



GENERAL INFORMATION

Candidate info

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| Name | Maya Kornberg |
| City Council District # | 39 |
| In which primary | Democratic |
| Age | 33 |
| Education | BS, Stanford University; MA, Columbia University; PhD, Oxford University |
| Current job, position, or occupation | Sr. Research Fellow & Manager, Brennan Center for Justice |

Previous jobs or positions

Executive Board Member, Central Brooklyn Independent Democrats (CBID) and Independent Neighborhood Democrats (IND)
Adjunct Professor, NYU
Lecturer, Georgetown University & American University
Lead Researcher, Inter-Parliamentary Union
Public Engagement Consultant, Public Agenda
Postdoctoral Research Fellow, The Governance Lab
Senior Economic Development Associate, United Nations Development Program

Campaign contact information

| | |
|-----------|-----------------------------|
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INTRODUCTION

1. What are your top three campaign promises or goals, and what action will you take to achieve them if elected?

Promise 1: Putting Constituent Engagement First: The job of a City Council Member is to engage with local constituents and represent their interests. I've spent my career working on creating more responsive governance, and I know the number one rule is that people want to be heard, and government works better when it listens. We need the basics—a continuously open district office and constituent requests that are answered in a timely manner. But I will do more than that. I will start monthly town halls that meet people where they are, with virtual engagement options for those who cannot join in person. In a diverse district, I will work to create culturally competent and varied engagement opportunities that are created together with those with different lived experiences. As a Council Member, engaging with the community, including groups that disagree with me, will be a top priority.

Promise 2: Tackling the Affordability Crisis: I believe the number one issue affecting District 39 is the affordability crisis that is also affecting the city as a whole. The costs of housing, childcare, and other essentials are making it harder and harder for most New Yorkers—especially young families, seniors, the shrinking middle class, and those from traditionally marginalized communities. My son Liam was born in October 2024 and we want the best future for him. My partner is an elementary school teacher and I have worked as a college professor. We believe that investing in children and young people is the most powerful way to make the world a better place. We face a crisis in early childhood education. We need more public funding for childcare assistance programs and we need it now. Affordable housing is at a historic low across New York City. As a renter in this district, I feel the housing crisis. We must continue to prioritize building new housing that centers sustainability and takes a creative approach to mixing residential and commercial buildings to meet community needs. American cities where rents are going down are cities where more housing is being built. We desperately need more housing units in this city, and development must prioritize affordability, community engagement, and good union jobs. As a Council Member, I will work tirelessly to build legislative coalitions with colleagues and work with the community to address this crisis and create responsive solutions.

Promise 3: Protecting Democracy & Fighting Trump: President-elect Trump has threatened to eliminate our checks and balances and take away basic rights. I've spent my career fighting for democracy, and I'll bring this expertise to City Hall. As a Senior Fellow at the Brennan Center, I work on combating political violence and misinformation, strengthening oversight and legislative processes, and bolstering

our checks and balances and democratic institutions. The City Council is a crucial line of defense against Trump's plans to strip away our basic rights and target blue cities like our own.

2. If elected, what is the first piece of legislation you would introduce? Why is that your top priority? If you are an incumbent, please also state what legislation you have passed which you are most proud of.

If elected to the City Council, the first piece of legislation I would introduce is a measure to create a fast-track permitting system for childcare centers. We are in the midst of a crisis of childcare affordability and accessibility here in New York City. As the mother to an infant, I know firsthand that childcare can be prohibitively expensive for many parents. A big driver of the exorbitant cost of childcare is simply a dearth of childcare centers. Many childcare centers are at capacity with long waitlists. I've heard from those in the childcare industry that the city's permitting process for opening new centers is both complicated and incredibly slow. Fast tracking childcare permits will increase the number of available slots at daycare centers and lead to reduced costs. The fast-track system should place added priority on applications to open centers in areas designated as childcare deserts.

3. In your view, what are the major needs of your district's constituents?

The policy needs that at the top of mind here in District 39 are those I highlighted above: affordable childcare and early-childhood education, affordable housing, and standing up to Trump's assault on our basic rights and essential government programs.

From speaking with voters across the district over the last several months, what I keep hearing is a need for much more engaged, responsive, and accessible constituent services and community engagement. We need the basics—a continuously open district office and constituent requests that are answered in a timely manner, but that's just the start. I know from my work on representative democracies that it is particularly important to proactively engage disengaged communities, many of whom face barriers to engagement. I will host monthly town halls that meet people where they are—at senior centers, places of worship, gyms, parks, bars, libraries and community centers. We will offer virtual engagement options for those who cannot join in person (including people with mobility issues or care obligations) and opportunities for constituents to send feedback and ideas via phone or submit a video recording with sign language. I also know from my work with legislators that many constituents may not know whom to contact about an issue or where to find their Council Member. I will work with my staff to set up "constituent service" tables at parks and other public spaces so that people can resolve their issues.

4. How long have you lived in the district in which you are running, and do you have any achievements or involvement in your neighborhood you are particularly proud of?

I have lived in this part of central Brooklyn for the last 6 years and my husband and I have chosen to raise our 5 month-old son Liam here. As a political scientist and a lifelong activist, I've especially enjoyed how high the level of civic engagement and political advocacy is here in Park Slope. I'm proud to have served on the Executive Boards of both of the major Democratic clubs that cover the neighborhood, IND and CBID, where I've been able to work on behalf of amazing candidates from the local judicial district committee level to the presidential level. I even canvassed for Proposition 1 with IND in the third trimester of my pregnancy this past fall. I've also been proud to become an active member and regular attendee of Community Board 6. My husband and I are members of the Park Slope Food Coop and contribute food regularly to CHIPS and the Park Slope Methodist Church Sunday Dinners.

5. What experience have you had with good government and reform issues? (e.g., voting and election reform, campaign finance, ethics, police accountability, government transparency). If you've worked to advance these goals, we'd love to hear about it.

I have spent my entire career working on government. I hold a PhD in political science and have taught at several universities. As a senior research fellow and manager at the Brennan Center for Justice, I work on how to make legislatures more effective. My book *Inside Congressional Committees: Function and Dysfunction in the Legislative Process* (Columbia University Press, 2023) explores how Congress works and how we can make it stronger. I've published on campaign finance and how money shapes pathways to power. I successfully advocated for the FEC to change campaign laws so that candidates can use campaign funds for security. During the pandemic, I led a project of the Inter-Parliamentary Union that explored how parliaments around the world engage with their citizens. I've worked on digital innovation at NYU Govlab, and on institution-building at the United Nations Development Program.

I have spoken on these issues to audiences including several hundred interns at congressional intern orientation, members of Congress at the Summit for Democracy, international delegations of parliamentarians and advocates at the European Parliament, scientists at the largest annual conference for U.S. research facilities, and members of the public at the 92nd Street Y State of America Summit.

I've spoken on NPR, CSPAN, Berkeley KPFA, Madison public radio, and other outlets. My commentary has appeared in the Washington Post, NPR, BBC, Scientific American, Newsweek, CSPAN, the Hill, and Slate. My work has been cited in the New York Times, MSNBC, Bloomberg, The Saturday Evening Post, Ms. Magazine, and more.

6. What do you think the role of the City Council is in city government this upcoming term?

The Council has two extremely important roles. The first is to conduct effective oversight of the administration. I know from my work on strong legislatures that the way to do this is to harness the power of committee hearings as tools for public awareness, holding the executive to account, and building relationships with the agencies.

The other role is to legislate. Effective legislating means building broad coalitions and passing substantive legislation through bipartisan collaboration and robust engagement with experts and community stakeholders. Especially right now, as the federal government is attacking so many basic rights and values and undermining democracy itself, the City Council has to double down on civic engagement and rebuild trust that has been lost.

ELECTIONS AND VOTING

7. Do you support moving New York City's elections from odd-numbered years to even-numbered years, and will you co-sponsor a Council Resolution supporting that measure?

Yes

Voter turnout in New York City elections is exceptionally low, as they are held “off-cycle” in odd-numbered years. To boost local voter turnout and reduce participation gaps, the Legislature passed and Governor Hochul signed a law that moves county and town elections to even-numbered years, and lawmakers are supporting a constitutional amendment that would do the same for city elections, including New York City's. Citizens Union is [leading a coalition of groups advocating](#), to move New York City's elections to even-numbered years, and the City Council is considering a [Resolution in support](#) of that shift.

8. The New York City Board of Elections (NYC BOE) has been a source of frustration for voters and candidates for years. The City Council appoints NYC BOE members and has the power to appoint commissioners who are committed to reform, but the most recent commissioners have been appointed behind closed doors. Do you commit to request a public hearing for BOE nominees, and to only vote for individuals who are publicly committed to reducing party-based patronage and supporting open hiring practices?

Yes

9. Do you support maintaining the use of Ranked Choice Voting in New York City’s elections?

Yes

10. New York City is one of the few cities that maintains a closed primary system, in which only registered party members can vote in the primary election. Do you believe New York City should shift to a form of completely open primaries, allowing all registered voters to vote in one primary where the top two candidates, regardless of party, move on to the general election?

Yes

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

11. Individuals with business ties to city government and registered lobbyists can bypass their donation limits by “bundling” donations from other people. Do you support limiting bundling by people on the Doing Business with the City database?

Yes

12. Are you a supporter of the City’s public campaign matching funds program, and do you commit to protecting the independence of the program and ensuring that the Campaign Finance Board has sufficient resources to run the program?

Yes

*** In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve New York City’s campaign finance system.**

I’ve been a supporter of this program for a long time as a democracy advocate. It is a great equalizer for young people, women, and people of color running for office and it encourages more robust civic engagement. I’ve conducted research about how to effectively use and promote the program. I am honored to have opted into the program as a candidate and think it is a tremendous tool to fight the outsized power of big money in politics. To date, I’ve maxed-out on public matching funds and my campaign has received 568 contributions with 90% of them being \$175 or less, over 85% coming from NYC, and nearly half coming from District 39.

ETHICS IN GOVERNMENT

13. The recent pattern of indictments and resignations surrounding City Hall has exposed serious ethical problems in City Government. Please describe how you will maintain the highest ethical standards in office.

Integrity and trust are the bedrock of a healthy democracy. Trump and Adams have contributed to a breakdown of trust in government institutions and electeds that is very dangerous to our democracy. Not only will I maintain integrity and transparency in office, but I will also double down on civic engagement. I have spent my career working on making government more responsive to the people it’s meant to serve,

and getting to continue that work as a City Council Member would be a tremendous honor I would take very seriously.

14. Incoming public servants must sever ties and divest from companies or other interests that have business dealings with the City, but they are not required to recuse themselves when working on matters involving their former business partners, clients, employer, etc. Do you support forbidding public servants to work on matters relating to their former business partners, clients, employers, and other interests for a set period of time?

Yes

15. Some campaign consultants also work as lobbyists. Do you support restricting campaign consultants from lobbying the candidates they served for two years after the candidate won elected office?

Yes

16. Do you support moving lobbying oversight and enforcement from the City Clerk’s Office to another agency charged with ethics issues, like the Conflicts of Interest Board?

Yes

*** In the box below, you may provide additional information on any actions that you have taken or plan to take to improve ethics standards in New York City government.**

We need greater transparency about use of public funds as well as campaign finance. Effective oversight of the executive is also essential to improving ethics. I know how to use committees as a tool for oversight, and in the Council, I will harness this skill to make sure the administration is held to account.

POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

17. Who do you think should have the final say on discipline in the New York Police Department? (i.e., Place the final decision with the Police Commissioner; the Civilian Complaint Review Board; the Mayor; the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety; or another individual or entity).

I do not support the current system that places overarching power in the hands of the Police Commissioner. The Police Commissioner should not have the power to both overrule the determinations of the Civilian Complaint Review Board and overturn guilty verdicts by Administrative Judges. I know from my work that effective oversight is done in the open, in full view of the public, and that impartiality is paramount to garnering and maintaining public trust. I believe that internal disciplinary authority within the NYPD should be with the Department of Investigation’s Inspector General and that the final authority on disciplinary actions in the NYPD should be independent Administrative Judges.

CHECKS AND BALANCES

18. The Mayor currently has the power to block charter revision ballot questions (proposed by the City Council, other charter commissions, and citizen petitions) by establishing their own Charter Revision Commission. Do you support removing this Mayoral power?

Yes

Comments (optional)

I support removing this Mayoral power. The lack of transparency standards on descriptions on ballot proposals on the ballot and the ability of the Mayor to use this power to block ballot questions weakens democracy. Citizens should be able to offer ballot proposals and there should be clearer information about what the ballot proposals actually do. I was involved in voter engagement efforts for the November 2024 election, and there was tremendous confusion about the 5 ballot proposals—in part because descriptions were (perhaps intentionally) opaque. Clear information for voters about what they are voting on and the ability of citizens to organize and propose ballot propositions are essential to a healthy democracy.

19. Do you support allowing bills with strong support to go through the committee process and be put to a vote on the floor without needing the permission of the speaker?

Yes

Comments (optional)

I wrote my PhD dissertation and a book on committees because they are one of the most powerful and universal legislative tools. They act as the legislative concourse leading up to bill passage and provide a crucial place for deliberation and learning in legislatures and for a group of legislators to come together and shape a bill (sometimes the only place for that). We know in political science that the power of parties and the power of committees are inversely correlated. The more powerful the party and party leader, the weaker the committees tend to be in that legislature. Frequently, speakers will push bills through to a vote or block committee processes in order to maintain their power and keep rank and file legislators out of the process, and this weakens the legislative process. I am fully supportive of bills with strong support going through the committee process and to a vote without the permission of the speaker. This would guard against a speaker usurping control and keeping members out and it would allow for the full use of committees as a space for learning, deliberation, and shaping of high-quality legislation.

20. Please provide your views about the New York City Council's "advice and consent" powers. In what cases, if any, should a mayor need the Council's approval for an appointment of a high ranking Mayoral official, such as an agency commissioner?

I think that the City Council should have advice and consent powers to approve Mayoral appointments of agency commissioners. In just the last few years we have seen embarrassing scandals hit this administration due to under-vetted and under-qualified appointees. Requiring that agency commissioners be approved by a majority of the City Council will provide important oversight to ensure that the most highly qualified people are appointed to these essential roles. Similar to the federal confirmation process,

the City Council should have the power to hold confirmation hearings for commissioner-level appointees, giving the process more transparency and allowing for more public engagement.

ADDITIONAL INFO