

# 2610

# 13-C-5021

A COMMUNICATION BY  
 COUNCILMEMBERS MICHAEL BOND,  
 POST 1 AT-LARGE, CARLA SMITH,  
 DISTRICT 1, KWANZA HALL, DISTRICT  
 2, IVORY LEE YOUNG, JR., DISTRICT 3,  
 AND CLETA WINSLOW, DISTRICT 4 TO  
 APPOINT RABBI JOSHUA LESSER TO  
 SERVE AS A MEMBER OF THE HUMAN  
 RELATIONS COMMISSION.

**CONFIRMED BY**

SEP 03 2013

**COUNCIL**

- CONSENT REFER
  - REGULAR REPORT REFER
  - ADVERTISE & REFER
  - 1<sup>ST</sup> ADOPT 2<sup>ND</sup> READ & REFER
  - PERSONAL PAPER REFER
- Date Referred: August 19, 2013  
 Referred To: Carlin on Council  
 Date Referred: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Referred To: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date Referred: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Referred To: \_\_\_\_\_

**First Reading**

Committee \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chair \_\_\_\_\_  
 Referred To \_\_\_\_\_

Committee CAC  
 Date 9/3/13  
 Chair Wasson  
 Action Fav Adv, Hold (see rev. side)  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

Members' Members  
 Refer To \_\_\_\_\_

*Michael Bond*  
*Carla Smith*  
*Ivory Lee Young, Jr.*  
*Kwanza Hall*  
*Cleta Winslow*

Committee	Date	Chair	Action	Other	Refer To
_____	_____	_____	Fav, Adv, Hold (see rev. side)	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	Members	_____	_____

**FINAL COUNCIL ACTION**

2<sup>nd</sup>  1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup>  3<sup>rd</sup>

Readings

Consent  V Vote  RC Vote

**CERTIFIED**

SEP 03 2013

ATLANTA CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT

**CERTIFIED**

SEP 03 2013

*Rachel Douglas Johnson*  
 MUNICIPAL CLERK

**MAYOR'S ACTION**



External  
copy

CITY OF ATLANTA

**13-C-5021**

KWANZA HALL  
COUNCILMEMBER  
DISTRICT 2

55 TRINITY AVENUE, S.W.  
SUITE 2900  
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30303  
MAIN (404) 330-6038  
FAX (404) 658-7164  
EMAIL khall@atlantaga.gov

July 1, 2013

Atlanta City Council President Ceasar Mitchell  
Atlanta City Councilmembers

**CONFIRMED BY**

SEP 2013

**COUNCIL**

Dear colleagues:

We are writing to nominate Rabbi Joshua Lesser as the Council District 1, 2, 3, 4, and At-Large Post 1 appointee to the City of Atlanta's Human Relations Commission. His resume is attached.

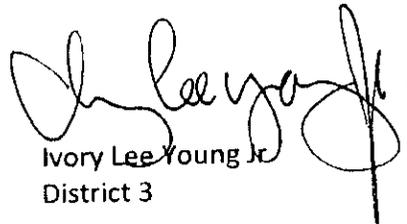
Rabbi Lesser presides over Congregation Bet Haverim in Atlanta. He lives at 5 Krog Street, Unit A, Atlanta, GA 30307.

Thank you for your support of this nomination.

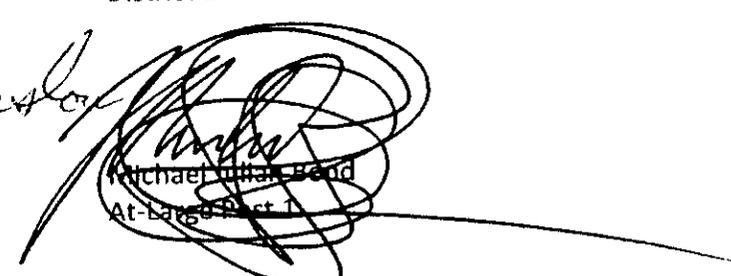
Sincerely,

  
Carla Smith  
District 1

Kwanza Hall  
District 2

  
Ivory Lee Young Jr.  
District 3

  
Clela Winslow  
District 4

  
Michael Julian Bond  
At-Large Post 1

**RABBI  
JOSHUA  
LESSER,  
M.H.L.**

**PROFILE:** Engaging, responsive Rabbi with more than 19 years of commitment in fostering understanding, building bridges and creating community. Passionate and committed in communicating progressive Jewish and Universal values, and civil and human rights through advocacy, education, writing and public speaking.

Creative in envisioning traditional rituals and liturgy to inspire and infuse meaning. Cultivates diversity, promotes thoughtful debate, and values based decision making. Emphasizes the significance of spiritual living for children and adults.

Core strengths include: Visioning and Strategic Planning, Contemporary Ritual and Liturgy, Balancing traditional Jewish approaches with Meditation, Spiritual Direction, Integrating Life Experiences with Texts, Social Justice, Education, Interfaith Dialogue, LGBT and Faith Issues, Social Media.

## **RABBINIC EXPERIENCE**

### **1999-Present // Congregation Bet Haverim - Atlanta, GA // RABBI**

Congregation Bet Haverim is a dynamic Reconstructionist synagogue of nearly 300 member households. Originally founded by and for LGBT Jews and their loved ones, the community is profoundly committed to the values of hospitality and diversity. CBH celebrates its founding values by ensuring that interfaith families, single parents, Jews of color, spiritual seekers, multiracial families, and people of all economic means have a home that honors them. The community has been regionally and nationally recognized for its high quality and innovative programming, significant level of member engagement, and its commitment to living its values both within the synagogue and externally.

Accomplishments resulting from rabbinic leadership:

- Sustained and strengthened growth. Increased membership by 300%.
- Fostered a religious school that has growth by 200% and now serves 150 children and their families
- Raised funds for a Scholar in Residence Program and a Rabbinic Intern Trust
- Created the Jewish Teen Book Group
- Pioneered the introduction of new services (e.g. Meditation and Mysticism, Sing and Play, Blues T'shiva B'av)
- Initiated development of adult-education and scholar-in-residence programming
- Blended social action and Shabbat services
- Trained a core of congregants to become lay service leaders

### **2003-2004 // Emory Hillel - Atlanta, GA // INTERIM RABBI**

Emory Hillel is a Jewish student center on Emory's campus.

Rabbinic accomplishments include:

- Trained service leaders for Sabbath and holy day services
- Significantly increased students' participation and attendance
- Developed and implemented The Tritt Social Justice Force providing students with service education culminated by leading a service mission to the Jewish community in Minsk, Belarus.

### **1999-2006 // Reconstructionist Rabbinical College - Wyncote, PA // GUEST INSTRUCTOR**

Played a pivotal role in designing, teaching and then mentoring instructors of a mini-course: *Creating Inclusive Communities, for Jewish seminary students which addressed the needs of LGBT congregants and their families; received positive feedback from students.*

### **2009 // Hebrew Union College - Cincinnati, OH // GUEST INSTRUCTOR**

Introduced Judaism and LGBT Issues: *What 1,000 Rabbis Think you Should Learn in Seminary* to students covering the theological, social and religious concerns, challenges and gifts of LGBT people.

**RABBI  
JOSHUA  
LESSER,  
M.H.L.**

## EDUCATION

- 1999 Master's Degree in Hebrew Letters and Rabbinic Ordination  
*Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Wyncote, PA*
- 1991 Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Social Policy, Concentration in Counseling Psychology and Social Policy  
*Northwestern University, Evanston, IL*

## PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

- Reconstructionist Rabbinical College Social Media Training
- Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience Course for Clergy
- The Institute for Jewish Spirituality Rabbinic Training Program - Fourth Cohort
- GLAAD Media Training
- The Andrew Young Faith Leadership Institute with Faith and the City Class of 2005
- Lev Shomea Spiritual Direction Training 2011 - 2012
- Congregation Bet Simchat Torah CRI Alumni Training

## AWARDS AND COMMENDATIONS

- 2013 Jewish Daily Forward's list of America's Most Inspirational Rabbis
- First Revolutions Award for Outstanding Nonprofit Leader, GA Center for Nonprofits
- The Rabbi Devorah Bartinoff Memorial Prize for Spiritually Motivated Social Justice, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
- The Rabbi Kenneth and Aviva Berger Memorial Prize for Excellence in Practical Rabbis, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
- Community Builder Award, Atlanta Pride Committee
- The Rainmaker Award, The Rainbow Center and Jewish Family & Career Services
- Featured in FENUXE Magazine as Atlanta's 50 most prominent and influential members of the LGBT community

## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Featured spiritual expert on CNN's "Faith Matters"

Selected to be a speaker in various conferences including:

- 2013 Global Health & Humanitarian Summit
- National American Bar Association Conference
- National Urban Fellows Conference
- Conference of GA Social Workers
- HRC
- Faith and Fairness Townhall at the Chicago Gay Games
- Mayor's Interfaith lunch on Unity
- Safe Space Conference in Asheville North Carolina
- The American Prayer Hour in Minnesota, Mayor State of the City Breakfast, GA State Forum on Religion and Public Health
- Disabilities Conference, National MLK Holiday, Seeds of Hope Infertility Support Group
- United for Safety Speaker on Faith Issues and Domestic Violence

**RABBI  
JOSHUA  
LESSER,  
M.H.L.**

## PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta, Co-Founder, Former President
- Chair of the Tikkun Olam Commission as part of the National Reconstructionist movement
- World Pilgrims, Trip Leader and Founding Member
- Camp Big Heart, Co-Founder
- Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, Member & Convention Chair 2013
- Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, Kol Echad, Task Force on Inclusion of People with Disabilities
- Florence Melton Mini School Educator
- Jewish Mosaic, Rabbinic Consultant
- Trans Torah, Rabbinic Consultant
- Health and Wellness Task Force, Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta
- Minsk Partnership, Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta
- Camp JRF Faculty
- Nehirim Faculty
- Atlanta Mayoral Clergy Task Force on Occupy Atlanta
- Georgia Equality, Board Member
- Atlanta Rabbinic Association
- Teach For America, New Orleans Corps Alumna

## EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

- Special Education Teacher - Teach for America Corp New Orleans, LA 1991 - 1993
- Biblical and Midrash Consultant - Miriam's Cup, children's book 1997
- Primary Adult Education Instructor - emphasis on text study, Jewish living and ritual, Jewish philosophy - Congregation Bet Haverim 1999 - Present
- B'nai Mitzvah Instructor - Congregation Bet Haverim 1999 - Present
- Local scholar - Taught on Senior Learning - MJCC 2000
- Guest Instructor - Florence Melton Mini School 2000 - 2004
  - Purposes for Jewish Living 3 years
  - Rhythms of Jewish Living 3 years
  - Ethics of Jewish Living 3 years
  - Understanding Jewish Texts: Understating the Jewish Cannon and Subsequent Writings 2 years
- Guest Instructor - Emory University 2003 - 2006
- Coordinator - Intown Rabbi Lunch and Learn and Study Groups 2004
- Instructor - Introduction to Judaism; A Reconstructionist Approach 2004 - 2011
  - A fifteen series class exploring the Reconstructionist movement
- Scholar - Taught workshops on LGBT views and Judaism, Issues around coming out, Judaism and suicide, Infertility and Jewish responses - JFCS 2004 - Present
- Instructor - Jewish Values and Talmud Class 2005
- Instructor - Chaplin Training: Introduction to Judaism - Northside, Emory University, GA Baptist, Scottish Rite Hospitals, 2006
- Guest Instructor - Reconstructionist Rabbinical College Wyncote, PA 2006
  - Played a pivotal role in designing, teaching and then mentoring instructors of a mini-course: Creating Inclusive Communities, for Jewish seminary students which addressed the needs of LGBT congregants and their families; received positive feedback from students.
- Instructor - Taste of Judaism - The Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta 2008 - Present

**RABBI  
JOSHUA  
LESSER,  
M.H.L.**

## **EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION**

- Scholar in Residence - taught on Jewish Year Cycle and Jewish legends of Golem - Nehirim 2008, 2010
- Guest Instructor - Hebrew Union College Cincinnati, OH 2009
  - Introduced Judaism and LGBT Issues: What 1,000 Rabbis Think you Should Learn in Seminary to students covering the theological, social and religious concerns, challenges and gifts of LGBT people.
- Editor - Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible 2009
- Leader - Lunch and Learn Sessions on Torah Queeries 2010-2011
- Co-Instructor - Who Wrote the (Hebrew) Bible and How to Read It 2011
- Instructor - Limmud 2011
  - Spiritual Social Justice
  - Jewish Values around Immigration
  - Storyteller: Jewish Stories of the South
- Authoring chapter for B'nai Mitzvah process for Reconstruction guide 2012
- Leader of the Jewish Teen Book Group 2012
- Instructor - Outsider Midrash Class 2013

## **INTERFAITH COMMUNITY BUILDING**

- Leader - Bayard-Rustin Interfaith Breakfast in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. 2000
- Co-Founder - Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta 2001
  - President 2008 - 2010
- Organizer - Responsible for Interfaith Liturgy for Atlanta's September 11th Service Ebenezer Baptist Church 2002
- Speaker - Gave interfaith blessing over Martin Luther King Jr. Day March 2003
- Participant - Faith & the City, Interfaith Leadership Program 2004
- Participant in Baccalaureate at Morehouse College 2006
- Lead Rabbi - World Pilgrims
  - Inaugural Trip to Turkey 2007
  - Trip to Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah 2008 (pilgrim)
  - Trip to Jerusalem, Jordan and Egypt 2010
- Interfaith Participant - Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience 2008
- Participant - Interfaith trip to visit Dalai Lama in Wisconsin 2008
- Participant - Interfaith Habitat for Humanity 2010
- Participant - Interfaith Dog Sledding Trip 2010
- Speaker - Dozens of Interfaith Services and Panels with varying topics, such as: human rights, faith communities response to the death penalty, affordable housing, war, Israeli/Palestinian Conflict, disparity in public housing and public education, hunger, interfaith marriage, immigration, and LGBT issues.
- Speaker - Read Hebrew Scriptures Martin Luther King Jr. Commemorative Service at Ebenezer Baptist Church 2011

RCS# 2988  
9/03/13  
2:18 PM

Atlanta City Council

MULTIPLE

13-C-5017 AND 13-C-5021

CONFIRM

YEAS: 14  
NAYS: 0  
ABSTENTIONS: 0  
NOT VOTING: 1  
EXCUSED: 0  
ABSENT 1

Y Smith	Y Archibong	Y Moore	B Bond
Y Hall	Y Wan	Y Martin	Y Watson
Y Young	Y Shook	Y Bottoms	Y Willis
Y Winslow	Y Adrean	Y Sheperd	NV Mitchell

MULTIPLE