

OREB Endorsement 2024-4

This is part of the OREB endorsement process. Please complete this form. Questions 7 through 40 require a **SHORT** (no more than 800 characters) explanation as part of your answer. Click the button below to start. There are 13 sections. After launching, please click the "NEXT" button at lower left to go to the next section. If you have concerns, please contact Carol Coyote or Michael Cheng.

Email* info@melvinwillis.org

I. Campaign information

1. Name

Melvin Willis

2. Preferred Pronouns

he/him/his

3. Position Running For

Re-Elect to Richmond City Council District 1

4. Email Address

info@melvinwillis.org

5. Phone number

510-837-4880

6. Campaign website

melvinwillis.org

II. Campaign finances and support

7. Who has contributed to your campaign?

My campaign is funded by individual contributions and labor unions to date.

8. Other than individual donations, who do and will you receive donations from? List all groups, unions, businesses (especially those doing business with the entity in which you seek to hold office).

I have pledged to take no donations from corporations, businesses, business associations, realtor groups, or the police department, so I can be accountable to Richmond residents, not corporate interest. These are some of my previous supporters who I hope to get donations from again:

AFSCME Local 3299

SEIU 1021

IFPTE Local 21

ACCE Action

ATU 1555

CBE Action

California Nurses Association

Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) Action

National Union of Healthcare Workers

Lead Locally

Lift Up Contra Costa County

9. Please list persons and organizations who have endorsed you.

I am endorsed by the Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Richmond Progressive Alliance, Democratic Socialists of America, Working Families Party, ACCE Action, League of Conservation Voters of the East Bay, Richmond Firefighters Local 188, SEIU 1021, SEIU CIR, IFPTE Local 21, United Teachers of Richmond.

10. Please list PACs, Super PACs, and independent expenditure committees supporting you.

None yet. I was previously supported by the East Bay Working Families PAC.

11. List any/all industries, organizations and people that you will decline donations and endorsements from, please be inclusive.

My corporate-free pledge extends businesses of all sizes and to all industries and corporate interest groups.

III. Crime and law enforcement

12. What do you think about the use of force by police? What and when is appropriate and what is not?

I believe that officers should always prioritize de-escalation before resorting to use of force. I believe that a strong and independent community review commission is essential to ensuring that complaints by the public are taken seriously and officers are held accountable to the community they serve. It is never appropriate for officers to resort to using force to restrain members of the public in non-violent situations.

13. Do you support banning private prisons? Please explain.

The criminal justice system should serve to bring justice and repair to communities, not to benefit private shareholders and corporations. Privately owned, for-profit institutions

maximize profit by reducing cost, resulting in cutting essential support services, inhumane living conditions, and forced labor.

14. Do you support abolishing cash bail? Please explain.

I support abolishing cash bail. The cash bail system, as a tool of the prison industrial complex, disproportionately keeps low income communities jailed while wealthy offenders are able to use their money to get off with no accountability for harm done. The disparity in bail amounts and the ability to pay can result in a system where justice is not equally accessible to all,

15. Do you support decriminalizing (and/or legalizing) all drugs? Please explain.

The criminal justice and drug enforcement policies have been racialized and segregated by class both nationally and locally in my district. I am for the decriminalization of all drugs because I support community needs of rehabilitation and health based healing. The current criminalized status of most drugs results in the separation of families, violence and shame. When that system perpetuates more harm and trauma it must be opposed with alternatives being developed.

16. Do you oppose the use of capital punishment? Please explain.

I oppose capital punishment. In recent struggles around the progressive efforts to end death sentences, it was shared that there is racial bias in sentencing people to death. That and false convictions are two good reasons to abolish it.

17. Should convicted felons and prison inmates be granted the right to vote? Please explain your view.

The prison industrial complex and deeply racialized nature of policing in our country has resulted in the mass disenfranchisement of our Black, Brown, and low-income

neighbors. I believe in the felons' and inmates' right to vote because the structural injustice of the criminal justice system disrupts so many people of color's ability to participate in democracy, which affects our communities' ability to share our interests on the political stage.

IV. Immigration

18. What is your view on immigrants and immigration? What new legislation is needed? And what laws should be removed?

I am proud of the role that I played making Richmond a sanctuary city and limiting cooperation with ICE by city departments. Moving forward, Richmond should honor its commitment to extending the right to vote in municipal elections to all residents, including undocumented individuals. On a federal level, I'd like to see a path to citizenship for all.

V. Infrastructure issues

19. What kind of health care insurance system do you support? And why?

I believe we need to strive towards developing a single payer system so that all resident can have access to quality healthcare, regardless of their economic status.

20. Do you support public banking? Why or why not?

Public banking is essential for a future economy based on community needs instead of corporate interests. I support this form of banking because people in my district and beyond should have the right to have access to financial products that actually serve their communities' interests.

21. Do you think public transit should be free?

Yes. Public transit is a public that should be free and accessible for all residents.

22. What do you think the minimum wage should be in California? Nationwide? What does a “living wage” mean to you?

A living wage refers to the minimum income necessary for a worker to meet their basic needs without experiencing poverty or severe financial stress. This includes adequate shelter, food, healthcare, and other essential expenses such as transportation, education, and childcare. A good place to start in California is raising the minimum wage to \$20 per hour in every sector.

23. How would you protect workers not covered by the National Labor Relations Act?

We should enact state and local laws that provide labor protections for workers excluded from the NLRA, such as agricultural workers, domestic workers, and independent contractors. This includes laws related to minimum wage, overtime pay, and workplace safety. We can also encourage the formation of unions so that the NLRA does cover more workers.

24. Would you propose to tax the companies that rely upon contract workers? And how?

Some big companies hire contract workers instead of regular workers so they don't have to follow certain rules, like making sure workers are safe, paying fair wages, or giving benefits like health insurance and pensions. This saves the companies money, but it means the government and taxpayers end up paying more to help those workers through different programs. To fix this, the government can charge companies a special tax based on how many contract workers they hire, making sure the companies pay their fair share.

VII. Housing

25. What are the causes of the housing crisis in California and the Bay Area?

The housing crisis in our state has many causes, including the dominance of corporate landlords, restrictive single-family zoning laws, and limits on rent control measures. I firmly believe that housing is a fundamental human right. When housing is treated as a commodity, it creates a situation where too many individuals are deprived of this essential right. The current system has led to widespread violations of people's rights to secure and affordable housing. Therefore, it is crucial for every level of government to intervene with robust programs and policies to ensure that everyone has access to adequate housing. Relying solely on the free market to resolve this issue is not sufficient, as it often prioritizes profit over people's basic needs. Comprehensive government action is necessary to address the complex factors driving the housing crisis and to protect the right to housing for all individuals.

26. What do you propose to protect renters? Please comment on laws/acts, such as Costa Hawkins and others, to be repealed, and added/legislated?

I support all the rental protections promoted by the organization I work for, ACCE, including:

- Support of tenants unions
- Right to Counsel legislation to protect tenants in disputes
- Funding 'know your rights' educational programs for tenants
- Emergency rental assistance
- Strong enforcement of rent control in Richmond
- Repeal Costa Hawkins across the state.
- Prioritize infill development over impinging on open spaces and the shoreline
- Develop nonprofit housing owned by city, where rents are set below market rate

27. Do you support the repeal of all laws that criminalize or punish homeless persons? What will you do to protect our unhoused communities?

I do think we should stop criminalizing and punishing homeless people. We should advocate for universal housing through policies and initiatives that combat homelessness at a systemic level. Supporting housing programs that offer transitional or permanent solutions is crucial. Additionally, we must support the expansion of our social safety net, including stronger renter protections and unemployment support, to prevent residents from becoming unhoused in the first place. As a supporter of the Community Crisis Response Program, I advocate for more trained mental health and social workers, and fewer armed police officers, to respond to calls involving homeless people.

28. How do we provide/develop more affordable and low-cost housing?

Richmond is using public-private partnerships, in particular with non-profit housing developers, to bring more energy to this endeavor. I support on-going collaboration between local government agencies and these non-profits to create affordable housing projects. This can involve promoting incentives or tax breaks for developers who commit to building affordable units. I think we must explore the use of new housing solutions such as modular construction, tiny homes, or adaptive reuse of existing buildings to create affordable housing options quickly and cost-effectively. And we have to stay informed about available funding sources for affordable housing projects at the local, state, and federal levels, and advocate for our share of that funding.

29. Do you support social housing? How do you propose to create it?

Because the open market has failed to keep a substantial part of our community housed, we need alternatives. I support social housing – housing that is owned and

managed by the government or nonprofit organizations, with the primary goal of providing affordable and secure accommodation to low-income individuals and families. To do this, establishing a supportive policy and legal framework is crucial. This may involve passing laws or regulations that enable the creation and management of social housing, including zoning regulations, land use policies, and tenant protections. Securing adequate funding and financing mechanisms is essential. This can include government subsidies, grants, low-interest loans, tax incentives, and contributions from philanthropic organizations or private investors.

VIII. Education

30. What is your opinion about charter schools?

Public schools are an essential city service that charter schools are slowly degrading. Public money should go into our core community schools, instead of subsidies for charter schools to take students away and further reduce resources for schools to fully serve students.

31. What is your opinion about no cost public college and university?

I believe the public college and university should be free.

32. Do you support the cancellation of all student debt?

I support the cancellation of all student debt, starting with those who have used their degrees for public service and all others who fell victim to predatory lending practices.

33. How do you propose to make universal public pre-K free?

I advocate for ensuring that major corporations and affluent individuals contribute their equitable portion of taxes to promote a fair distribution of wealth and resources across

our nation. Proposition 13 was not originally designed as a corporate subsidy, yet it has functioned as such, necessitating reform.

34. Do you support “strengthening” Title IX?

Strengthening Title IX is important because it helps tackle ongoing problems with gender-based discrimination and ensures that schools are safe and fair for everyone. It means making sure schools protect students from all types of discrimination, whether it’s based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or if someone is transgender. The federal government should do more to explicitly include protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity within Title IX. This would make sure that all students receive the educational experience they are entitled to under the law.

IX. Environmental

35. What do you think, broadly, a “Green New Deal” should contain?

A GND should work to decarbonize our economy, fight the climate crisis, and create thousands of well paying jobs in the process. Programs should include incentives for renewable energy manufacturing, and training programs to support young people and transitioning oil workers to fill the jobs. I have supported the development of Richmond’s Blue Green New Deal Workforce Development program, and look forward to working towards implementation once the final plan is completed.

36. Do you support banning fracking?

Yes. I support banning fracking, and see a county and statewide ban as a key part of transitioning our societies away from our reliance on the oil and gas industry.

X. Election

37. Do you support public financing of elections?

Yes. Public financing would allow grassroots candidates to have a better chance against candidates who are funded and influenced by corporations. Taking a pledge to be a non-corporate candidate, as I have done, is an important first step, but I would like to see fundraising from all sources play less of a role in politics.

38. Do you support ranked choice voting for your office, and in general?

I support ranked choice voting. I voted to put forward a ballot measure in Richmond that will ask voters to approve an RCV system for our municipal elections. RCV is a great way of ensuring that more people feel satisfied and represented in our electoral system.

XI. US foreign policy

39. Do you support the international campaign of BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions)? And what should the US policy be on Palestine/Israel?

I believe that we should work towards the long term peace and security of all people in Palestine and Israel, and for political autonomy of the Palestine. I voted in favor of a city resolution calling for an end to Israel's assault on Gaza, and in favor of divesting Richmond from corporations that profit from the war on Gaza.

XII. Anything else?

40. And if you have chosen not to answer some questions, please explain why.

I completed all the answers.

