

# Annapolis Pride 2021 City of Annapolis Primary Election Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate: SHEILA M. FINLAYSON, WARD 4 (D)

*(See candidate responses in bold, blue, italic font)*

1. Please let us know if you have ever volunteered with or supported any LGBTQ+ organizations, such as Annapolis Pride, PFLAG, or the Human Rights Campaign. Feel free to include events in which you participated. Please include all groups you feel are pertinent including LGBTQ+ Equity actions or advocacy that you have taken in other non-LGBTQ+ organizations or Boards. If no previous volunteer or advocacy experience with or for LGBTQ+ Community, please explain why not and how you now understand the importance of such advocacy.

*As an educator, I understand and support the rights of all citizens. While actively involved with the National Education Association, I supported in the organizing of the LGBTQ Caucus and was a member.*

*Personally, I have family members who are part of the LGBTQ community. I fight for their rights to be the individuals they are.*

*I am also very proud that our city has embraced and support the LGBTQ community. The City has liaisons in the Mayor's office, as well as in several departments, who help to keep us aware and informed so no one is left behind.*

2. [The Trevor Project National Survey on LGBTQ+ Youth Mental Health 2021](#) surveyed nearly 35,000 LGBTQ youth ages 13-24 across the United States. Among the key findings of the survey:
  - **42% of LGBTQ youth** seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including **more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth**.
  - **12% of white youth** attempted suicide compared to **31% of Native/Indigenous youth, 21% of Black youth, 21% of multiracial youth, 18% of Latinx youth, and 12% of Asian/Pacific Islander youth**.

Please discuss your feelings about the data above and how you would help support LGBTQ+ youth and specifically Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), and transgender nonbinary youth. Have you advocated for or endorsed legislation and actions on the state or local level to keep LGBTQ+ youth safe? Explain if you have not and what you intend to do in the future to improve the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth in Annapolis.

*I think the statistics are appalling and frightening. The statistics clearly state that youth who are feeling the pressure of discrimination crosses all segments of our society. Our youth are in crisis and we must do something about it.*

*As an educator, I believe all youth must be protected and nourished. We must support our youth so they don't have the feelings of desperation that leads to wanting to take their own lives.*

*I applaud the Board of Education for the position they have taken and it is up to them to assure the community and the youth that everyone will follow their guidelines. The counselors in each school must be properly trained to identify youth who are at risk of being bullied and terrorized and be qualified to provide the needed assistance.*

*At the City level, I proposed, and last year finally got funding for, a social worker with an advance degree. This year, I was able to get an assistant to the social worker. My hope is that we will create a department of social services so that we have adequate staffing and resources to help address the needs with our youth and adults. In the interim, we rely very heavily on the County's Social Services to provide support and services.*

*We must identify all forms of discrimination and put into place policies and procedures that will help eradicate it. Equally as important, we must pay attention to what is happening around us so that when we see youth starting to "slip away," we can catch them. Be it through parental involvement, counseling or medical attention, we must be aware and be prepared to help.*

3. On June 16, 2021 the Anne Arundel County Public School Board passed the [Safe and Inclusive Environments for LGBTQ+ Students](#), a comprehensive policy that prohibits discrimination and harassment based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The policy states support for the right of any student to be addressed by a name and pronoun that correspond to the student's gender identity. Additionally, the policy supports the right of any student to use school facilities that correspond with gender identity in which the student identifies.

Please discuss the importance of the adoption of policies in schools that respect student gender identification, including consideration of reasonable and respectful accommodation in regard to facilities. Please provide your feelings regarding "Bathroom Bills" that have been proposed around the country.

*As a former educator, I think the Board of Education policy was a huge step toward protecting the rights of all students. The Safe and Inclusive Environments for LGBTQ+ policy is an important step in eliminating discrimination in our schools. Schools should be a safe environment for youth to grow and develop and learn. Eliminating the obstacle of discrimination will hopefully put to rest the things that lead to separation.*

*I believe the groups, often lead by parents, who oppose such actions by Boards of Education are not acting in the best interest of the youth. I believe it stems from their own prejudices that cause them to take such damaging actions toward kids.*

4. How have you advocated for the LGBTQ+ community and supported inclusion for the LGBTQ+ community in the past (i.e. have you spoken out publicly for policies at your place of business, testified before government bodies, adopted written policies for your employees, marched for equal rights, etc.)? Please be specific.

*As I said previously, I fully supported the LGBTQ Caucus at the NEA. As a Director with the National Council of Education Association, NCUEA, I had the opportunity to influence policy at the national level and particularly in the 12 states I represented. While my tenure was in the early 2000's, even then the Education associations recognized the significance of eliminating all forms of discrimination and putting appropriate policies in place. Education organizations have always been in the forefront of addressing policies and practices that discourage and eliminate any form of discrimination and most especially that address gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and race. I have participated in protests for what seems like my entire adult life. I have attended several anniversary protests of the March on Washington, mostly lead by the NEA. In 2016, I was extremely proud to participate in the Women's March in DC, and locally, I joined the youth in their Black Lives Matters protest here in Annapolis. After having two, yes, two knee replacements, my protesting days have been curtailed but only briefly.*

5. It has been well documented that LGBTQ+ people face health disparities linked to societal stigma, discrimination, and lack of access to quality health care. How have you advocated to reduce LGBTQ+ health disparities? Explain if you have not and what you intend to do in the future to improve the health of LGBTQ+ people in Annapolis.

*I have been a strong advocate of all employee rights, all employee rights. I believe health care is one of those rights. For many years I negotiated the health care benefits for all of the teachers in Anne Arundel County Public Schools. I would not have tolerated differentiated treatment, and I still don't. My organization had a mechanic to identify specific needs for specific members. We must work to remove the stigma attached to health care for the LGBTQ+ community. Education must be one of the ways to eliminate the stigma. I think it is important to have counselors who understand and can direct folks to the resources that are available to them. The City has non-discrimination policies in place that forbid disparity in treatment. We must assure our employees that the policies will be upheld.*

6. What is your position on police reform, and do you support police training and education on issues of concern to the LGBTQ+ community?

*We currently have legislation being proposed to address changes in our policing policies and practices. I believe reform is needed while the police maintain their core function of “protecting and serving.” Some of their practices, such as choke holds must be forbidden.*

*I have advocated for community policing for almost eight years. The model I endorse causes the police to connect with the community. Growing up in Eastport, we knew the police officers who walked our beat and they were “our friends.” We didn’t fear them. I embrace the model that assigns officers to a specific beat that will be their territory “to serve and protect.” They become responsible for what happens on that beat and should take pride or have concerns about what happens there.*

*I have also advocated for trained social workers in the City. See answer to question #2. I strongly support training and education on issues of concern to the LGBTQ+ community. I think the training should be part of the initial training and should be ongoing.*

*I have a Masters Degree in Cultural Foundations, which in essence speaks to addressing those differences that set us apart and how to bridge the gap.*



Annapolis Pride invited all candidates in the upcoming City of Annapolis elections to participate in our first candidate questionnaire to educate voters impartially and on a nonpartisan basis. We encouraged all candidates to participate regardless of party affiliation. Candidate questionnaire responses are distributed for purely informational purposes.

Annapolis Pride is a volunteer, grassroots non profit organization that advocates for the LGBTQ+ community all year long and hosts the annual Annapolis Pride Parade and Festival held in June. Learn more at [AnnapolisPride.org](https://AnnapolisPride.org). Contact Annapolis Pride at [info@annapolispride.org](mailto:info@annapolispride.org) or by mail, PO Box 4822, Annapolis, MD 21403.

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