

# **NETWORK 49 MAYORAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Candidate Name: Kam Buckner**

## **1) Professional Background**

### **1. What progressive policy issue/achievement are you most proud of?**

There are several key legislative achievements that I'm incredibly proud of, including:

- a. [HB 5855](#): The Assault Weapons Ban. Makes it unlawful to manufacture, deliver, sell, or purchase an assault weapon. I co-sponsored this landmark legislation, which passed in the Illinois House of Representatives on the morning of January 6th, 2023. In the wake of the Highland Park shooting, this victory is a crucial step towards making the people of Illinois safer.
- b. [HB 4757](#): The Ghost Guns Ban. Prohibits the transfer, purchase, manufacture, importation, possession of unfinished frames or receivers and serialized firearms. I sponsored this legislation, which proved that we can take on the gun lobby and pass common-sense gun control legislation in our state.
- c. [HB 804](#): The Clean Energy Jobs Act (CEJA). This was the most comprehensive and consequential clean energy legislation in the United States, and I was proud to be a co-sponsor on this bill.
- d. [HB 2908](#): The Elected Representative School Board (ERSB). I was the lead negotiator on this bill, which was a priority for the Chicago Teachers Union. When the Mayor turned her back on a promise to get this done, I made sure we fulfilled the promise.
- e. [HB 3932](#): Task Force on Missing and Murdered Chicago Women Act. This legislation set the groundwork for examining the systemic causes behind violence that Chicago women and girls experience, tracking and reporting on data, and creating new policies to rectify the issue. I sponsored the legislation and am incredibly proud of the progress that it has enabled.
- f. [HB 4920](#): Extension of the EITC. I co-sponsored this legislation to bring pivotal additional tax credits to working folks in Illinois. Expanding its accessibility was a tremendous step towards building equity for Chicagoans.
- g. [HB 3904](#): Name, Image, Likeness Act. This generational legislation allowed college athletes to make money based on their name, image, and likeness which largely impacted women and minorities. This bill created equity and parity for a class of people who have been historically commodified but haven't been able to monetize their success, and paved the way for a national change by the NCAA.

### **2. What have you worked on/toward that you regret NOT having accomplished?**

I am currently working towards passing [HB 3917](#), which will change the evidence-based funding formula to consider student need and lead to more equitable school funding. It hasn't passed yet, but I intend to get it passed before I become Mayor.

## **2) Climate Change / Sustainability**

### **1. How will you fight and address the impacts of climate change? How do you plan to move Chicago towards a greener city?**

I have a proven track record fighting for the kinds of solutions that can make a difference on climate change. I founded the Lake Shore Caucus to address erosion issues on Lake Michigan and create solutions across our state. I was a co-sponsor on the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA), which passed in 2021, and continues to be the most consequential and comprehensive clean energy bill passed in the United States.

As Mayor, I've laid out my [comprehensive plan for the environment](#) that will take us one step closer towards tackling the impacts of climate change and becoming a greener Chicago. It calls for establishing, staffing, and fully funding the Department of Environment (DoE). I will appoint a Commissioner to lead the department, rather than a Director, to ensure institutional integrity that

is not subject to mayoral inaction. The DoE will create a comprehensive plan to address existing environmental threats across Chicago and I'll prioritize that work.

**2. What policies and practices will you initiate to promote environmental justice and reverse environmental racism which has steered hazardous industrial sites to be located in low-income communities?**

Environmental justice is critical to building equity in our city, and I will continue to fight and advocate for better treatment in our most marginalized communities. I stood with Little Village and demanded that the Hilco report be released by the Inspector General after a recent implosion blanketed their community in dust. I stood with South Chicago to demand the city deny General Iron's application for a construction permit in our community. And I was the only candidate to speak up about the [green wastewater infrastructure](#) after recent storms and floods. My administration will make sure that we make decisions that have communities in mind and don't make unilateral decisions that disproportionately impact already disinvested communities.

**3. Do you support the creation of a Chicago Department of the Environment?**

Unequivocally yes – it's the first commitment I make in my environmental platform. I have not only committed to reinstating the Department of Environment in my environmental platform, but I will ensure it is fully staffed, fully funded, and led by a Commissioner-level leader (rather than a Director) to ensure institutional integrity within the office that is not subject to mayoral inaction. My administration would first and foremost task the DoE with creating a comprehensive plan to address existing environmental threats across Chicago.

**4. How will you address preservation and protection of our lakefront to include fighting lakefront erosion and supporting ecosystem projects?**

In Springfield, I founded the Lakeshore Caucus: this group of legislators that represents the lakefront works to address erosion issues on Lake Michigan and create solutions across our state. This group continues to advocate for protecting the shoreline and the communities along the shoreline. My environmental plan commits to coordinating with the Illinois Waterway system to put in a concerted effort to protect Lake Michigan, including constructing physical protections.

### **3) Health**

**1. What will you do to improve mental health services and how?**

I'm the only candidate in this race who has released a [comprehensive mental health plan](#) that outlines my plan to improve access to mental health services in Chicago. I call for reopening the shuttered mental health clinics, standing up a true mental health responder program, piloting mobile mental health units to provide real-time support when it's needed, and more. I'm also committed to recouping state and federal funding for these initiatives that have been left on the table by the current administration.

**2. What is your position on (a) Treatment Not Trauma, (b) opening closed mental health clinics, and (c) developing non-police responses to mental health emergencies?**

(a) I'm a vocal supporter of the Treatment Not Trauma movement.

(b) I will reopen the closed mental health clinics; it's the first point on my mental health plan and it's a critically important step. I will also make sure 4 of those clinics are open 24/7 so that people can get the help they need when they need it.

(c) My administration will stand up a true responder model – not just a co-responder line. There are instances where a co-responder model is still too policed; this dedicated line will create a support unit that brings in mental health professionals to respond to mental health crises. I commit to this in my mental health plan as well.

**3. What will you do to ensure equitable access to acute care hospitals in the city?**

Public health, just like public housing and public education, has been used as a weapon against underprivileged communities, rather than a tool to build equity, for far too long. Healthcare should be a human right for every Chicagoan regardless of their economic position, and that should include mental and physical healthcare.

There's an opportunity to develop partnerships with healthcare delivery organizations and Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) to stand up community based clinics. There are abandoned schools across the city that have been vacant for years – we can convert those spaces into places that the community can go to receive the healthcare they need.

My legislative district includes more hospitals than anyone else, including Provident, University of Chicago, Northwestern and Lurie, so this is especially important to me. I've fought in Springfield to keep safety net hospitals in Chicago open and funded year after year. I'll make sure that CDPH coordinates with the county, state, and federal government to make sure we have viable medical acute care options in the communities that need it most.

**4. What will you do to ensure seniors and the disabled are able to remain in their homes and have access to health care?**

I want to build a Chicago that works for everyone – that includes building better community programs that are informed by those who are most impacted. First and foremost, I would listen to the community leaders who have been doing this work to understand the core needs of people with disabilities. That will allow my administration to focus our efforts on the right programs to make the most impact.

I would ensure that the eligibility requirements for programs that service people with disabilities are fair and inclusive, and I would look to state and federal resources to fund additional hours of support.

The ultimate goal always has to be increasing independence for people who require these services, so I would work to also expand not just the maximum hours, but the range of services including Electronic Home Response and home modifications. I would double the amount of weekly home service time offered by MOPD from 6 hours to 12 hours and work with the State and Federal government to get the funding needed to execute this.

**5. How are you going to address structural racism in health care access?**

I will task CDPH with instituting specific anti-racist policies, including specific provisions that will deal with administering vaccines and tackling maternal mortality, especially among Black women. I helped write the Legislative Black Caucus pillar that focuses on healthcare, which has now been signed into law.

This work isn't new to me – in the state legislature, I was a co-sponsor on [HB 158](#), which addresses the following (among other provisions):

- Increases payment rates for psychiatric treatment at hospitals serving primarily low-income patients.
- Updates the state's online Child Care Assistance Program Eligibility Calculator.
- Provides funding to preserve and maintain OBGYN services at safety-net hospitals.
- Creates the Special Commission on Gynecologic Cancers to determine best practices for early detection of gynecologic cancers and reducing disparities in treatment.
- Expands coverage of doula services and home visiting services for pregnant women.

I will bring this same commitment to addressing these issues at a city level as Mayor.

#### **4) Diversity/Inclusion**

- 1. Given Chicago's racial and ethnic diversity, what is your position on how to unify our city in relation to race, ethnicity, cultural, and sex/gender orientation?**

Our city is incredible because of its diversity, but it's plagued by centuries of systemic segregation that stands in the way of building productive coalitions. As a kid who grew up on the South Side, I know that these issues are deep-rooted. My administration is committed to building coalitions – that means engaging with activists of all backgrounds and inviting them into the decision-making process. I will make sure that the diverse and often-forgotten populations that make our city so great are invited to the table and given a voice in building comprehensive solutions. I will build an administration that looks like the city of Chicago and collaborates in the way we need Chicago to collaborate.

- 2. How will you address the reparations movement with regard to American descendants of chattel slavery, stolen indigenous lands, etc.?**

I will address this issue swiftly and unapologetically. I'll begin by working on what Chicago reparations should look like on day one while simultaneously pushing the Federal government to do their part in addressing this issue. Ultimately, this should be addressed at a Federal level, but cities can do their part and my administration will take a concrete step towards addressing reparations for our most marginalized people. Black Americans are the only people who came to this country as a commodity and we need to repair the wrongs done to the Black community in this city, state and country.

- 3. What solutions will you propose for the Chicago government to address systemic racism in city structures, especially in CPD, CPS, city government offices, etc.?**

As a Black kid from the South Side, I also know what it's like to lay face down on a wet pavement, handcuffed, because a police officer said I "fit a description." I recognize that these structures need to be addressed at their root if we want to see real change. My public safety plan commits to building a better police force and focusing on de-escalation tactics.

- 4. What have you done to address policies and practices specifically regarding harm to or support for American Descendants of Slavery and Indigenous peoples?**

My [call for a special session](#) to deal with issues specific to the American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) sparked the work that created the [Illinois Legislative Black Caucus pillars](#). This was the most sweeping ADOS-specific legislation that any state legislature has ever passed nationwide. I would expand this work to issues specific to Indigenous peoples and make sure we have a roadmap at the city level to address these systemic harms.

#### **5) Safety / Police / Accountability / Equity**

- 1. What is your plan to support city compliance with the federal consent decree and ensure accountability in police use of force, training, discipline, etc.?**

A recent report from the Independent Monitor showed that only 5% of Chicago's consent decree is in full compliance and just 17% are secondarily compliant – that is not sufficient. Mayor Lightfoot and Superintendent Brown have systematically failed to prioritize officer wellness and compliance with the majority of mandated reforms. The promised eleven wellness counselors have not been hired, despite budget allocations, and the Officer Suicide Prevention Plan has not been implemented despite monitors noting that Chicago's officer suicide rate is 60% higher than the national average.

CPD's community policing program is half-baked at a time where our city is desperate for real solutions to crime and the gun violence epidemic that plagues us every day. I know that there is deep distrust that goes both ways with many Chicagoans and the police, and it's indefensible

that a Mayor who promised reform has delivered so little where it matters most—public safety. My public safety plan commits to making meaningful progress on the reforms outlined in the Consent Decree, and I’m the only candidate in this race who has experience helping a big city police department work through the requirements of a Department of Justice Consent Decree from my time in New Orleans. This is a top priority for my administration.

**2. What will you do to improve public safety and increase our sense of security?**

The current administration hasn’t proven a commitment to addressing violent crime across Chicago – at a time when the city demands a plan to solve these issues, the Mayor is bringing nonsense “solutions” like closing city pools in the summer and instituting a curfew. The biggest reason why I’m running for mayor is to bring a true commitment to prioritizing public safety to City Hall.

Chicago is facing a crisis – we need a balanced approach to safety and justice to both address violent crime and tackle its root causes. Our city is currently failing to do the most basic work to make Chicago safe, like filling the hundreds of police vacancies. It’s not enough to just change policing in Chicago, we have to change the way Chicago views public safety entirely.

Putting my vision for public safety into place is a priority. The first policy plan I issued on my campaign is my Safer 77 Plan, which was the first comprehensive vision for public safety in this race and stood alone as the only public safety plan for months. My plan calls for both safety and justice to keep our city safe.

My administration will work to strengthen the existing public safety and justice structures in place, foster collaboration among law enforcement and the communities they serve, increase violence prevention investment, provide support for our first responders, and solve more crimes.

Additionally, we need to think beyond just policing and civilianize many sworn officer roles. My administration would develop the necessary mental health resources for police officers and communities, going further than the current co-responder pilot and having dedicated mental health professional teams appropriately answering calls, and investing in a true community policing model.

Public safety should protect us from risks across the city – lack of affordable housing options, an underfunded education system, and understaffed resources to support in a crisis. If we invest in these resources, Chicago can lead on what safety looks like. My full plan is available at [www.kamformayor.com/4-star-agenda/public-safety](http://www.kamformayor.com/4-star-agenda/public-safety).

**3. How will you improve the relationship between police and communities?**

One way to strengthen the relationship between communities and law enforcement is for law enforcement to successfully bring justice to portions of the community that have been left behind. I have committed to facilitating this work by writing and passing [HB3988](#) aimed at helping law enforcement find answers to the epidemic of missing and murdered women and girls in Chicago.

I’m committed to making sure that every CPD employee, new and existing, will be thoroughly trained in implicit racial bias and violence de-escalation techniques. Additionally, as mayor, I will make sure CPD is in full compliance with the federally mandated Consent Decree, which will make the department stronger and better equipped to serve the community. Coming into compliance with the consent decree is a top priority in our Safer-77 [public safety plan](#). And as the only candidate in

this race with experience in Consent Decree compliance for a major city Police Department, I understand how this should work.

My plan also outlines that we will require all use-of-force incidents to be recorded and then publicly posted within 30 days of the incident to increase accountability and transparency within the police force. My administration will also pass the [Anjanette Young ordinance](#) to strengthen the rules around police raids to prevent discriminatory practices and wrongful raids.

- 4. What alternatives to current policing practices will you pursue to improve public safety?**  
We need to rebuild lost trust in our police department and invest in non-police resources that will keep our communities safe. I would civilianize certain functions in the Police Department and commit to the Treatment Not Trauma campaign by instituting a non-police crisis response line. I will also invest in the Office of Gun Violence Prevention to tackle these issues at the root. In Springfield, I was the lead sponsor on the Ghost Guns Ban, which gets unserialized, 3D-printed guns off of our streets. I also helped get the Assault Weapons Ban across the finish line this year.

## **6) Urban Planning / Housing / Homelessness / Infrastructure**

- 1. Will you support the Bring Chicago Home Ordinance? Why or why not?**  
I've been a vocal proponent of the Bring Chicago Home Ordinance. Homelessness is an epidemic in our city and the Bring Chicago Home Ordinance outlines critical steps to resolving it. My [housing platform](#) commits to RETT reform, in line with this ordinance, and my administration will do this work to make meaningful progress on addressing this issue.
- 2. What will you do to promote affordable housing preservation and development?**  
I outline my vision for housing in my comprehensive [housing platform](#). It includes provisions to reform the Real Estate Transfer Tax (RETT) and ensure those funds go directly into combatting our homelessness crisis. I'll also build affordable housing options across our city through strategic partnerships and prioritizing affordable options with public transportation access. This all needs to be centrally managed at a city level – I will ensure that we appoint a cabinet-level position who is focused on managing affordable housing. This person will coordinate across departments, work directly with builders, and manage the creation and maintenance of affordable housing across the city.
- 3. How would you work with communities and local community organizations regarding neighborhood development and investing in Chicago's disinvested communities?**  
It's important that we listen to the people in each of our communities and include them in the decision-making process. I'll ensure that development decisions are made in partnership with community members, not in a silo. For too long, our communities have had decisions thrust upon them and their
- 4. How do you plan to improve residential streets, sidewalks, lighting, parks, and green alleys, and bicycle lanes and paths?**  
We need to make our city liveable, and that means making our parks accessible, creating safe and protected bike lanes, and investing in non-automobile infrastructure.  
  
I grew up playing in Chicago's parks, participating in sports leagues at the parks, and enjoying Ridge park with my family. Our parks make a difference and I'm going to see to it that we prioritize investing in our parks and green spaces to ensure kids in future generations, including my son, can enjoy our parks as much as I have over the years. This is personal to me.  
  
Parks are an important community resource and I want to make sure they remain a priority which is why I plan to include the Park district in all zoning and environmental decisions and create a partnership with CPD on youth engagement. I also plan to expand upon the Openlands

Plan, set to be instituted by 2023 and increase urban agriculture areas by creating greater opportunities for Urban farmers to develop land through business licenses and incentives.

We also need to invest in creating walkable and bikeable streets so people without cars can get around. I've signed on to the [Bike Grid Now](#) proposal to build a connected, protected citywide bike grid. Beyond just signing onto the Bike Grid Now pledge, I have committed to it as part of my [overall transportation plan](#), among other pro-biking provisions. This will be a dedicated effort in my administration.

## **7) Immigration**

### **1. How will you maintain and promote Chicago's status as a sanctuary city? What would you do differently, especially in response to immigrants being sent to Chicago?**

The need for Chicago to serve as a sanctuary for residents is multi-fold: it should serve as both a legal sanctuary as well as a welcoming environment for immigrants, undocumented or otherwise. This doesn't stop at schools – it requires the entire city to work together to welcome these families into our communities by increasing outreach and providing the services families need: housing, healthcare, childcare, after school programs, and job training.

While in Springfield, I supported [SB 1565](#), which would allow undocumented residents to vote in school board elections so they have a voice in the process and in their childrens' education. Though this bill did not leave the Senate, I will continue to advocate for creating programs and services that allow undocumented individuals to feel safe and protected in Chicago, without fear of detention by federal agencies.

There's a lot I would do differently from the current administration. My wife is a first-generation American whose parents fled from despotic regimes and poverty in Cuba and Ecuador, so this is personal to me. I will make sure that we open our doors while also making sure our communities are involved in the conversation. We need to find a way to both house these migrants and make them feel safe and welcome while also bringing communities along in the process.

### **2. Will you increase funding to the Department of Family and Support Services to help address the current migrant crisis?**

Yes.

## **8) Education**

### **1. Given the history of under-investment in neighborhood schools, particularly in communities of color, what specific measures will you take to ensure high quality education in all Chicago public schools?**

With key leadership changes and strategic investments, Chicago's public education system can be a valuable tool to bridge equity gaps that have plagued our city for generations.

If we want students to enroll in our schools, they must be best in class. We need to work with Springfield to make sure that our schools receive funding based on need, not based on criteria that have only perpetuated inequities. I've led this fight in Springfield as a sponsor on [HB 258](#), which seeks to create a more equitable funding formula for our schools. I would work with ISBE to accommodate factors such as generational trauma and poverty in the funding formula.

We also need to give schools sufficient resources to manage day-to-day student needs. I'm committed to making sure every single neighborhood school is staffed with a librarian, a social worker, and a nurse. These supports are critical for the health and safety of communities, and it's time we prioritize funding in CPS' budget to allow our schools to fully support the health and wellbeing of our students.

These commitments and more are detailed in my [education plan](#).

**2. What is your position on charter schools?**

As a product of the Chicago Public School system, I understand the importance of a school system that meets the needs of students and their families. Charter schools can be options for students, but shouldn't be opened in lieu of neighborhood schools. Investing in our neighborhood schools and providing them with the resources they need is key to providing equitable education opportunities to all students.

**3. By 2027 Chicago will have a fully elected school board. What measures do you advocate that will lead to equitable school board membership? Do you support limits on campaign financing in school board elections? Should elected school board members be paid for their service?**

Championing the Elected Representative School Board in Springfield and getting that bill across the finish line is one of the things I'm most proud of as a State Legislator. I'm currently working on legislation that will put comprehensive campaign finance limits on elections.

Before the board is fully elected, it will be a hybrid board, which I fought for to help us prepare for these changes. As Mayor, I'll select 11 board members who have proven they're committed to working for kids in our schools and look like the school district they serve. That could be LSC members, people who have worked in the education space, parents of CPS students, people with a vested interest in the district, and people with experience in growing enrollment. Ultimately, I'm committed to making sure that we bring in individuals who will be working to bring the best outcomes for our young people.

**4. Do you support a continued moratorium on school closings?**

I support truly investing in our schools to increase enrollment and improve overall outcomes. I worked to pass the moratorium in Springfield to protect students in a time of uncertainty. The reality is each school is different – we should not close all under-enrolled schools without understanding needs at a school- and neighborhood-level. When schools close in Chicago, there needs to be a clear process, transparent communication, and straightforward plan for the students and families impacted.

**9) Art & Culture**

**1. How will you support culture, equity, and the arts in Chicago – both for organizations as well as for individual artists and collectives (visual arts/theatre/dance/music)?**

The arts have always been incredibly important to me – as an avid music fan, some of my fondest memories have been enjoying and appreciating the arts ac

**2. Will you support a funding increase for arts education, sports, and extracurricular programs in our schools and parks?**

Yes. Many of our parks are only accessible from 9am - 5pm; the majority of the time that our parks are open are when our kids are in school. We need to make our field houses accessible to residents for as many hours as possible, and for as many hours as we can that people actually need them. That means keeping these resources open from 5-9, not just 9-5.

CPS and the Park Advisory Councils should work with the city to help us come up with a comprehensive vision for these spaces. In my administration, private companies will no longer dictate the development of green spaces – the city will own the vision to make sure it's supporting our communities.