

Democratic Rural Conference of New York State

2022 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE DEMOCRATIC RURAL CONFERENCE

CANDIDATE'S NAME and ADDRESS:

Letitia James

Position for which you are a candidate: **Attorney General of the State of New York**

Candidate's Address for All DRC Correspondence:

Telephone:

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Fax:

E-mail: Tish@jamesforny.com

THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS WILL BE POSTED ON THE DRC WEB SITE.

Name, cell phone number and e-mail address for the person on your staff who will be your liaison with the DRC.

Yvette Buckner , yvette@jamesforny.com, 917-533-3799

List your qualifications for this office including but not limited to other offices you have held, educational background, etc.

Please address these questions, but make your answers brief so the entire questionnaire does not exceed 4 pages.

- 1. ABILITY TO LEAD THE ENTIRE STATE – What contact and experiences have you had with parts of the state, other than where you currently reside, which demonstrate your recognition of the geographic, demographic and economic diversity of the state and your ability to provide leadership on behalf of all New Yorkers?**

As Attorney General, I have fought for New Yorkers in every corner of the state, and delivered. A core part of this work for me has been traveling directly to rural counties, including Clinton, Essex, Washington, Montgomery, and Seneca Counties, and more, to work alongside local partners and ensure that the funds my office won from settlements went directly to programs in their communities.

My office has 13 Regional Offices around the state, and I work hand in hand with them in critical areas such as elder abuse, consumer fraud and tenants' rights. I have regional representatives on the ground to communicate and connect me directly to communities in DRC counties. They enable me to stay up to speed with the most pressing issues facing New Yorkers all around the state, and to elevate and take action on particularly salient issues, as needed.

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In January, 2022, I traveled to Sullivan and Ulster Counties, to meet with local advocates, elected officials, and community leaders about topics ranging from opioid and substance abuse treatment programs, to rural health care, mental health programs, and more.

Additionally, I've taken on illegal drug traffickers to protect our rural communities. For example, our Organized Crime Task Force arrested and charged 54 individuals for conspiring in three major drug trafficking rings that funneled heroin, fentanyl, and cocaine to Jefferson County. The investigation, dubbed "Operation Heat Wave," led to the recovery of 850 bags of heroin mixed with fentanyl, 65 grams of heroin, three kilograms of cocaine (with a street value of more than \$300,000), and dozens of oxycodone and hydrocodone pills.

2. KNOWLEDGE OF THE ISSUES – What issues do you believe are of most concern to voters in rural counties, and what will be your message in addressing those issues?

As Attorney General, I have collaborated with local elected officials and been on the ground to listen to the needs and concerns of residents in rural counties. I have been steadfast and resolute in understanding and addressing the twin crises of our time – COVID and the opioid crisis – while simultaneously working on the important economic challenges that New Yorkers face today such as student loans.

When I ran for office 4 years ago, I made a promise to help stem the tide of pain and destruction from the opioid crisis. I launched a statewide tour called "HealNY" and my office has distributed \$1.5 billion in settlement money from those deemed responsible for widespread opioid addiction and overdoses in New York and around the country. As part of the opioid settlement negotiations, I specifically fought for money to go directly to the counties and not be redirected to the state. I succeeded in those negotiations, and subsequently in passing legislation to effectuate those agreements, ensuring that rural counties have direct access to opioid funds to help them address the problems in their communities.

As New Yorkers continue to struggle with the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, I have provided guidance and protections for New Yorkers to be aware of their rights as we face the end of the state's eviction moratorium, a crucial tool to help residents stay in their homes. Additionally, I am working to take action against companies that look to profit from consumers by charging exorbitant fees for products such as at-home COVID-19 tests and high quality masks during the increase in public demand.

3. PARTY BUILDING – How have you expressed and demonstrated a commitment toward building our party statewide and what are your ideas for future party building, specific to rural counties?

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I will continue to use the power of my office to address some of the party's most critical issues associated with the COVID-19 crisis, including but not limited to dealing with price gouging; working to decrease violence in our communities via my gun buyback program, protecting taxpayers from scams by leading efforts to prevent predatory lenders from charging high interest rates on loans and bypasses state interest rate caps — or usury laws — already in place; and ensuring fair and open elections such as the suit my office recently filed against the Rensselaer County Board of Elections for failing to provide voters in Rensselaer County with adequate and equitable access to early voting poll sites.

I also will continue to be a consensus builder and provide strong leadership for our state party. I will be on the ground with elected officials and candidates across the state and headline events to help grow and build our party for the future.

4. **In the event of a primary for the office you are seeking, will you support the winner of the Democratic primary? (This calls for a YES or NO answer ONLY.)** Yes.

5. **FAIRNESS IN SHARING POLITICAL POWER - How have you and how will you defend and further the rights of small counties to be represented in the decision making process and in governmental and political positions?**

Democratic elected officials throughout the state know that they have a friend and ally in the Office of Attorney General. My staff works tirelessly helping fellow Democrats to address constituent issues, jointly scheduling events to discuss issues of importance throughout the state, and assisting with their legislative and policy priorities.

My office worked extensively to analyze the harms that communities around the state faced as a result of the opioid crisis, allocated settlement funds accordingly, and empowered county executives to make key decisions about how to allocate those funds on a community level.

6. **INCLUSION – If elected, how would your administration include the people from DRC counties and address the issues of concern in those counties?**

The Attorney General's office has 13 Regional Offices, and I work closely with each individual office to address important matters of social and economic justice in the communities they serve by investigating and bringing action to protect consumers, civil rights, charitable donations, workers' rights and the environment. Each of our Regional Offices is deeply engaged in local community affairs; conducting outreach and educational presentations and responding to New Yorkers' complaints in critical areas such as elder abuse,

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consumer fraud, tenants' rights, immigration services fraud, election fraud and not for profit corporations.

Additionally, the Attorney General's office has regional representatives on the ground to communicate and connect directly to communities in DRC counties, bring awareness and elevate pertinent issues as needed.

7. VOTER APPEAL – What qualities or experiences do you have that would attract support from voters in DRC counties, not just from Democrats but also from non-enrolled voters and cross-over Republicans?

Over the past 4 years, the work of my office has received widespread support and I will continue working on behalf of all New Yorkers, from all parties, and non-enrolled voters. Some examples include:

- Taking on Predatory Lending: My office has taken action against unscrupulous lenders trying to take advantage of borrowers by using aggressive tactics and unfair loan terms—such as high interest rates and fees. This issue significantly impacts people in rural areas and they are preyed upon.
- Repealing State and Local Taxes “SALT”: I have been fighting the federal government on behalf of New Yorkers from harmful and misguided taxes that unfairly require New Yorkers to pay more. I am working to repeal this law and deliver a much-needed boost to New York's economy.
- Fund code enforcement: My office has devoted resources to protecting tenants from negligible landlords by ensuring that their housing is in a habitable state, and working to transform blighted, vacant, or poorly maintained problem properties through the use of housing and community data from various state agencies.
- TLAP Tenant Legal Assistance Program: I have worked to provide funding for organizations to offer tenants free legal assistance in Upstate New York and Long Island who face eviction during the COVID-19 crisis.

As the State's chief legal officer and the People's Lawyer, I have been and will continue to be committed to enforcing laws, improving transparency and standing up to powerful interests on behalf of all New Yorkers.

8. CAMPAIGN IN DRC COUNTIES – How would you campaign in DRC counties? Will you personally appear with local candidates?

I will partner with local leaders and get out messages through grassroots and digital campaigning in DRC counties and personally appear with local candidates as logistics permit. As Attorney General, I have enjoyed traveling in person and virtually to every corner of the state. After suing Big Pharma for fueling the opioid crisis, and securing \$1.5 billion to fight the opioid epidemic, I launched my HEAL NY tour and visited 18 counties to disburse funds. My campaign for Attorney General will be equally as aggressive. I look forward to continuing to visit DRC counties to support local candidates, generate excitement and assist in strengthening grassroots efforts.

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9. **OTHER CRITERIA** – Please set forth anything else you want us to consider.

I am running for re-election as New York's Attorney General because I intend to complete the work New Yorkers elected me to do, which is to hold power accountable, stand up for the rule of law and make sure the law is a sword and a shield. As Attorney General, I have fought for the people of New York, and delivered. With several important cases underway, I intend to finish the job and continue fighting for justice and equality for everyone.

1/31/22



Date

Signature of the Candidate

Please return THE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE at your earliest convenience but no later than **January 24, 2022** to Judith Hunter, DRC Chair via e-mail at **judith.hunter@gmail.com**. Ms. Hunter can also be contacted at (585) 615-2986.