



2018 Pennsylvania CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate Name: James Craig

Running For: PA Senate

District: 46

Party Affiliation: Democrat

Charitable nonprofits include groups like food banks, Habitat for Humanity, YMCAs, religious institutions, hospitals, museums, libraries, child care centers, and many more. What has been your personal experience with nonprofits (ex: as a board member, employee, volunteer, or donor)? How do these experiences shape your policy positions?

In law school I interned with Neighborhood Legal Services, a nonprofit dedicated to helping less fortunate members of our community stay in housing. My role was to meet with and defend clients in court to protect their tenant rights. I constantly saw the lack of resources and the constant fighting for dollars from the city, state, and county. It was non-stop and often detracted from our organization's mission. One of my top priorities will be to ensure that organizations like NLS have a predictable and reliable funding stream to support the great work they do.

What is your position on the following tax issues that affect charitable nonprofits:

Do you support preserving state and local sales and real-estate tax exemptions for charitable nonprofits?

Yes, for true nonprofits. Unfortunately, there are some large industries, especially hospitals, that are "nonprofit" in name only. They use this status to avoid paying their fair share, ultimately at the cost of true non-profits who are doing great work. I would make sure that any change to these exemptions will protect the true nonprofits while taking a harder look at organizations that might be misusing this status.

Do you believe that nonprofits should be required to provide Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILOTS) or Services in Lieu of Taxes (SILOTS)?

I believe that for some nonprofits, providing PILOTS or SILOTS is a mutual benefit to both the local taxing authority and the organization, however I believe requiring these payments outright for all nonprofits is a step to far. In certain circumstances, they are a useful tool for local governments to use, but they should not be mandated from the state. Instead each situation should be looked at on a case by case basis to ensure that the nonprofit organization and the taxpayers are both receiving a benefit from any agreement.

Would you support additional state tax revenues dedicated to fund nonprofits providing contracted government health and human services?

Absolutely. In too many cases, the government comes in and tries to reinvent the wheel or duplicate services that local providers are already making available. Whenever possible, I support funding the nonprofits already making a difference in local communities instead of creating or funding a competing agency.

Additional comments about tax policies that affect nonprofits:

Nonprofits provide more than 720,000 jobs in Pennsylvania (15% of the state's workforce). What policies would you propose to promote continued job growth for private employers, including both nonprofit and for-profit business?

One of the biggest challenges facing employers in our state is finding qualified employees to fill the roles. We need to make sure we're investing in education and training so that our workforce is ready for the jobs of the future, which will help both nonprofit and for-profits alike. Specifically looking at nonprofits, I support continuing and expanding many of the benefits available to those working in nonprofits, as often workers at nonprofits trade a higher salary for the ability to help in their community. The state should make sure that this work is rewarded, and I would be open to new ideas to promote nonprofit work.

Would you favor legislation that would reduce the likelihood of a budget impasse in future years? If so, what type of legislation?

This is a complicated issue and one that I believe we can address through smaller, procedural changes. First, we should start the budget process earlier, and not wait until the end of a session to pass it. Legislators have other priorities, of course, but the first priority of the state is to pass a budget. Many other states work in a similar process and because legislators want to work on their bills, there is more of an incentive to come together and pass a budget so other legislation can be addressed. I'm also a supporter of suspending pay for legislators when there hasn't been a budget passed. The fact that our Senators and Representatives continue to be paid when schools and nonprofits are struggling is a shame. Suspending pay until a budget is passed will increase pressure on legislators to come together. Finally, in a more drastic move, I would be open to the idea of passing a biannual budget in the first session after each election. This will get the budget out of the way and allow those who rely on state funding to project an additional year out, increasing stability.

Would you support regulatory changes that increase efficiencies and nonprofit-government partnerships. (Proposed regulatory changes could include reducing redundancies across state agencies - e.g. common pre-award processes, budget templates, use of a single audit, reporting template and central depository vault)?

I would be open to these changes but would be interested in learning more from my friends in the nonprofit community as to the exact effects these changes would have on their industry. Overall, I'm open to changes that make everyone's life easier and help our nonprofits serve more residents.

If elected, what would be your top three policy priorities?

My top three priorities are:

1. Ending corruption in Harrisburg through passing campaign finance reform, term limits, an end to perks, and a real solution to gerrymandering.
2. Addressing the opioid epidemic head on and providing real funding for the problem. Too many politicians give this important issue lip service while not devoting any resources to actually fund solutions. I will be a quarterback on this issue, making sure my colleagues in Harrisburg take the issue seriously.
3. Last, but not least, I want to reduce crime and property taxes by passage of a constitutional amendment legalizing and taxing recreational cannabis. Our projections show revenue of over 1 billion dollars, not to mention the savings in prosecution and prisons. The time is now, and if we don't pass this through a constitutional amendment, it will only be a matter of time before Harrisburg does it itself, giving voters no control over how the revenue is spent or how the program is implemented.