

2022 Primary Endorsement Questionnaire

DEADLINE: Submit by 12:00 Noon, Monday, April 18, 2022

Email *

surlenegrantbos3@gmail.com



Thank you for your interest in being considered for an endorsement by the Asian Pacific American Democratic Caucus of Alameda County. Please answer each question in 250 words or less. Be honest and direct. Please submit your responses by 12 Noon, Monday, Apr. 18. All questionnaire responses will be posted on our website for Caucus members to review.

Personal Information

Candidate Name *

Surlene G. Grant

City and zip code of residence.

San Leandro, 94578

What is your campaign website address?

www.surlenegrant.com

What is your campaign email address?

surlene@surlenegrant.com

Are you a registered Democrat? The APA Democratic Caucus can only endorse registered Democrats *

Yes

No

Are you an APA Democratic Caucus member? *

Yes

No

How long have you lived in the district which you are seeking to represent?

29 years

What are the names of any community or nonprofit organizations with which you have been an active volunteer in the past 3-5 years.

Unity in the Community - San Leandro; Black Women Organized for Political Action; Stephanie Brown Cadet Memorial Foundation; San Leandro Chamber of Commerce; Africa American Business Council; leadership activities of faith-based organization

CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

1. What actions have you taken to address anti-Asian discrimination/bullying/harassment?

Please explain in what capacity you have acted and whether any of these actions were prior to 2020. (i.e., as an elected representative, member of commission/board/organization, and as an individual.

My own experience of being initially elected in office in San Leandro carries memories of receiving hate mail; a feeling that stays with you. Thus, I will continue to fight for, stand for and speak out against hate and racially-charged actions.

In my capacity as a co-founder and convener of Unity in the Community, I have acted on such incidents since Spring 2016. Specifically, I have written and signed letters to the District Attorney and the State Attorney General seeking redress and higher penalties. I am a participant with the Divided Communities Project (the Mortiz School of Law at The Ohio State) in thought-leadership sessions that have led to their publications on how to respond to / counter hate. Through my established "pre" 2020 relationships, I was able to seek advice and counsel from Department of Justice on how to respond to situations in San Leandro (and Bay Area) that developed in 2020 and 2021.

In May 2021, Unity in the Community volunteers (including myself) staffed a table at "Hate is Un-American" event sponsored by AAPI community leaders at the San Leandro Library plaza. The event led to very interesting conversations with people and a chance to educate and inform. One of the goals of Unity in the Community is to make space for difficult conversations. During that event a man of Asian descent came to the table and ask "why do black people hate Asian people?" We welcomed the question and took him aside to engage him in a quiet personal discussion, taking the opportunity to peel back the layers on generations of mis-information and stereotypes. We are more alike in this struggle than different. As representatives of disadvantaged groups, the bullying and hate is unfortunately something that African American and Asians continue to share. So, when I take a stand for hate crime in San Leandro; when we march, rally, write letters, sign petitions for this community, my fight is also for your community.

2. One out of every 3 Alameda County residents is of Asian ancestry but are underrepresented in elected office. What have you done and will you do to elevate their issues of concern?

In an area where 30-40 percent of the population is of Asian descent, I recognize that someone from the overall community should be at every meeting table and policy discussion. Yet, I often walk in a room where that is not the case. And when I do, I call it out. It is important that everyone's voice is represented in some way. In my work, I strive for that inclusion and attempt to work with the sponsor to create a more inclusive space. I will make sure AAPI and immigrants, and others, are included in the engagement, in government process and in the policy decisions.

Some specifics for what I have done:

One of my earlier pieces of legislation as a Council member with the City of San Leandro was the removal of the word "minority" from use in City documents. If there were no "majority" population group in the City then there could not be any "minority group"... we sought to change people's thinking from ruling class / oppressive language of "majority / minority" to historically excluded or disenfranchised.

As convener of Unity in the Community -San Leandro, I prepare agendas, find speakers and coordinate programs with others to provide an opportunity for learning and space for empathy, compassion, and understanding. We introduce and discuss topics such as Free Speech and hate speech, history of Japanese Internment, Chinese Exclusion Act and other related topics.

In my professional work, my goal is to hear from all of the community. From 11/19-5/21, I worked on outreach and engagement for the City of Oakland's equity based Capital Improvement Program. I made sure that Chinatown residents were included in the process by holding meetings in the vicinity; and recognizing that Asian people and culture are not monolithic. I also put efforts in having a series of meetings at Clinton Square Park to meet with the Vietnamese community as well as representatives from other immigrant groups.

Probably, the greatest effort has come with the Civic Engagement of my own city (San Leandro). In spring 2020, there were a series of meetings - some related to the selection of the new City Manager, some related to the establishment of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programming. People of Asian ancestry were totally absent the City Manager interview. I was incensed and let every City Council person and the Consultant know of this gross oversight and suggested people they should have contacted. For the DEI work, I proactively suggested names of people to include or reach out to, and they did.

Some specifics of what I will you do:

- * Listen - As one who is a member of an ethnic group who is also frequently dismissed by policy makers, and one who has service in public office --I will listen and pay attention to all constituencies
- * Develop new and cultivate existing relationships throughout the community.
- * Promote and Work with underrepresented constituencies so that their voices are heard and elevated
- * Support leadership training and mentor programs of other programs as well as pathways to engagement and participation by seeking and recruiting Asian Americans to serve on Alameda County boards and commissions
- * Support leadership by working with Asian American who are on County Boards and Commissions to make sure their agendas are strong. Leadership only works if there is followship. I can only be a leader if people will follow. They will follow if I am carrying their agenda.

* Convene round table conversations w/Asian American leaders from different cities throughout District 3 and the County in general with the goal of hearing concerns, ideas, recommendations from AAPI leaders

3. One-third of Alameda County residents were born in another country. Do you believe that the needs of immigrants have been adequately addressed by the office you are seeking to represent? What changes are needed to better center their needs?

I believe that Supervisor Chan's hallmark was her stand for immigrants and minority communities -all, but especially the AAPI community. She was a champion of immigrant families and communities throughout her district and entire county. She led the efforts for the Board of Supervisors to adopt a resolution Designating Alameda County a Welcoming County for Immigrants and Refugees in 2016.

The resolution promotes the value of immigrant integration efforts and supports a comprehensive planning process that engages immigrants, refugees and the broader development of policies, programs and initiatives that build welcoming communities.

The adopted resolution centers the needs for Alameda County immigrant residents through policies, programs and initiatives (housing, health, county social services, food insecurity, etc.).

If I am fortunate to serve Alameda County as a Board Member of District 3, I will continue to uphold the values, principles and in spirit that our cherished colleague Supervisor Wilma Chan embodied in serving our district. I have and will continue to embrace and promote Alameda County as a Welcoming County to Immigrants and refugees. I would continue to advocate access, inclusion, and engagement with immigrant communities so that services continue to meet the variety of needs and that immigrant and refugee communities thrive in Alameda County.

I will continue her work for access to health care, language accessibility, small business development ...so yes, with her, and her resolutions for a welcoming city, for civil rights (for DACA and anti-ICE), she definitely addressed the need. Now we need to carry her work forward and further.

4. What have you learned about Asian Americans in the past year that you were previously unaware of and how has that impacted you?

It's not what I have learned about Asian Americans as a group -- that is too broad. However, from my professional work with the City of Oakland and my volunteer work with Unity in the Community, in the past 2 years, my most impactful learning has been about Oakland's Chinatown as a community. I held the perception that as an insular community with its own stores, banks, restaurants and services that Chinatown was a bustling, thriving place, with a supportive economy. I always thought of Chinatown and the people living there, living well. Working on the recent projects and working with community leaders, I learned that my perceptions were not factual.

The learning came in receiving information of the poverty rate, the lack of services and employment - made worse by the impacts of the pandemic and the vaccination rates, and compounded by the rash of hate-based crimes. I learned how much attention needs to be given to the community versus what was given in the past for city services, social services, employment and training. I had not perceived Chinatown and the community within it as an isolated place, but that is how policy makers tend to respond - "those people over there" and often ignore the problem.

For me, this realization translates to the need for more inclusion in the policy discussion, not just of Chinatown voices but of others. If Chinatown voices and representatives which literally are the most visible and organized are ignored, then what is happening to voices representing others in the City and the County? If Chinatown is established, grounded and we know the leaders, then what is being done for new immigrants? As a leader, it will be my work to bring these voice and communities into the process, to respond to needs, to create pathways for improved quality of life such as employment training, social service and public safety programs.

5. What is the difference between supporting Asian American/Pacific Islander issues and being an Ally?

While different in terminology, the two -- being a supporter and being an ally - are not mutually exclusive. An ally is in theory supportive. However, for me, being a supporter is stronger. An ally can be passive with their support. But a true supporter put action to the words. As a community person, and definitely as a Supervisor I would serve as a supporter.

"Ally" is the buzz word of the day, much like equity." I have been a champion of equity long before 2020 and I have been an ally - a friend, a person in alliance with many causes for civil rights and recognition - prior to 2020 as well. For me, and Ally is one who says "yes, I agree with those things." "yes, I support the principle and tenets of your group." However, being a "supporter" puts that "allyship" to action.

Being a supporter means to me, I will stand with you and fight with you... I will speak on your behalf on issues. I will sit at the table with you and draft the policy recommendation. Supporting AAPI issues is to lend an active voice to the discussion, to promote change and find solutions.

6. What resources (people/organizations) will you tap to increase your knowledge and understanding of the on-going needs of the Asian and Pacific Americans living in your district?

I will attend community events and cultural events. But beyond such visible involvement, I plan to establish frequent community roundtables with leaders and organizations to discuss concerns and issues, program ideas, etc. proactively so that relationships are established or made even stronger.

Some of the people and organizations are listed below: This is not an all inclusive list -- but just so you know that I do have some familiarity of people and organizations - some of the organizations and individuals that I have existing relationships with and knowledge of that I will work with are:

Oakland Asian Cultural Center
Oakland Chinatown Chamber of Commerce
Asian Health Services (AHS) - San Leandro and Oakland
Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce
Vietnamese Community Center of the East Bay
East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation (EBALDC)
Asian Pacific American Environmental Network
Asian American Community Mental Health Service
Stop AAPI Hate
Heritage Baptist Church (San Leandro)

Some leaders and community connectors with whom I have, could and would contact to get a better understanding of needs are listed below. (This is not an exhaustive list or a list to indicate support, just acknowledging a relationship with few key community connectors) :

Xouhoa Bowen, Alice Lai-Bitker, Carl Chan, Greg Chan, Jeanette Dong, Rick DeSilva, Pastor Alan Fong, Lamar Heysteck, Hanson Hom, Evelyn Lee, Derek Lee, Arlene Lum, Ken Pon, Alvina Wong, and Hendy Wijaya

Just among the 3-4 cities/ communities of District 3 the diaspora of Asian based and Pacific Islander communities is broad, and becomes even more diverse as you reach even more communities in the County. So while I listed some organizations above, there are several organizations serving these populations away from Oakland -- from food distribution to other social services - that do not have an affinity identifier in their names such as Fremont Family Resource Center, or Davis Street Community Center. These too are important to serving the Asian and immigrant populations of our County.

7. Please identify any Asian Pacific American candidates whom you have publicly endorsed/supported over the past 5 years including this election cycle. If there are none, please explain.

Benny Lee (San Leandro City Council and Ora Loma Sanitary District) and Rob Bonta (as Assembly person) come to mind immediately. For the upcoming election cycle in San Leandro (November) I am still waiting to closer to the filing period.

Thank you for completing our questionnaire.

Only candidates who submit questionnaires by noon Monday, April 18 will be considered for endorsement.

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