

## Ontario Votes 2022: Liberal candidate Kasirlou focused on health, affordability and community



As a registered nurse, Oak Ridges resident Marjan Kasirlou has been a vocal advocate to politicians on the importance of healthcare and those working within the system.

Now, as Ontarians head to the polls on June 2, she is hoping to take this advocacy to the next level be the community's voice at Queen's Park as the Provincial Liberal candidate for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill.

"When I become elected, my goal is to serve people based on the needs of the community," she says. "My engagement in the political arena started as a professional with the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. We were so vocal in terms of the policies we need to have in communities to help our communities be healthy. To me, as a nurse, I think the best thing we can do is prevent some of the complications that ended up filling our hospitals with patients; rather, we can provide more prosperous policies to help people thrive and also keep them safe and keep them healthy."

Some of the main elements of health, she says, are providing proper housing and improving the environment. On this front, the issue of affordability is top of mind as she goes door to door.

"We can't have healthy communities if we have people living in poverty," says Ms. Kasirlou, who came to Canada from Iran. "Society can be healthy if we consider people's overall social determinants of health, education, housing, income, safety in the community and the environment. All of them go hand in hand. The gaps in society are really getting bigger and bigger. We have some people living in poverty and that is one of the big areas we need to invest in."

"For people who are working parttime, they don't have access to equitable pay. We are forgetting about equity and payment to individuals. We have some gig workers who don't have any benefits. I have seen patients who didn't fill in their prescriptions because they had to pay their bills, rent or put food on the table for kids, so they denied their health. It is really heartbreaking."

Being "mindful" of spending and income is important in lifting people out of poverty, and that includes fostering an environment where housing is once again more affordable.

"We need to provide more homes that are affordable," she says. "Right now, I am so concerned about the application of MZOs (Ministerial Zoning Orders) by the Ford government. "Cities and Councils are working hard to have a proper plan on how many buildings we need, how many jobs we need, and where we can have industrial places. We need to be conscious about where we're

building and how many units are in each location.?

The issue of affordability also extends to in-home care for the senior population.

More needs to be done to create a ?safety net? so elders are able to age in place in the communities they call home, she says.

?We have a lot of seniors in the community and these people have served Ontario for their entire lives,? she says. ?Now they need us. I think it is our responsibility to provide this safety net for them to live in a place they love. The majority of the people we have seen in the community, they love to be in their own community and this has benefits both for the people as well as their family and society in general.

?We're going to invest more on having community-oriented living for elders. Instead of having 500 individuals in long-term care, we can [lower that number]. I think we need places like long-term care facilities for individuals who cannot [receive] the service in the community but we have to have different layers of care for individuals.?

These are issues that have been close to Ms. Karislou's heart for many years, and they are the issues she has advocated for to the powers-that-be. Now, she wants a voice on the table on behalf of the community she calls home.

?After a couple of years of advocacy, I felt enough was enough,? she said of pressing the incumbent government on the issue of healthcare. ?We did a lot of research, spent a lot of time talking to politicians and we didn't see any outcome out of it. The best bet is for someone with a healthcare background being at Queen's Park and talking about these policies.

?We need to have healthcare practitioners at Queen's Park. I believe we can do better and I do believe with the knowledge and expertise I bring from the healthcare sector [and] the needs of each individual, I think I could be a really amazing voice for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill.

?This campaign is a learning journey and I love it because I learn every single second ? in the campaign office working or out knocking on doors. Talking to individuals at the doors I see firsthand what the issues are for our society and it makes me more conscious about what is needed in Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill. I believe good government is government that listens.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter