



ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE 2022

Jerry Demings

**Running for
Orange County Mayor**

Candidate Information

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1. What motivated you to run for this position?

I was born and raised in Orange County to blue collar workers and determined at an early age that I was interested in a public service. I had several role models who inspired me who were public servants. They included African Americans who were police officers, firefighters, teachers, and politicians. After working as an accountant, I was inspired to become an Orlando police officer and ultimately became Orlando's first Black police chief, Orange County's first Black Deputy County Administrator/Public Safety Director and elected sheriff. Each of these roles gave me an opportunity for higher office with greater influence to effectuate equality, justice and inclusion for all people. I ran for Orange County Mayor and in 2018, I became Orange County's first African American Mayor. I look forward to continuing to serve my final term as mayor with a focus on equity, inclusion and diversity. I have worked with various citizen groups, including the LGBTQ+ community in addressing housing affordability, transportation, job creation, arts and cultural affairs and public safety. I humbly ask for your endorsement.

2. What does being an ally or advocate for the LGBTQ+ community mean to you?

As an ally or advocate for the LGBTQ+ community, you can count on me to support your mission. I have demonstrated my commitment through action. I hired the first transgender deputy sheriff in Orange County, I was one of the first public employers to provide domestic partner health insurance before legal mandates, appointed the first deputy liaison to the LGBTQ+ community and appointed the first Mayor's Special Assistant and liaison to the LGBTQ+ community. I am proud to say that the LGBTQ+ community has always supported me. The Rainbow Democrats have endorsed me in the past and in 2021, I received the LGBT+Center Orlando Incorporated Lifetime Achievement Award.

3. Please summarize your history of community involvement. This may include city boards, civic associations, non-profits, etc.

I have been a volunteer on numerous advisory boards to include the Orlando Civil Service Board, YMCA of Central Florida Board, Boys & Girls Club of Central Florida Board, Central Florida Red Cross Board, Mental Health Association of Central Florida Board, Children's Safety Village Board, Florida Governors Citizen Safety Task Force, LYNX Board, Central Florida Expressway Authority Board Treasurer, MetroPlan Orlando Board, Orange County Tourist Development Council Board Chair, Central Florida Commuter Rail (SunRail) Board Chair, Orange County Board of County Commissioners Board Chair, National Association of Counties Justice and Public Safety Committee Chair, Florida Association of Counties Health & Safety Committee Chair, Florida Commission on Law Enforcement Commissioner, Florida Sheriffs Association President, Major County Sheriffs Foundation President, FEMA National Advisory Council, Florida Supreme Court Substance Abuse & Mental Health Task Force, Career Source of Central Florida Board Chair, National Sheriffs Association Board, Dr. Phillips Performing Arts Center Board, Saint Mark AME Steward Board, and several other fraternal and civic organizations. I am also an active member of the Florida Democratic Party.

4. Please summarize any work you have performed in the past five years to further LGBTQ+ rights. This may include paid positions, volunteer work, and donations.

In addition to the above, I have supported the One Orlando Foundation with funding from Orange County's TDC for its remembrance of the Pulse Night Club victims.

Questions

5. The rise in anti-LGBTQ+ legislation barreling down from Tallahassee has caused a sharp increase in discrimination and violence against the LGBTQ+ community in Orange County. How would you go about reducing discrimination in your district or local community? How would you measure your progress?

I created the Orange County Mayor's MLK Initiative during my first year as Orange County Mayor. The purpose of the initiative is for Orange County and the community to embrace Dr. Martin Luther King's principles of nonviolence in pursuit of justice and equality for all. This is a year-round initiative rather than simply celebrating Dr. King's legacy on only the anniversary of his birth or death. The initiative includes volunteer service of its members throughout the year. Success has been measured by the number of persons volunteering and the collective hours of their volunteer service. The initiative is co-chaired radio personality and activist Monica May and Lisa Bachman from the Holocaust Center of Orlando.

6. Elected officials and office staff are still woefully under-educated on the transgender community. This means that the services their offices provide are often ignorant of the needs of the transgender community. What actions would you take to ensure that the services your office will provide will be educated on and cognizant of the needs of the transgender community?

No Response.

7. The Florida Republican Party is leading the country in stripping away LGBTQ+ rights, starting with our children. Students are having their lives and livelihoods placed at risk by laws such as the Transgender Sports Ban, the so-called Parental Bill of Rights, and now Don't Say Gay. These shamelessly discriminatory bills are forcing LGBTQ+ families to reconsider their future in Florida. What would you tell the parents of LGBTQ+ children in your district who feel they need to leave Florida in order to protect their children?

I would ask them to stay and help us fight for the rights of our LGBTQ+ youth and possibly consider running for the Florida Legislature. We also need them to help fund the campaigns of those Democrats who currently share the views of the Rainbow Democrats.

8. The Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that 45% of LGBTQ+ students seriously considered attempting suicide and 1-in-5 LGBTQ+ attempt it. How would you lead on this issue and work to decrease these statistics over the course of your term in office?

Recently, I led efforts in Orange County to analyze where we have gaps in the current continuum of care for those with mental, behavioral and substance disorders. I successfully got the Commission to authorize a gap analysis study by the Heart of Florida United Way. The study was completed in February of 2022 and is now being reviewed to define an implementation strategy. Funding for these services is being deliberated during the budget discussions for fiscal year 22/23.

- 9. The same survey by The Trevor Project found that nearly all transgender and non-binary students have had to worry about their access to gender-affirming healthcare, bathrooms, and sports teams being taken away from them. How would you work to take this fear off their shoulders so that they can go back to just being kids?**

We must work with local school districts to ensure adequate training is provided for all school personnel who have direct interactions with students and provide confidential access to mental and behavioral counselors. The Orange County Citizens Commission for Children is a multidisciplinary group that recommends ways to address these issues and corresponding services. Orange County has allocated an additional \$20 million annually to address direct services for children.

- 10. Far-right groups are pushing to ban books on any topic they find disagreeable, such as books on Black history and experiences, immigration, the LGBTQ+ community, climate change, etc. Do you support these book bans? If not, what is your plan to counter them and ensure students have access to a full array of age-appropriate knowledge and experiences?**

I don't support such bans. I will support Democratic candidates for the Florida Legislature and/or nonaffiliated candidates who support changing current Florida laws that are inconsistent with best practices.

- 11. During a town hall in your district, a constituent describes being gay or transgender as a "lifestyle choice." What is incorrect about their description? How would you constructively respond in this situation?**

I would point out that such a statement is a mischaracterization and offer suggestions on literary work that addresses current research.

- 12. During a board meeting, the board chair purposely refers to a transgender woman as "he" and "him" as the woman attempts to give her public comment. The woman corrects the board chair each time, insisting that her pronouns are "she" and "her." The board chair continues to misgender the woman until she eventually leaves the chamber in tears. How would you respond in this situation?**

I would intercede on behalf of the woman and have one of my staff members immediately follow-up with the person to offer available resources.

- 13. A parent approaches you at an event, insisting that her son's teachers have "groomed" him into liking boys. Her son is at her side when she says this. How do respond to the parent's statement such that the young boy leaves feeling better about himself?**

No Response.

- 14. Orange County continues to embrace urban sprawl, despite a plethora of data that links urban sprawl to severe strains on our housing, employment, healthcare, and public transit systems (to name a few). What are your thoughts on Orange County's growth? What could Orange County in terms of development that would better serve the communities in your district?**

Orange County adopted a "Housing for All" 10-year action plan to increase affordable and attainable housing units by over 30,000 units within the next decade. In addition, Orange County is in the final phase of defining its Vision 2050 plan, which contemplates updating land use plans and permitting procedures. The plan calls for building multiple housing types to meet the needs of current residential customers and building more units near job centers and transit stations/hubs. A transportation infrastructure sales tax referendum has been approved by the Board of County Commissioners for voter consideration in November 2022. If passed by the electorate, it would provide a dedicated funding source that would support better transit options for residents. A multimodal transit system is the best solution during a modern era..

- 15. Do you support the idea of constructing more multi-family homes in neighborhoods traditionally zoned for single-family homes? What impact would this have on your district?**

My support would depend on the character of the neighborhood, resident support and the amenities that would be included in the development..

- 16. Homeowner Associations often prevent homeowners from transitioning their lawns away from non-functional grasses such as turf and towards sustainable options such as native Florida plants and edible landscapes. HOAs insist that moving away from the traditional pristine green lawn would lower housing prices. What is your opinion on this issue?**

A one size solution may not be the answer. I believe that government of the people and by the people results in more favorable outcomes for neighbors. Alternative landscapes, if done right, could be more acceptable if there is community buy-in. I encourage all citizens to read their HOA's deed covenants thoroughly before purchasing.

17. What are the top environmental concerns you are seeing in your District and what are the solutions you plan to bring forward if you were elected?

In 2021, the Orange County Board of County Commissioners and I committed to \$100 million investment over the next 10 years to acquire 23,000 additional acres of conservation lands. The Florida Wildlife Federation gave an award of recognition to Orange County June 4, 2022

18. Contributions are typically linked to poor environmental policies being passed. Are you pledging to stay away from any particular contributions?

I have not made such pledges but would not be averse to doing so if called upon.

19. Understanding our economic position, how do you plan to localize and strengthen our food system?

Presently, as Mayor I have led efforts to provide funding to The Center, Second Harvest Food Bank and other non-food banks through federal CARES and ARPA funds received by Orange County.