

Rebecca Garcia

Watsonville City Council 2014

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

ANSWER: Social justice issues apply to all oppressed groups. I reach out to the GLBT community to fight for justice and peace for all.

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

ANSWER: An endorsement from the GLBT Alliance would demonstrate that I have the support of an under-represented group who needs advocacy in policy development and policy change.

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 have served on various Boards and Commissions that address issues of equity, poverty, education, and health. All these issues apply to the LGBT community. However, none of the Boards/Commissions have dealt with recommendations or policies specific to LGBT. Some of the Boards I have served on include Girls Scouts of Monterey Bay, Second Harvest Food Bank, Watsonville YWCA, and Pajaro Valley Health Trust.

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 familiar on the issues of bisexual and transgender communities only to the extent of the communications I receive from the Equality Action Project. I have been on the listserv since early 2012. I do have an understanding that in addition to the general issues experienced by the LGBT community, bisexual and transgender individuals deal with the issue of gender identity.

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: Just last week both the Sentinel and the Register Pajaronian carried articles about the increase in sexually transmitted disease in Santa Cruz County. The targets are gay men and bisexual individuals. The cause was attributed to unprotected and casual sex.

If this is the case the question that needs to be answered is what services are provided or need to be provided to educate and provide resources to this community to address this problem. As an elected official it is my responsibility to work/partner with health agencies to address these problems in Watsonville.

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: Sexual freedom is another human right that belongs to those who are members of our communities. I am not familiar with “alternative” sexualities and would like to learn more about them, but only to the extent that it is because that “right” is being taken away from them and I as an elected official am able to do something about it.

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 don’t believe that the “traditional” two-partner model exists any more to define a family. Research shows that there are more unmarried couples who raise children. There are more single mothers who raise children. There are more divorced individuals who raise children. And there are more gays and lesbians who raise children. Discrimination is unacceptable for any model of family. Family is one where love is abundant and children are raised to be contributing members of their community. That is all that matters.

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: I am sixty-seven years old and I would suspect that there has been a LGBT person who has influenced me. I am not able to give a specific example because I believe that that individual inspired or mentored me not because he/she was LGBT, but because he/she was a human being who cared about another human being. I do have family members and friends who are LGBT and they serve to remind us of the need for diversity and equity.

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 am a Latina and did not recognize racism until the age of 30 when I began higher education. At U.C.S.C. I read, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" by Paulo Freire. The book focused on the oppression of peasants in South America, however through the book I learned that oppression applies to so many other groups. The philosophy learned is that action must be taken to make this a more "beautiful" place for all people. As a member of my community in Watsonville and as an elected official I will take action to find diversity and equity for all groups.

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: I checked with the City Clerk to see if Watsonville has any programs that impact the LGBT community and was told no. I believe the issues of poverty, health care, education, and human rights needs to be addressed for all groups including the LGBT community. As a city council member my responsibility is to make sure that all discussions around these issues include the LGBT 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: I was a founding Board member of the Pajaro Valley Health Trust, consequently Health and Human services are a priority for me. I am a retired educator and know that many of our students' families depend on health and human services to survive. Funding for health and human services must remain a priority for the LGBT community and all groups.

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: Not only was I a Girl Scout as a youngster, but I also was a Board member of the Monterey Bay Girls Scots. Recently I was asked by the Board Chair and the Executive Director of Big Brothers/Big Sisters to be on their Board, but I had to decline because I chose to run for city council. I definitely support these two organizations. I do not know if Watsonville has a policy that states they will not support/fund any organization that discriminates based on sexual orientation, religion, race/color, gender, disability.... If it

does not I will definitely advocate that such a policy be adopted. The Boy Scouts and the Salvation Army could not be supported under this policy.

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: Any and all health care needs which include gender reassignment surgery and medical care for transgender employees and family must be part of the City medical insurance. It's difficult for me to understand why any type of health care need will not be supported.

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: As an educator (teacher and administrator) I have always guaranteed equal access to all school programs regardless of gender identification. I will continue to do so as an elected official. I remember when I was principal of Rolling Hills Middle School there was a young woman who took pride in being a Lesbian. I made sure that bullying against her was not tolerated. I remember getting information from the Equality Action Project to support AB 1266. I don't remember who we were suppose to contact, but I did.

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: I don't know who the LGBT elders are in Watsonville. However, if they would contact me I definitely will support their rights and services.

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 the syringe exchange program if it encounters interference? Do you support training for your police department around needle exchange?

ANSWER: There has been much discussion regarding the syringe exchange program in Santa Cruz County. It appears that this problem is in the Santa Cruz area and not in Watsonville. Hours for exchange has been limited in Santa Cruz, but the clinic hours in Watsonville continue the same. HIV is serious and the education for at-risk communities is vital. The City working with the health department can contribute to this education. I am not clear on how the police department is involved in the needle exchange in Watsonville, but training to help police officer understand the prevention of HIV through needle exchange is necessary.

15 - Do you support marriage equality, and did you do so publicly? Are you aware of a nationwide 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: I do support marriage equality. Other than congratulating friends in their marriage I have not had the opportunity to declare my support publically. Religion is a private experience. We have freedom of religion, i.e. to believe in and not to believe in.

Consequently, I do not believe there should be any religious exemptions. I am a Catholic and this is contrary to what the Church believes. However, because I believe God has given me free will I some times disagree with the decisions of the Church which includes not supporting religious exemptions.

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?

ANSWER: I have not attended any LGBT events in the past because mainly I have never been invited by a LGBT friend. I am a single woman and although occasionally I do attend events alone I do like company.

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

ANSWER: Yes. I have just published a website and after August 16th I plan to list all endorsements.

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

ANSWER: Just last week I submitted my questionnaire to the Monterey Bay Central Labor Council and hope they will endorse me. On August 23rd I will be participating in the Democratic Women's Club Forum to attempt to get an endorsement from them. Individuals from the LGBT community who have given me their endorsement are: Steve Trujillo, Santa Cruz and María Luisa Ramirez Perez, Watsonville.

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

ANSWER: I'd like to share about the work I have done in Watsonville. I had the privilege of serving as a Trustee on the Cabrillo College Governing Board for 20 years. During my tenure, the Cabrillo Watsonville Center went from four crowded rooms at La Manzana Center to now include two new buildings plus the old post office building. As a result, new programs to support career development and the transfer to university were established for our local Watsonville youth. I was Chair of the Watsonville Housing Task Force in the early 1990's that led to the adoption of an Inclusionary Ordinance which provides affordable housing in Watsonville. I participated in Action Pajaro Valley which brought Measure U to the voters to establish the Urban Limit Line and included the annexation of the Manabe/Ow property. I served as Chair of the City Redistricting Task Force after the 2010 Census. I currently am the immediate past chair of the Watsonville Parks and Recreation Commission. In the Commission I has given input not only to recreational activities, but also to gang prevention programs, bike and walking trails, and the beautification of the city with trees. My work was not directed at the LGBT populations, but this population will have benefited from my work.