



Organization *for* Responsible Governance

An Open Letter to all Nominated Candidates seeking election to Parliament

September 2, 2021

Dear prospective candidates,

As the National Election rapidly approaches, The Organization for Responsible Governance (ORG) commends your leadership and interest in public service and calls on you to publicly commit to actionable, realistic and sustainable reform on areas that have long prohibited the forward development and progress of The Bahamas. **ORG views your attention to these matters as vitally necessary to achieving a thriving Bahamas where accountable and transparent governance allows every citizen, business and group a meaningful say in decisions that affect their future while being provided equal access to opportunities.**

Despite acknowledgement of the need for improvement in accountability, transparency, effectiveness, and efficiency in governance by subsequent administrations, there remains significant long-standing issues. Additionally, economic development, fiscal management and education all remain critical issues needing to be addressed in a more comprehensive manner. Bahamians have endured what can only be defined as an extraordinary two years having survived both Hurricane Dorian and now the COVID-19 pandemic. With every social and economic challenge that arises, the choice of who to entrust the duty of leading our communities and country at-large has become increasingly important.

While ORG acknowledges that some progress has been made, the status quo in governance and politics has not been able to sufficiently address these problems and has in fact created massive inefficiencies by perpetuating sub-standard governance practices. The behind closed doors, ultra-political environment that has prevailed for years does not support the creation and completion of modern, open, inclusive, data-driven, long-term solutions and policies which are necessary for the positive and sustainable future of The Bahamas.

ORG asserts that a shift to a more open and participatory model of governance is both essential to our future success as a nation and vital to bringing about the necessary reform.

Over the past days, manifestos, blue prints and visions have been issued by the Free National Movement, the Progressive Liberal Party, Democratic National Alliance and the Coalition of Independents. ORG commends the parties for their presentation of these to the public and recognizes the inclusion of various actions for long term reform in each of these. However, the longstanding governance and economic issues that plague The Bahamas should not be seen simply as issues to be solved as part of a partisan agenda. They affect every segment of the nation and their resolution will require commitment, action and sacrifice from all who call The Bahamas home regardless of party affiliation.



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As such, ORG appeals to every candidate seeking public office to embrace and actualize the precepts of Good Governance. These include:

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Even enforcement of Law
- Efficiency and Effectiveness
- Participatory, Inclusive and Consensus Driven Government

As you look to represent the people of The Bahamas, ORG requests that you to demonstrate your belief in these precepts and commit to actionable and sustainable measures to increase transparency and accountability; reduce the instance, opportunity and perception of corruption; increase the growth of the gross domestic product; bring greater ease of doing business to the local private sector; build responsible foreign direct investment; reduce the national debt; improve education; and increase citizen participation in governance. **To this end, ORG has identified opportunities for short and midterm actioning by the next government and calls on you to commit to the following:**

Accountable Governance

- Adopt the National Development as an apolitical transparent multi-sectoral plan to guide long-term reform.
 - Commit the University of The Bahamas Public Policy Institute to monitor and steward the progress of the plan.
- Debate, pass and enact the Integrity Commission Bill 2017 to establish a independent body to receive, vet and resolve claims of corruption and conflict of interest; oversee and track public disclosures; foster a culture of integrity in public service; and assist the government and public to reduce the opportunities, instance and perception of corruption.
- Debate, pass and enact the Ombudsman Bill 2017 to establish and independent office to receive and resolve claims and concerns related to maladministration in government services.
- Conduct extensive public consultation of the Public Health Emergency Bill 2021 to ensure it is representative and equitable.
- Fully enact The Freedom of Information Act and provide extensive public education on the appropriate usage of Act.
- Amend the Local Government Act to allow for greater decentralization of decision making and resources. This includes:
 - Implement Local Government in New Providence as recommended in the report issued by the National Committee for Local Government in NP.
 - Expansion of the scope of responsibility by the Local in the Family Islands to ,more directly address island/ community specific issues.
- Public Service reform including:



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- Passage of a Public Service Act that more clearly distinguishes the management and oversight roles between Ministers and Sr. Government officials and establishes clear performance indicators while requiring increased training and performance based evaluation of the civil service.
- Expansion and funding of the Delivery Unit to drive effectiveness and efficiency measures across all Ministries and Departments of government.
- Ongoing mechanisms to receive and respond to public input for improvement of performance.
- Electoral reform including :
 - Fixed Election Dates
 - Term limits for Prime Minister
 - An Independent Boundaries Commission as recommended by Civil Society Bahamas.
 - Campaign Finance legislation to:
 - Regulate Campaign spending.
 - Provide transparency for campaign donation sources.
- Further the independence of the Legislative Branch of Government
- Establish an independent oversight body to support the work of the Complaints and Corruption branch of the Royal Bahamas Police Force.
- Pass and enact the Patients Rights Bill.
- Increased funding and access for the Auditor General's office to expand their capacity.

Economic Development

- Complete the full implementation of the Public Financial Management & Performance Monitoring Reform (PFM/PMR) Project including related legislation.
- Commit to a plan to reduce the burden of State Owned Enterprises on the public purse with clear benchmarks and timelines.
- Adherence to a clear and transparent National Debt Management Plan.
- Prioritize revenue generation from existing sources and the reduction of non performing government expenditures.
- Full Enactment and Funding of the Procurement Act 2021 and expansion of education to ensure participation of a broad inclusive range of local vendors.
- Ensure full adherence to the Fiscal Responsibility Act including the expansion of the role of the Fiscal Responsibility Committee to offer public commentary.
- Development of a comprehensive National Land Use Plan with identified targets for development.
- Full expansion of the Government digitization efforts to ensure ease of access to government services and information.
- Full implementation of Invest Bahamas as a mechanism to streamline responsible foreign direct investment.



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- Expanded public education on Fiscal Literacy and expansion of the government Fiscal transparency platform.
- Amend the Energy Regulations to allow for greater local participation and growth in renewable and green energy.
- Expansion and support of The Small Business Development Center to manage the dual roles of Business incubation and post disaster recovery coordination.
- Link unemployed persons receiving National Insurance Board and other government benefits with opportunities to upskill and perform volunteer service with community based not for profits and Faith Based Organizations.

Education Reform

- Offer increased support to facilitate early Childhood development including parent training, nutritional education and access to resources.
- Expand Pre-school options provide universal accessibility and ensure sufficient resources to monitor the quality of education.
- Integrate Social emotional curriculums to support our children to develop better coping, conflict management, and resilience skills.
- Address gender disparities and the reduction of gender based violence at formative stages with children.
- Amend the Education Act to:
 - Allow for the operation of public private partnership schools that can bring high quality innovative education for all into our most underserved communities.
 - Provide for alternative pathways for teacher certification and education to support more technical professionals to become educators.
- Implement youth apprenticeship programs in 10th to 12th grade as a pathway to vocational and academic success.
- Unify the skill development/ job readiness programs that exist across multiple Ministries into a comprehensive program with unified standards, benchmarks, curriculums and monitoring. Link further investment in education and labour programming to identified national priority skill gaps and track against clear performance indicators
- Increase job skills development and placement programs for persons with disabilities.

Civil Society Development

- Increase the opportunities and funds for not-for-profits (NPOs) and Faith-Based organizations to provide social, cultural, environmental and educational programs.
- Create an expanded role for local NPOs in the coordination of disaster preparedness, relief and recovery efforts.
- Work with the local NPOs to complete the World Bank NPO Risk assessment develop protocols to reduce any vulnerability to terrorism financing or money laundering in the local NPO sector.



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- Formalize partnerships with local and international NGOs to increase the capacity of The Bahamas to meet local, regional and international Climate Change targets and build protection strategies for environmentally sensitive areas.
- Amend the NPO Act to ensure consistent and equitable regulation and standards across all social cause organizations including political parties, associations, faith-based organizations and statute based institutions.
- Establish a formal NPO Advisory working group to collaborate ongoingly with the government on the development and consultation of legislation, development of a formal mechanism for public consultations, and the adherence of The Bahamas to international and regional obligations and agreements related to human development and the environment.

The Bahamas finds itself at a critical juncture and failure to achieve significant progress in the next administration can result in dire and irreversible circumstances. The needs of the political parties and the politicians must not eclipse the greater needs of the nation The Bahamas. The actions identified above represent difficult but necessary steps forward that exist outside of a political agenda.

ORG will continue to encourage Bahamian citizens to hold their candidates accountable and offer the issues and actions highlighted in this letter for use by the public as benchmarks for each aspiring Member of Parliament and Senator over the next five years. We will continue to educate and engage with citizens to increase their responsible involvement in governance, including what they should expect of their elected officials and how to distinguish between a unrealistic idea and a sensible strategy.

ORG stresses the obvious to all candidates. **Promises sound good, but solid plans lead to meaningful, inclusive and positive growth.** The Bahamian public deserves plans for change that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and anchored within a believable Time Frame. This commitment to transparency and accountability can be the difference between a short term electoral victory, and the longer term sustainability and success of the nation.

We wish each of you luck in the upcoming election and encourage you to keep your safety, the safety of your campaigners, and the safety of the voting public as a priority. Whether you are chosen to represent your constituency or not, ORG stands ready to work in partnership with each of you to move The Bahamas toward a more transparent, accountable and prosperous future. Thank you for your leadership

Best Regards and Be Safe.

The Organization for Responsible Governance