



ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE 2022

Tom Keen

**Running for
Florida House of Representatives
District 35**

Candidate Information

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1. What motivated you to run for this position?

I have been a resident of Orlando and Central Florida for eight years this July, and a Florida resident for over 28 years. As a Naval Officer I had the opportunity to live and work in multiple states and overseas, and I value diversity and multi-cultural communities. I want to continue to serve our community so that all Floridians can be happy, safe, and prosperous. We need to make sure our public schools are well funded, all residents have access to healthcare (including mental health), and that we protect our environment.

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

Providing a voice for the community in Tallahassee and in Orange/Osceola Counties. Actively consult with LGBTQ+ leaders and organizations. Attend and be present at events focused on LGBTQ+ community (not just once a year at Pride). Introduce/co-sponsor/advocate to pass legislation that would prohibit discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation and gender under the Florida Civil Rights Act.

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

City of Orlando Citizen's Police Review Board and Veterans Advisory Council

Orange County Democratic Precinct Leader

Friends of Fisher House Orlando - Board of Directors/Treasurer

American Legion, Lake Nona Veterans Club, St Cloud VFW

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.

Donations to the Zebra Coalition and Out of the Closet Thrift Store

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?**

Work with the City of Orlando/Orange/Osceola Counties (for example the City of Orlando Board on Multicultural Affairs) and with Business Leaders (Gay Chamber, etc) to establish metrics based solutions. And specifically as a member of the Florida House, fight to repeal changes made last session to the Florida Civil Rights Act.

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?**

First, educate myself, make sure I have engaged with leaders in the transgender community, second make sure my staff is well trained and knowledgeable.

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?**

This is a nationwide issue, we need to start here at home in Florida. Make our state a leading light for LGBTQ+ rights. This starts locally and moves up to Tallahassee. Elect more State Representatives that share our values to start undoing the harmful legislation created in the last few years.

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?**

Suicide prevention and access to mental health resources have to be given priority across the board, not just for LGBTQ+ youth. I have seen similar statistics for returning Veterans, and understand it is not an easy issue to solve - it will take building a coalition of groups to bring about real change and progress.

- 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?**

Be present in the community, provide opportunities for students to voice their concerns. Work with local leaders to affirm our commitment for access. As stated in other responses, continue to work on making the Florida Civil Rights Act include LGBTQ+ rights.

- 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 do NOT support book bans. We need to be vocal in our SUPPORT of local Boards of Education and Libraries. We have procedures already in place, should a parent want to limit access for their children at school, that can be followed by those parents. However we should not let a small vocal minority limit choice for the vast majority of students in a public school. They can censure their children but not ours.

- 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 do not believe being gay or transgender is a lifestyle choice, but that is a common perception. I would state that I believe that there are biological/genetic factors that determine sexual orientation. Choice has nothing to do with who does and does not become gay or transgender.

- 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?**

First, follow up with the woman to make sure her voice is heard and that her comment was welcome. Second, have a discussion with the board attorney to better understand the board position in dealing with public comment, and the rules of conduct by the board members. IAW Florida Sunshine Law - open a discussion with the board chair to respect individuals during public comment. Finally provide public statement in support of the transgender community.

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?

This is a very difficult question to answer in a hypothetical without context, such as age of child, etc. If the parent has concerns I would not argue or minimize her concerns but would recommend she talk with school staff (Principal / Counselors), her Pediatrician, etc. Sounds like she may just be making a generalized statement about all teachers, not a specific teacher. If that is the case I would still want to engage her but might be better if the child was not present. I really have a hard time with this, we should be supporting teachers not making wild statements.

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?

Create and follow a comprehensive long term plan that address these issues. Many Floridians bemoan growth in an area they chose to move to AND at the same time, they desire more commercial services near them - which drives more growth. We need more dense housing options that allow for more efficient public transportation and access to more green space/parks. It's all about balance.

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?

Yes. We have a housing crisis - both in number of units available and affordability. Most of my district, D 35, is suburban and rural, but we still need to consider more multi family homes. This will come down to local government decisions relating to zoning and local transportation issues. We do need to make sure we stick to the pledge (which has always been broken by the Republican led legislature) to use Sadowski funding as it was intended.

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?

HOAs are very common in Florida and there is often a tension between individual property rights and the association. I usually defer to lowest level of government as the best option. I do like the idea of using native plants and landscapes and I am not convinced that there is a correlation with lowered property values. Let's try a novel approach and have the State Agriculture Commissioner model a program that highlights this option.

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?

Clean water is my number one environmental concern. Loss of habitat is also a top priority. We need to ensure the Florida Department of Environmental Protection has resources and teeth to enforce existing state law - and that they are aggressively working to restore and protect the environment.

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 any specific pledges and will make case by case decisions. For example, I most probably will not take contributions from the NRA or other gun lobby groups - but it's doubtful they would consider donating to my campaign either.

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

Better access to resources in food deserts would be a top priority. Encourage local farmers markets and other retail options.