civilian oversight, and ensure Austin lives up to its self-perception as a progressive community that supports police reform and community control of the police.

5) What are your plans and strategies to address the housing crisis in Austin? What is your plan to respect and advance the human rights and inherent dignity of our unhoused neighbors?

Thanks to the efforts of local leaders including housing justice organizers and progressive elected officials, we have a political consensus in Austin that includes strong investments in permanent supportive housing, aggressive efforts to build affordable housing, and ongoing work to remove barriers to adding housing supply (i.e. land use reform). To some extent the goal is to “stay the course” and continue making these investments that were neglected for decades before.

The biggest thing Austin could do on housing would be to convince the federal government to make major national investments in public housing and affordable housing. We need a trillion dollar national housing investment. My goal would be to work through progressive formations of local officials to advocate on a national level. For example, why aren't the mayors of major US cities holding protests on the steps of the US Capitol to emphasize the need for immediate and substantial action?

In regard to our neighbors who are experiencing homelessness, my core belief is that we are wealthy enough as a community to find dignified and supportive housing for all, and the only thing that is missing is political will. Unfortunately there are too many in power and in the community who want to blame folks instead of helping folks. On Council I would fight against any effort to criminalize people, and would be a voice for real solutions like permanent supportive housing as opposed to congregate shelters and other unsafe and uncomfortable programs that don't provide long-term solutions.

6) How will you fight to improve the material conditions of city workers, including specifically maximizing telework? What actions will you commit to within your first term to ensure these improvements are implemented and maintained?

I'm a former member of AFSCME Local 1624 who organized law department workers to join the union. AFSCME was the base of support for my first campaign for Congress in 2018 and is an organization that I love and respect as a key force for progressive change in our community.

For city workers, we need to demand fair and equitable compensation that allows our civil servants to be able to live in and enjoy the city they are serving. This includes conducting salary surveys to ensure we are paying competitive wages and avoiding the staff attrition and vacancies that plague too many departments. We also need to explore building workforce housing. My understanding is that approximately 40% of our city workers live outside the city limits and that's only getting worse. City workers should be able to live in the city they are serving — it makes their lives easier and it improves the quality of service the city receives.

In terms of telework, I support the union's pushback on the interim city manager's “return to work” policy and remain optimistic that the union will be able to win a resolution to that issue before the next City Council takes office in January 2025. From my conversations with city workers, the demand is for a nuanced telework policy that is not “one size fits all” but is instead responsive to the particular needs of each department and team. Big

picture, telework provides benefits including reducing climate impact, supporting work-life balance and family responsibilities, reducing transportation costs, and more. To the extent the City wants to demand workers return to the office, it should be backed by specific goals for productivity and collaboration and not just a general push that does more to benefit downtown real estate interests than city productivity needs.

7) How will you ensure City purchasing power, assets, and contracts support union organizing and labor rights in Austin?

In an increasingly hostile regulatory context, with the State further eroding local control with each legislative session, it's absolutely critical that the City use every spending tool at its disposal to advance progressive policy and protect workers and worker rights.

I've followed enthusiastically the organizing by Texas Climate Jobs Project and the Austin Building Trades Council to force Austin Energy to treat "power purchase agreements" as construction contracts instead of commodities investments. Now we will have compensation and safety protections for workers who build energy generation facilities for our community. We need to look broadly at every way the city spends money and issues debt as an opportunity to advance progressive policies and care for our workers.

I think there are a number of other ways we can do this. I'm interested in creating a "public bank" that would hold city deposits and give the city investment capacity for local priorities. I'm interested in the city behaving more like a "public developer" that actively participates in building affordable housing. I also see the "direct pay" programs under the Inflation Reduction Act as an opportunity to spur massive public investment in climate resilience programs. In each of these instances, the City would be able to control the quality of the jobs created and put in place protections for compensation, safety, and union rights.

8) How do you intend to use this influence in your term in office to improve the day-to-day conditions of the working class more broadly?

My goal is to be ambitious and strategic to build power for working class demands in the community and at City Hall. In the same way that Bernie Sanders pitched himself as a president who would be "organizer in chief," my goal would be to be a "council organizer" who uses the resources and visibility of a council office to support progressive movements in the streets and in the bureaucracy.

One of the most important early decisions will be hiring council office staff. Between the full time salary paid to the Councilmember, and the staff budget, you have 5-6 full-time people working in one office. This is a tremendous opportunity — more staff than a Texas state representative or state senator, even. These are the people who will be essential to running a responsive and effective office.

A key goal would be to balance the day-to-day work of being a Councilmember with long-term objectives for a four year term. As one Councilmember out of 11, I'd prioritize my time and energy to not try to do everything, but instead "concentrate to make a breakthrough." There are so many different types of issues that come across your desk as a Councilmember, many of which are an emergency for the person bringing the issue to you, and our current council has shown how even well-meaning members can get

swept away by a City Hall “crises of the moment” instead of pushing for deeper, structural change. I hope to avoid this trap.

The balance I’d want to strike would be a sustained focus on one or more key issues (climate action, for one), while also being nimble and responsive to the moment as issues arise in the community. One strategy would be to “multiply” the efforts of our council office by building alliances with other council offices (who could take the lead on some issues, for example, to enhance our capacity to take on other work), and by building alliances with community groups engaging in various areas of policy reform.

Another layer of the struggle is how to connect the work here in Austin with organizing efforts in other cities in Texas and the South. This could include mobilizing during the Legislative session on issues of statewide concern, or working with council members in other cities to help spread successful local policy efforts, or engaging in regional organizing focused on pressuring the federal government to take action. An Austin City Council office is a strategic position to launch various organizing efforts, be they hyper-local or national in scope.

9) Beyond the issues mentioned here, what are your priorities in office?

I think I've shared a lot! I wanted to add just a couple clarifications on YES/NO questions:

- **on campaign literature:** I'd much rather this be a dialogue than a binary. If endorsed and planning joint field operations, I'd prefer to work with DSA to figure out the right message for the right audience, which may be campaign lit, DSA lit, or maybe new/collaboratively designed lit.
- **on unionized staff:** starting out, I'll hire one person as an employee of the campaign (as the first employee of the organization, there won't be a union to join). As the campaign staff grows, I'd imagine it would be similar to my congressional campaigns in 2018 and 2020, when my campaign staff unionized.

END OF CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE