

GLBT Alliance City Council 2014

Cynthia Chase

- 1- Please tell us why you are interested in reaching out to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender community.

ANSWER:

Having the support of GLBT community is of great personal importance to me. In high school in 1992, I was dating a transgender individual and as a result I was verbally assaulted on my high-school campus. The school administration was at a loss for how to respond and instead treated me as they did "problem students" by sequestering me in the vice principal's office in order to "protect me." I knew then that I couldn't and wouldn't be hidden nor would I have my education taken from me. I chose to return to classes and face the abuse until it turned physical and I was no longer safe on campus. Since then, I have been committed to advocating for the rights of the GLBT community particularly young people who need to feel safe and accepted at school and in their homes and need to be given every opportunity to thrive. Support from the GLBT is important to me because I am member of the GLBT community and want to continue to represent my life experience and be an example for others.

- 2- Why do you want the endorsement of The GLBT Alliance, Santa Cruz County's grassroots progressive gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender political organization?

ANSWER:

My answer to this question is the similar to the first. I consider the GLBT community my community. I want to continue to be engaged in and support the community in any way I can. I want to be able to represent community members and help carry forward the message of the community. I am also dedicated to helping people realize that GLBT issues are not just projects and programs that are designed or designated for the GLBT community, but that all decisions we make as elected officials impact the lives of GLBT individuals, couples and families.

- 3- Please tell us about your history with the LGBT community, and your awareness of issues specific to our community.

a - Have you had any opportunities to address LGBT issues in the course of your community service or professional life to date (i.e., have you helped formulate corporate non-discrimination standards, worked on the board of a non-profit that developed a LGBT outreach program, etc.)?

If so, please tell us about this work.

ANSWER:

I served on the Queer Youth Task Force in Santa Cruz County to support the rights of queer youth and to represent their needs, perspectives and help give them a voice.

I also worked on several research projects related to the overrepresentation of LGBTQ youth in the alternative education, homeless, juvenile justice and child protective services populations. The projects were focused on collecting more accurate data in order to better tell the story of this population of youth and to develop programs to address their needs. I was also particularly interested in helping to reform the justice system's policies and practices regarding housing transgender individuals in juvenile hall, jail and prison institutions.

As a faculty member for the School of Social Work at both SJSU and CSUMB I have been committed to providing my undergraduate and graduate students with a thorough and honest education about LGBTQ history, rights, legislation, challenges, victories and opportunities for advocacy.

b - The queer community is diverse, and we work to represent all elements of it. In support of that objective, we'd like to ask, specifically, whether you are familiar, at any level, with the issues faced, specifically, by the bisexual and transgender communities. If so, what influence would this have on your decisions as an elected official? If not, what steps will you take to become familiar with the issues, needs and concerns of these communities?

ANSWER:

I am quite familiar on a personal level with the challenges the bisexual community faces. It is challenging to move through the world not fitting into the sexual orientation binary and facing assumptions and judgments because of it, even within the GLBT community. I know that bisexual individuals are represented at a higher proportion within the behavioral and physical health system. I know first hand of the complications that exist in finding and receiving competent health care and I personally experienced lack of awareness and ignorance on the part of health care professionals in regard to the needs and risks for bisexual individuals.

In regard to transgender individuals, the health challenges and risks are exceptional. Health benefits are often not available or do not cover needed and costly procedures. In addition, finding competent health care providers is also a challenge. Transgender individuals also face challenges and discrimination in hiring and housing. I am always willing to find out more about any issue that is impacting the GLBT community. I am interested in knowing about the latest research and in talking to members of the community and advocates to make sure that I am staying abreast of changes in the needs, challenges and successes that have a direct impact on the community.

c - As documented in the The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute publication, "Bisexual health: An introduction and model practices for HIV/STI prevention programming" (2007), which is available for download at the URL below, in many cases bisexual people face even greater health risks and obstacles to accessing effective health care and health information than their peers in the queer community, including higher levels of self-harm, suicide attempts and thoughts of suicide. What specific steps would you take to address the issues raised in this report, and elsewhere, that are specific to bisexuals, including "biphobia" and lack of service provider awareness of bisexuality?

http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/bi_health_5_07_b.pdf

ANSWER:

As a young person I experienced assumptions from a health care provider who assumed heterosexuality and proceeded with their intake assessment of me in ways that made me feel like I was not accepted and not safe. I believe that one of the most powerful ways to impact systemic change is to educate people. In this case it would be educating health care providers in addition to the general public about the personal impacts that result from discrimination and marginalization of bisexual individuals. Personal stories accompanied with data that shows the inequities can go a long way at helping practitioners recognize the potential harm that can result from assumptions and ignorance. I am willing to provide education, advocacy and lobbying support to help address these issue at the local, State and national level.

A summary of the top ten health issues for the bisexual community, sourced from the above report, can be found here:

http://brown.edu/Student_Services/Health_Services/Health_Education/lgbtq_health/bisexual_health/health_concerns_for_bisexuals.php

4 - Many adults, in and outside of the queer community, express their sexuality in a variety of ways, many of which are not well understood by the general public or the service provider community, and often subject to severe social stigma; this frequently leads to poor health outcomes for the individuals in question and / or complications when interacting with the legal system and social services providers.

What do you know about "alternative" sexualities aka Leather/BSDM/Fetish (often collectively referred to as "kink") and their associated communities? Are you willing to learn more about them and engage in dialogue with people from your community who express their sexuality in this manner, in order to ensure that these constituents are better served by the agencies and institutions that you will be overseeing?

The Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance, which "works to advance the recognition of sexual, gender, and family diversity" and "to affirm sexual freedom as a fundamental human right" addresses these issues as part of their larger agenda of supporting "sexual freedom." Their web site is at <http://www.woodhullalliance.org/>

<<http://www.woodhullalliance.org/%E2%80%8E>>

The National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (NCSF) has an introduction to SM that outlines the governing principles followed by responsible individuals and organizations within these communities: <https://ncsfreedom.org/key-programs/education-outreach/education-outreach-program-page.html>

ANSWER:

I am aware of the variety of ways in which people express and experience their sexuality and intimate relationships. It is both consistent with the values and ethics of the Social Work profession, as well as my personal values that all people are free to choose who they love, how they love and how they experience and engage in intimate relationships. Our personal choices are just that, personal. I am always open to dialogues with the community, to listen and to learn about ways in which I can better support and advocate for the community's needs.

5 - Many adults, in and outside of the queer community, participate in relationships that do not fit the traditional two-partner model, and in doing so, are subject to discrimination in housing, insurance coverage and access to health care, immigration, custody and parental rights.

What do you know about these "alternative" relationship structures, often referred to by those participating in them as the practice of "polyamory" (defined as "the practice, desire, or acceptance of having more than one intimate relationship at a time with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved"), the people who participate in them, and the communities that have formed around them? Are you willing to learn more about how these types of relationship structures work, and engage in dialogue with people who participate in them, in order to ensure that these constituents are better served by the agencies and institutions you will be overseeing?

ANSWER:

I am familiar with alternative relationship structures and I am always willing to learn more. My job as a council member and as Social Worker and clinician is to increase my knowledge and understanding of the community, their concerns and needs and to become a more informed council member and advocate. Again, I believe that who and how a person loves is a personal choice and personal business.

You can find out more about these types of families, and the issues they face, on the Family Matters Project website (sponsored by the Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance) at <http://www.familymattersproject.org>, which is "dedicated to advancing, respecting and protecting the fundamental human right to family by eliminating discrimination based on family structure and relationship choices."

6 - Have there been any LGBT people who've had a significant impact on your life as role models, inspirations, mentors, friends, etc.?

If so, please tell us a little bit about how they've influenced you.

ANSWER:

As corny as it sounds, I remember as a young person watching the episode of the Ellen show when she came out and being total awe. I was so inspired and so filled with hope that this meant things had changed. If Ellen can come out on national television and people didn't reject her, maybe there was room for me...?

Locally, I have been incredibly inspired by John Laird who serves openly and publically and I have been incredibly moved by Gail Pellerin who has been an outspoken advocate of same-sex marriages.

I have had 5 out supervisors in my career at Probation and at Kaiser all of whom were leaders in their profession but also leaders in the GLBT community. I also worked with Angela Irvine at Ceres Policy Research who helped me learn how to use data to improve the visibility and the lives of GLBT people through telling a compelling story.

Finally, my grandmother who is now 93 changed my life and my depth of my understanding about what it means to tell the truth about who you are. When I sat down to tell her that I was in a relationship with a woman, she saw how scared and uncomfortable I was. She said "I think I know what you're about to tell me." And I replied with tremendous relief, "Oh good, then I don't have to say it." And she said "yes, you do." And in that moment she taught me the power and necessity of saying out loud who I am.

7- Please describe your philosophy for working with under-represented communities of which you are not a member and, specifically, how this will manifest itself in your tenure in office.

ANSWER:

I would do this in the same way as I approach everything, find the commonalities as a place to start. What are the places where we speak the same language or care about the same things. I'd also bring an open curious mind and an interest to learn about issues that are new to me or different than my own experience. I will be open to hearing from anyone who wants to meet with me.

8 - Please tell us what you know about current City-operated or funded programs which impact the LGBT community, and what suggestions, if any, you have for improvements.

ANSWER: First, it's important to recognize that the GLBT community is represented in every facet of our community not only in programs and services that serve the GLBT community. Every aspect of city government and the decisions I'd be involved in touch GLBT members. My suggestion is that the city recognize this as well and work to make sure that our language represents that perspective and educates the rest of the community.

9 - Local non-profits that serve the LGBT community, along with other non-profits, have experienced considerable cuts in funding from all sources over the past couple of years. As a member of the City Council, where would you place funding for health and human services on your priority list?

ANSWER:

As the director of a non-profit program, I have a keen awareness of the necessity of city funding to support needed programs and services for our community. I would strongly advocate for the funding of needed and effective services and would make it a priority for the council to work to find collaborative solutions to funding challenges that includes leveraging other local dollars.

10 - Will you insist that the City not associate with organizations - such as the Boy Scouts and The Salvation Army - that have clearly stated their intent to discriminate against LGBT people, supporting, instead, such inclusive organizations as Girl Scouts or

Big Brothers/Big Sisters or Goodwill?

ANSWER: Yes. I can be counted on to fight against discrimination and homophobia and will be an advocate for the community.

11 - Will you ensure that medical insurance for City employees covers complete health care for gender reassignment surgery and medical care for transgender employees and family?

ANSWER: I will fight for the rights of transgender city employees to have their health needs met.

12 – If elected, do you intend to take a leadership role with respect to LGBT youth in your city, working to ensure that all schools are safe for all students? If yes, please cite a concrete example of how you would do so.

In particular, did you support AB 1266 (text here:

<http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billStatusClient.xhtml>), which guarantees equal access to all school programs and facilities for students in accordance with their expressed gender identity?

ANSWER: I am in complete support of AB 1266 and often wonder what my high school experience would have been like, and what the trajectory of my life would have looked like if such legislation existed in 1992. Knowing that State officials support all youth to receive an education would have made a huge difference for me and would have been a clear message to the school administration that they were required to provide me and other Q youth with the same education as any other student. The way I describe the legislation to others is essentially equal access to education for all students – including transgender students. I would educate people about AB 1266 and the illegality of the educational institutions in not instituting it and thereby discriminating against their transgender students. I would use my own story as an example.

13 – If elected, do you intend to take a leadership role with respect to rights and services for LGBT elders in your city?

If yes, please cite a concrete example of how you would do so.

ANSWER:

Absolutely. LGBT elders struggle to receive continued support throughout their lifespan and suffer housing and health care discrimination at rates that other older adults don't have to contend with.

14 - What would you do to support HIV education and services for at-risk communities in your city? Specifically, do you support syringe exchange in an effort to stop the spread of HIV and other blood-borne diseases and will you work to keep the program based on best practices and evidence-based research? Do you support safe needle drop-boxes in public areas, such as parks or bus depots? Will you support the syringe exchange program if it encounters interference? Do you support training for your police department around needle exchange?

ANSWER: I support the public health recommendations and best practices in regard to needle exchange and am committed to supporting the use of evidence-based practices and research in response to interference. I support training and education for the police department and the community about how best practices result in a safer, healthier community for all.

15 - Do you support marriage equality, and did you do so publicly? Are you aware of a nation-wide movement to create "religious exemptions" to marriage equality and other nondiscrimination laws (e.g.: AB 2237 - text here: http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/13-14/bill/asm/ab_2201-2250/ab_2237_bill_20140221_introduced.html)? Do you have a position on such exemptions?

ANSWER: Yes, I publicly support marriage equality for all people. I also support a person's right to their choice of religion. Just like who and how we love is personal choice, so is our religious beliefs. The two should not and need not conflict.

16 - Have you in the past, and will you in the future, attend LGBT events, such as LGBT Pride, Queer Youth Leadership Awards, or the BAYMEC dinner? If you have not attended, why not?

Yes, I attend Pride each year, have attended the Queer Youth Leadership Awards and nominated folks to receive awards, have supported multiple local LGBT supporting non-profits including the Diversity Center, Triangle Speakers and STRANGE and I will continue to support and advocate for GLBT related programs in the future.

ANSWER:

17 - If you receive The GLBT Alliance's endorsement, will you display it in your campaign literature?

Proudly.

ANSWER:

18 - Have you received endorsements which you think might be of interest to the LGBT community?

Attached is a full list of my present endorsements:

PUBLIC OFFICIALS
Mark Stone, Assemblymember 27th District
John Leopold, 1st District Supervisor
Neal Coonerty, 3rd District Supervisor
Ryan Coonerty, 3rd District Supervisor elect
Bruce McPherson, 5th District Supervisor
Phil Wowak, Santa Cruz County Sheriff

Jim Hart, Santa Cruz County Sheriff elect
Fred Keeley, Santa Cruz County Treasurer
Michael Watkins, Superintendent Santa Cruz County Office of Education
Karina Cervantes, Mayor of Watsonville
Don Lane, Vice Mayor City of Santa Cruz
Cynthia Mathews, Councilmember City of Santa Cruz
Micah Posner, Councilmember City of Santa Cruz
Reed Geisreiter, Santa Cruz City Port Commissioner
Amanda Jackson Miller, Soquel Union Elementary School Board Seat elect
Emily Reilly, former Mayor of Santa Cruz
Bruce Van Allen, former Mayor of Santa Cruz
Jane Weed-Pomerantz, former Mayor of Santa Cruz
COMMUNITY MEMBERS
Dan Agostinis
Ted Altenberg
Jeffrey Arlt
Abbey Asher
Shayna Asher-Schapiro
April Baker
Nathan Bell
Ezra Berger
Lisa Berkowitz
Chea Berra
Grace Bibbo
Ryan Bond
Debora Bone
Sarah Broker
Tom Burns
Piet Canin
Eli Chance
Bud Colligan
Rachel Dann

Shermeil Dass
Maria Elena de la Garza
Erica DeGarmo
Allison Endert
Matthew Farrell
Michelle Finch
David Foster
Darrie Ganzhorn
Fernando Giraldo
Leslie Goodfriend
Lea Goodman
Susan Greene
Gary Griggs
Leigh Guerrero
Matt Guerrieri
Dan Haifley
Samuel Hardin
David Heald
Howard Heevner
Tom Helman
Ethan Henderson
Gretchen Henderson
Erin Hohengarten
Denise Holbert
Jessica Howell
Gine Johnson
Tara Kemp
Clay Kempf
Vanessa Kuhlman
Monica Larenas
Owen Lawlor
Nicolette Lee
Shelby Leland

Elizabeth Locatelli
Danielle Long
Rick Longinotti
Lara Love
Scott MacDonald
Matt MacLeod
Bill Maxfield
Katie McKendry
Kate Minott
Shauna Mora
Jesse Nickell III
Judy Osborn
Cameron Papp
Ron Pomerantz
Casey Coonerty Protti
Michel Protti
Kirsten Qualey
Pete Ragias
Gina Ramirez
Craig Reinerman
Kris Reyes
Scott Rosemann
Joop Rubens
Gerardo Sandoval
Erik Schapiro
Sibley Simon
Charlie Smith
Elaine Smith
Stacey Smith
Adam Spickler
David Stearns
Bob Stahl

Kelly Stoll
Casey Swank
Woutje Swets
Alisun Thompson
Leslie Tremaine
Jeremy Verinsky
Lun Wang
Timothy Wang
Don Webber
Randy Widera
Rita Winings

ANSWER:

19- Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

ANSWER: I would be honored to receive the endorsement of the GLBT alliance and to proudly represent the community. I thank you for your work in our community and the impact it has not just on the local level, but as an example to other communities.