



Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Alex Zablocki

Office you are seeking: Public Advocate **District Number:** NYC

Campaign Contact and Title: Alex Zablocki, candidate

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Freelancers Union is a national nonprofit organization that represents the needs of America's independent workforce through advocacy, information, and service. In New York State alone, Freelancers Union has over 70,000 members.

Independent workers—freelancers, consultants, independent contractors, temps, part-timers, contingent employees, and the self-employed—make up 30% of the nation's workforce. With their short-term, flexible employment, these workers often do not have access to affordable health insurance, are taxed more than traditional employees, and have limited access to crucial workplace protections such as unemployment insurance, retirement plans, and unpaid wage claims. Freelancers Union is filling those gaps by providing essential benefits and advocating for independent workers, building the next social safety net for the new workforce.

The following questions explore some of the top areas of concern and legislative priorities for Freelancers Union members. For each issue, please provide us with your position on the topic. If you need additional space for comments, please attach pages which clearly indicate the position to which you are referring.

Please return to: Althea Erickson, Senior Manager of Advocacy and Policy, by JULY 17th.

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Freelancers Union Candidate Questionnaire

1. Independent workers are the fastest growing segment of New York City's workforce, accounting for 2/3 of the city's job base growth since 1975. However, the City of New York requires them to pay the Unincorporated Business Tax (UBT), a 4% tax on both business and personal income that effectively imposes a double tax. Freelancers Union proposes exempting sole proprietors from the Unincorporated Business Tax, so they can continue to grow their jobs and the New York City economy.

Do you support S5519/A8615, which would exempt sole proprietors earning under \$100,000 from the Unincorporated Business Tax? Will you work with Freelancers Union to secure passage of legislation that would fully exempt independent workers from the UBT, including passing a home rule bill in the New York City Council to authorize the vote?

This is a very important issue for all freelancers. The double taxation that they have incurred is unjust. Early on in my campaign, I started collecting petition signatures through my campaign website to urge lawmakers to pass a bill that would exempt freelancers from the UBT.

As you know, we won the battle recently with the passage of the bill in the City Council and the State legislature. I wholeheartedly supported this measure.

2. Independent workers are 1/3 of the nation's workforce, but they are on their own when a client refuses to pay. The Department of Labor offers an unpaid wage claim system to employees, while freelancers must sue or walk away. Freelancers Union believes non-payment should be seen as an equal problem for everyone and that independent contractors should be included in the same wage claim system.

How do you plan to combat the problem of employer non-payment when in office?

A contract is a contract – a deal is a deal. Employers that do not pay ANY employee, whether they be freelancers or the average worker, will have an advocate and friend in me if elected Public Advocate.

As Public Advocate, I would submit a new law that could better protect freelancers from not being paid. Any employer, person or company hiring freelancers could be held accountable by the Department of Consumer Affairs Department (DCA) if found liable of non-payment. This legislation would give the authority to the DCA to freeze up licenses of "dead beat" companies, if they are licensed with DCA. I would also have a staff available to work with freelancers (and small business owners) to assist them in matters such as this.

As Public Advocate I would also work to force the Department of Labor to recognize freelancers (independent contractors) the same as they do for regular employees to make the system more equitable.

3. Freelancers have no social safety net without unemployment insurance. Just like traditional employees, they need a method of income stabilization for when business slows. Freelancers Union supports developing a system of unemployment protection for self-employed workers that would allow them to set aside pre-tax dollars for use during periods of unemployment, to help stabilize their income. This is designed to complement the current unemployment system for employees.

Would you support such a program? Why or why not?

I would support the system, but I believe it would have to be some sort of insurance policy versus a pre-tax account. Currently, money for retirement can be saved, pre-taxed, but if withdrawn before retirement, it is penalized. There would be legal issues that would arise with pre-tax accounts, in terms of where the money would go or how it would be classified if it was never used.

I would be open to supporting a new type of unemployment insurance policy to supplement income during times of unemployment. As Public Advocate I would work with the Freelancers Union to get this accomplished.

4. In your professional career, how have you helped to support independent worker issues?

While attending Baruch College, where I obtained a Bachelor's degree in Finance and Investments, I started a business called SG Worldwide, where I build websites and sell items over the internet. This business has helped supplement my salary from working in city and state government. I know firsthand the challenges we face as independent workers.

As a staff member to State Senator Andrew Lanza, I worked closely with him to lobby other members, and the public, to support ending the UBT. As I stated previously, I also worked to eliminate the UBT by collecting petition signatures through my campaign website. While working for Senator Lanza I also helped independent workers and small business owners get health insurance either through Health Plus or HealthyNY. In my professional career I have also been a supporter of independent workers.

5. If elected to the position you are seeking, how will you advocate for independent worker issues?

As Public Advocate, I would have a team specifically assigned to work with independent workers and small businesses. I believe the Freelancers Union model, which assists members in getting health coverage, retirement plans and other services, is exactly what my office would be doing to help independent workers and the general public. As a small business owner myself, I know government sometimes gets in the way of our success and makes it difficult to survive in a very expensive city. As your Public Advocate, you would have a friend in office, on the citywide level, giving independent workers a seat at the table in City Hall. You would have a voice for lower taxes, smaller government, improved schools, jobs and accountability in government.