

GUARDIAN

March 2021

Volume 27, Number 1

For At-Large B and District 1 – Election Day is March 16

HRCNCF Queries Gainesville City Commission Candidates on LGBTQ Issues

The Human Rights Council of North Central Florida (HRCNCF) received written responses to its candidate questionnaire from those running in the March 16 Gainesville City Commission At-Large B and District 1 seats.

Verbatim responses to the candidate questionnaire are provided below; they are also available online at hrcncf.org.

In the At-Large B race, incumbent Commissioner Gail Johnson faces challenger Gabriel Hillel, who also ran last year under the name Gabe Kaimowitz, garnering 5% of the vote. He did not provide written responses to each question of the candidate questionnaire.

In her first term in office, Gail Johnson has proven to be an outspoken champion for positive change. In her HRCNCF questionnaire responses, Commissioner Johnson noted: “As a cis Black woman that has been focused on racial and gender equity during my term, the intersection of race, gender and gender identity are important to me. My hope is that there continues to be a focus on lifting up the voices and experiences of the Black LGBTQIA community.”

“Commissioner Johnson clearly has a passion and talent for promoting important progressive policies as part of her public service,” said HRCNCF President Flo Turcotte.

In the District 1 race, incumbent Commissioner Gigi Simmons faces off against challenger Desmon Duncan-Walker.

Both candidates provided excellent answers to the candidate questionnaire. As a first-term incumbent, Commissioner Simmons voted in favor of several LGBTQ ordinances and projects.

In the questionnaire, Simmons responded: “In my time as City Commissioner, I have proudly supported

Three ways to vote:

Vote by Mail: Contact the Supervisor of Elections at 352-374-5252 or at www.VoteAlachua.com to have a ballot mailed to you.

Vote Early: Early voting runs from March 5-13 daily from 9 AM to 6 PM at the following locations: Alachua County Supervisor of Elections, 515 N. Main St., Millhopper Library, 3145 NW 43rd St., the M.L. King Jr. Multipurpose Center, 1028 NE 14th St., and the University of Florida J. Wayne Reitz Union, 655 Reitz Union Drive.

Vote on Election Day: Vote in your own polling precinct from 7 AM to 7 PM on March 16.

LGBTQ+ rights and voted for measures that support this cause, such as the ordinance to ban conversion therapy, the installation of rainbow crosswalks in downtown Gainesville, and the introduction of gender-neutral bathrooms in our City Hall. Advocating for LGBTQ+ rights is of the utmost importance to me, and I will continue to lend my support to the LGBTQ+ community of Gainesville in any way I can.”

HRCNCF President Flo Turcotte noted: “We're pleased that both candidates in District 1 provided excellent questionnaire responses. However,

Commissioner Simmons' actions in support of a number of LGBTQ issues have spoken loudly.”

District 1 boundaries include much of eastern Gainesville with some parts extending to northwest neighborhoods.

Because Gainesville City Commission races are nonpartisan, all registered voters in Gainesville may vote in the At-Large race, while District 1 voters may also vote in their district race. Call the Supervisor of Elections office at 352-374-5252 to have a vote-by-mail ballot sent to you. Early in-person voting at four polling sites runs from March 5-13 from 9 AM to 6 PM daily, while in-person precinct voting is available on Election Day, March 16, from 7 AM to 7 PM.

This election will be the last in a long tradition of holding Gainesville elections in March. The next election will be on the August 2022 ballot, with runoff elections (if needed) appearing on the November 2022 ballot. Commissioners and Mayor thenceforth will hold four-year terms with city elections scheduled every two years in the even-numbered years to coincide with other local, state and federal elections. Commissioners and Mayor will still be limited to two consecutive terms.

In Response to U.S. Supreme Court Ruling

Florida Commission on Human Relations to Accept LGBTQ Discrimination Claims

In a major administrative announcement, the state agency responsible for enforcing Florida's civil rights laws said it will now accept discrimination claims on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

The Florida Commission on Human Relations made the announcement earlier this month, just weeks after it convened its first meeting in the new year.

The move comes after the landmark June 2020 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Bostock v. Clayton* which ruled that the 1964 Civil Rights Act's prohibition of discrimination “because of sex” also includes discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

While the majority of the state's population lives in cities and counties that already ban discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, the ruling means that LGBTQ residents who live outside those covered areas now have a formal means of redress should they experience discrimination on the job, in housing or in public accommodations.

The Commission also noted the impact of the Biden Administration's recent executive order enforcing nondiscrimination protections in all areas of the federal government on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Mission Accomplished? Help Us Make Sure the HRCNCF Mission Statement Is Inclusive Enough

By Sam Welker, HRCNCF Vice President

Often, non-LGBTQ folks – even allies sometimes – view members of the LGBTQ community stereotypically. Lesbians love trucks, play sports, and wear men’s clothing. Gay men love ballet, sing songs from musicals, and dress in drag. Bi folks are indecisive. Trans people do not know who they are. Queer people are, well, just odd. These are terrible, harmful stereotypes.

In a world that loves labels more than it seems to love people, the label makers forget that LGBTQ folks actually identify with many labels based on gender, age, race, color, ethnicity, religion, and economics. LGBTQ are not defined solely by their sexual orientation or preferences any more than straight people are solely defined by theirs. A human person is far more complicated than sex.

Human Rights extend to every aspect of the human experience. In fact, the International Declaration of Human Rights identifies thirty human rights. People who identify as LGBTQ are not only denied these rights because they are LGBTQ, but for other aspects of their humanity as well.

The mission of the Human Rights Council of North Central Florida (HRCNCF) is “to oppose discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in the interest of civic betterment and social welfare.” In addition, “HRCNCF also seeks to work in coalition with other organizations working to end discrimination based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, age, religion, national origin, or disability,” labels that cover the entire LGBTQ experience.

The Board of the HRCNCF wishes to expand our focus to include the total LGBTQ experience. We are asking you, our members, to help us identify areas of discrimination that impact the LGBTQ community that are not strictly speaking discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, areas that

deserve more attention, study, recommendations, and action.

Please let us know of areas or specific incidents of discrimination you believe we should either work on as an organization or in league with other organizations.

You may send your ideas to Sam Welker at sswelker@aol.com. We do greatly appreciate the input of our members.

HRCNCF 2021 Gainesville City Commission Candidate Questionnaire Responses

All candidates except for Gabriel Hillel provided written responses to each of the questions.

- 1. Recently a federal appeals court ruled 2-1 against local conversion therapy ban ordinances. The Gainesville City Commission had joined a dozen other cities and counties in Florida to pass its own conversion therapy ban ordinance which prohibits state-licensed practitioners from carrying out the practice of conversion therapy for minors. The Gainesville City Commission passed a resolution joining other cities and counties to petition the appellate court to rehear the case *en banc* (before the full panel of judges). Do you support or oppose Gainesville's conversion therapy ban ordinance?**

Gainesville City Commission At-Large B:

GAIL JOHNSON: I support the conversion therapy ban ordinance.

Gainesville City Commission District 1:

DESMON DUNCAN-WALKER: I support the conversion therapy ban ordinance.

GIGI SIMMONS: I am a strong supporter of Gainesville's conversion therapy ban ordinance, and I was a voting member of the City Commission for this measure. This is one of my proudest moments as Commissioner, and I am in full support of future actions to advance this ordinance across Alachua County and the rest of the state.

- 2. Do you support annual city proclamations recognizing Gainesville's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Pride Days? Why or why not?**

Gainesville City Commission At-Large B:

GAIL JOHNSON: Yes. Public affirmation and support of our LGBTQIA community is important.

Gainesville City Commission District 1:

DESMON DUNCAN-WALKER: Yes. I believe, not only, that we should remind ourselves annually of the struggle of our LGBTQ citizens to attain equality but that we should also be reminded of our need to eliminate discrimination against the LGBTQ community (and all people) in an effort to achieve a more just society and a more perfect Union.

GIGI SIMMONS: I enthusiastically support annual proclamations on behalf of the city honoring Gainesville's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Pride Days. Just like Black History Month, it is incredibly important that we recognize the contributions that the LGBTQ+ community has made to the history of not only Gainesville, but our country.

- 3. The Florida Commission on Human Relations – the state agency responsible for enforcing the state's civil rights laws – just announced that it will now accept discrimination claims based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The Commission cited the U.S. Supreme Court's 2020 *Bostock* decision which ruled that Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act's prohibition of discrimination “because of sex” extends to one's sexual orientation and gender identity. Meanwhile, state legislators are expected to file this year the Florida Competitive Workforce Act which would likewise prohibit such discrimination. Would you support a city of Gainesville resolution that would urge the**

Florida Legislature to pass this bill which would reinforce the Florida Commission on Human Relations' policy?

Gainesville City Commission At-Large B:

GAIL JOHNSON: Yes!

Gainesville City Commission District 1:

DESMON DUNCAN-WALKER: I would.

GIGI SIMMONS: I would proudly support a Gainesville resolution to reinforce the importance of the Florida Commission on Human Relations' policy towards discrimination on the basis of sexual identity. I fully support the LGBTQ+ community, and do not stand for any act of discrimination against people on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

4. Do you support the city of Gainesville's recent installation of three rainbow crosswalks downtown? Why or why not?

Gainesville City Commission At-Large B:

GAIL JOHNSON: Yes!

Gainesville City Commission District 1:

DESMON DUNCAN-WALKER: Yes. I support the installation of the crosswalks because in installing them, the City illustrated, in one small but visible way, that the LGBTQ community matters to Gainesville.

GIGI SIMMONS: I fully support the installation of rainbow crosswalks downtown. I think it is a beautiful way to showcase our support for the LGBTQ+ community. This support should not disappear once Pride month is over, and the painting of our crosswalks is just one way we can show our support year-round.

5. Describe some efforts you have taken locally to support or advocate for LGBTQ rights.

Gainesville City Commission At-Large B:

GAIL JOHNSON: I have always been and intend to continue to be supportive of our LGBTQIA neighbors. As a cis Black woman that has been

focused on racial and gender equity during my term, the intersection of race, gender and gender identity are important to me. My hope is that there continues to be a focus on lifting up the voices and experiences of the Black LGBTQIA community in the work of the Human Rights Coalition of North Central Florida. Thank you for all that you do!

Gainesville City Commission District 1:

DESMON DUNCAN-WALKER: I have consciously and intentionally invited and placed members of the LGBTQ community in essential positions in the Gainesville Alliance for Equitable Development. I have also consciously partnered with organizations who support LGBTQ rights.

GIGI SIMMONS: In my time as City Commissioner, I have proudly supported LGBTQ+ rights and voted for measures that support this cause, such as the ordinance to ban conversion therapy, the installation of rainbow crosswalks in downtown Gainesville, and the introduction of gender-neutral bathrooms in our City Hall. Advocating for LGBTQ+ rights is of the utmost importance to me, and I will continue to lend my support to the LGBTQ+ community of Gainesville in any way I can.

**HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
OF NORTH CENTRAL FLORIDA, INC.**
PO BOX 12912 GAINESVILLE, FL 32604
TEL: 352-234-6060 EMAIL: HRCNCF@GMAIL.COM

THE NEXT MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IS THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 2021, AT 7:00 PM AT PRIDE COMMUNITY CENTER OF NORTH CENTRAL FLORIDA, 3131 NW 13TH ST, IN GAINESVILLE. DUE TO PUBLIC HEALTH SAFETY PROTOCOLS, THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IS NOW MEETING ONLINE VIA ZOOM. PLEASE SEND AN EMAIL TO US IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO JOIN THE ONLINE MEETING.

The *Guardian* is published quarterly.