

**Indivisible Lambertville/New Hope (ILNH) Questionnaire
for New Jersey CD7 Democratic Candidates**

Candidate Name: Brian Varela

General / Philosophy

1. What are your top three priorities for your first two years in Congress and how do those demonstrate your core values? What do you see as your role in trying to achieve this?

My top three priorities are lowering costs for working families, protecting healthcare access, and defending our democracy and the communities under attack by this administration.

First, affordability. I'm the son of Colombian immigrants. My mother was a waitress and factory worker, my father drove trucks and limos. I know what it means to stretch a paycheck and worry about being behind on your mortgage. Too many families in New Jersey are working harder than ever and still falling behind because the economy is rigged for the ultra-wealthy and well-connected. I'll fight to stop corporate price gouging, lower the cost of housing and childcare, and push back against reckless policies like Trump's tariffs that are driving up prices on everything from groceries to gas. Working families shouldn't pay the price for this administration's chaos.

Second, healthcare. I watched my mother battle cancer while wondering which of the doctor's visits would end up bankrupting us. No family should have to choose between putting food on the table and affording life-saving medication. I'll fight to achieve universal healthcare as a right for all Americans, lower prescription drug costs, protect Medicaid from Republican cuts, and defend reproductive freedom. Politicians have no business making private medical decisions for women and families.

Third, defending our democracy and targeted communities. I was the first candidate in this race to reject corporate PAC money because I believe our government should work for the people, not special interests. But this is about more than campaign finance, it's about standing up to an administration that is attacking the foundations of our democracy and going after immigrant families, including families like the one I grew up in. I'll fight to protect voting rights, get big money out of politics, and be a voice for the communities this administration is trying to scapegoat and tear apart. My parents came here for the American Dream. I won't let anyone destroy it.

These priorities reflect my core values: that hard work should lead to economic security, that healthcare is a right, and that democracy only works when it belongs to all of us. My role in Congress won't just be to cast the right votes, it will be to organize, fight back, and be a voice for working families who have been ignored for too long.

2. What are the two main provisions of the OBBB Act you would roll back, and how would you achieve that?

The two provisions I would prioritize rolling back are the cuts to healthcare access and the tax giveaways to the wealthy.

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First, the OBBB guts healthcare for working families. It includes the largest Medicaid cuts in the program's history, over \$900 billion that will cause more than 10 million Americans to lose coverage. It imposes cruel work requirements that will trap people in bureaucratic limbo. It defunds Planned Parenthood by blocking Medicaid reimbursements and not for abortion, which was already banned from federal funding, but for cancer screenings, STI testing, contraception, and basic preventive care. Nearly 200 clinics are at risk of closing, cutting off 1.1 million patients from care. For many women in underserved areas, Planned Parenthood is their only healthcare provider.

Second, this bill is the largest upward transfer of wealth from working people to the ultra-rich in American history. The top 10% will see their incomes rise while the bottom 10% will see theirs fall. It adds \$3.3 trillion to the national debt, not to invest in our future, but to give tax cuts to billionaires. Working families are paying for it with their healthcare and their food assistance.

As a freshman Congressperson, I won't be able to snap my fingers and repeal this law. But I will fight like hell. I'll force Republicans to take vote after vote defending their choice to cut healthcare so billionaires can pay less in taxes. I'll use oversight hearings to put a human face on these cuts, like the cancer patient who can't get screened or the senior choosing between medication and groceries. I'll build coalitions with colleagues and advocates to keep the pressure on, and I'll look for bipartisan opportunities where they exist, because some Republicans are already uncomfortable with how far this bill went.

I'll also make sure my congressional office is well-staffed for constituent services, so we can help New Jersey families navigate the damage and access every resource available to them. And I'll work with Governor Sherrill and state leaders to protect New Jersey families in the meantime.

Leadership

3. How would you describe your leadership style, giving an example from your past work, and how would that influence your approach in Congress?

My leadership style is simple: show up, do the work, and build from the ground up.

In 2024, I was looking at the town of Wharton in our district. Republican mayor, all-Republican town council, and no local Democratic organization at all. Most people would look at that and say it's not worth the effort. I saw an opportunity.

I went door to door. Not to campaign, but to listen. I talked to neighbors about what they cared about, what was missing, who wanted to get involved. I recruited local advocates and community organizers one conversation at a time. By early 2025, we had restarted the Wharton Democrats from scratch. Then two candidates stepped up to run for town council in a swing town that hadn't elected Democrats in years.

In November, both of them won. Wharton now has its first Democrats on the town council in years.

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That's my leadership style. I don't wait for permission. I don't need an existing infrastructure. If the organization doesn't exist, I'll build it. If the path isn't there, I'll make one.

In Congress, I'll bring that same approach. Passing legislation is about building coalitions, finding common ground with colleagues, mobilizing grassroots support back home, and being creative about how to get things done. Too many members of Congress listen to corporations and lobbyists instead of the people they represent. I'll always start by listening to real people in our communities. I will work hard to understand their needs, their struggles, their ideas, and then fight to turn those into policy. That's how you legislate effectively: from the ground up, not the top down.

I'll work to mobilize constituents to keep pressure on tough votes, help elect more Democrats in swing districts, and look for unlikely allies wherever I can find them. I didn't get into this to play it safe. I got in to fight for working people, for our democracy, and to stop Donald Trump and his allies from dragging this country backward. I will bring that fight to Congress every single day.

4. What two measures would you take to address the corruption of the current administration?

First, I'll use every oversight tool available to expose this administration's corruption and protect the watchdogs Trump is trying to eliminate. Trump illegally fired 17 Inspectors General in the dead of night because he's terrified of accountability. I'll cosponsor legislation to strengthen IG protections, support robust whistleblower protections, and use hearings and investigations to put a spotlight on the self-dealing and abuse of power coming out of this White House. Transparency is the enemy of corruption, and I'll fight to make sure the American people know exactly what's being done in their name.

Second, I'll champion the For the People Act, which would get big money out of politics, require disclosure of dark money, expand and protect voting rights, strengthen ethics enforcement, and create a code of ethics for the Supreme Court. We need to give these ethics laws real teeth. Right now, the Hatch Act is being violated openly and repeatedly with zero consequences. I'll push to strengthen enforcement mechanisms so that officials who use their public positions for political gain actually face accountability. I was the first candidate in this race to reject corporate PAC money and I've pledged to never become a lobbyist but individual commitments aren't enough. We need structural reform so that elected officials work for the people, not their portfolios or their donors.

Affordability

5. What changes, if any, would you support to the federal tax code?

We need to make billionaires and corporations pay their fair share. Right now, nurses and firefighters pay taxes out of every paycheck, while many billionaires use tricks like "buy, borrow, die" to avoid paying anything at all. I'd close loopholes like stepped-up basis and carried interest that allow the wealthy to pass fortunes to their heirs tax-free or at an extremely low effective tax rate, raise the top marginal tax rate on incomes over a million dollars, increase the estate tax, and ensure we are aggressively taxing billionaires who

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have record-high amounts of wealth. We can't keep asking working families to shoulder the burden while billionaires pay a lower effective tax rate than their employees.

At the same time, we need to do more for working families. The OBBB made the Child Tax Credit permanent, but it still leaves behind the families who need help most, those earning the least get the smallest benefit because the credit isn't fully refundable. When my mom got sick, my parents ended up going out of business and I became the breadwinner for my family, so I know what it's like to stretch every dollar while you're terrified about the next bill. As someone who now runs ten affordable childcare centers across New Jersey, I see every day how much families are struggling with the cost of raising kids. I'll fight to make the Child Tax Credit fully refundable, expand it to \$3,600 or more per child, and add a baby bonus for newborns. Because the 2021 expansion cut child poverty nearly in half, and we should be building on that success, not walking away from it.

6. What initiatives would you propose to address housing affordability and food insecurity?

On housing, we need to build more affordable homes and help working families buy them. I support expanding the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit to finance hundreds of thousands of new affordable units, incentivizing the conversion of vacant commercial buildings into housing, and creating down payment assistance for first-time homebuyers. I know what it's like to fall behind on a mortgage. When my mom was sick, I was the one juggling the bills and trying to keep my family afloat. Too many families are working full-time and still can't afford a decent place to live. We need to treat this like the crisis it is.

On food insecurity, the first thing I'll do is fight to reverse the OBBB's devastating cuts to SNAP, the largest in the program's history. These cuts will kick millions of people off food assistance, including children, seniors, and veterans, while forcing states to pick up costs they can't afford. SNAP is the most effective anti-hunger program we have, it reduces food insecurity by 30 percent and keeps millions of kids out of poverty. We should be strengthening it, not gutting it to pay for tax cuts for billionaires. No one in the richest country on earth should have to choose between paying rent and putting food on the table. Beyond that, I'll work to pass legislation that lowers the cost of healthy food in schools and grocery stores, because all Americans should be able to afford food that is good for them.

Public Health

7. What specific legislative language or mechanisms would you back to support federal protections for reproductive justice?

Codifying Roe is essential, but it's not enough, we need to ensure that everyone, regardless of where they live or how much they earn, can actually access care. I'll cosponsor the Women's Health Protection Act to restore the legal right to abortion nationwide, and I'll champion the full reproductive freedom agenda: the Ensuring Women's Right to Reproductive Freedom Act to protect people who travel across state lines for care, the My Body, My Data Act to stop states from weaponizing personal health data to track and prosecute patients, and legislation like the Abortion Justice Act to tear

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down systemic barriers that have always made reproductive care harder to access for Black, brown, low-income, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

I'll also fight to protect contraception and IVF, rights that should never be up for debate. And I'll use every tool Congress has to block Republican efforts to revive the Comstock Act, gut EMTALA protections, or ban medication abortion. Reproductive freedom is fundamental, and I'll never stop fighting for it.

8. What are your proposals to improve healthcare access and affordability?

First, I'll fight to undo the damage from the One Big Beautiful Bill, which made some of the largest cuts to federal health programs in American history, all to fund tax breaks for billionaires. The law will put millions at risk of losing Medicaid coverage through burdensome work requirements and let enhanced ACA premium tax credits expire, causing premiums to double for working families. I'll fight to restore and permanently extend those credits. I'll also push to close the Medicaid coverage gap that leaves nearly 1.4 million Americans, 65 percent of them people of color, with no path to affordable coverage because their states refuse to expand Medicaid.

On healthcare access, I'll champion the Save America's Rural Hospitals Act to stop the wave of rural hospital closures devastating communities across America. More than 130 rural hospitals have shuttered since 2010, with hundreds more at risk. I support the Black Maternal Health Momnibus because we have the highest maternal mortality rate of any wealthy nation, and 80 percent of those deaths are preventable. We need to grow and diversify the healthcare workforce through legislation like the Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act and investments in medical school capacity, nursing programs, and loan forgiveness for providers who serve underserved communities. We're facing a projected shortage of 80,000-90,000 doctors and hundreds of thousands of nurses, we have to act now.

On prescription drugs, we need real reform, not marketing gimmicks like TrumpRx. That website is just a referral portal to pharmaceutical company discount programs that already existed, and most insured Americans won't benefit because they already pay less through their plans. Meanwhile, the same administration weakened Medicare's negotiating power by carving out protections for high-cost drugs. I'll fight for legislation that expands Medicare's negotiation from 20 to 50 drugs per year and extends those lower prices to everyone with private insurance, not just seniors. I'll push to cap insulin at \$35 a month for all Americans, not just Medicare beneficiaries, and crack down on pharmacy benefit manager middlemen who profit by driving up costs.

I run ten childcare centers and I see every day how crushing healthcare costs are for working families. Healthcare should be a right, and I'll fight like hell to make sure it is.

9. What legislation would you introduce or support to end gun violence?

I'll fight for a comprehensive approach to gun violence prevention, starting with universal background checks to close the private sale, gun show, and online loopholes that let dangerous people bypass the system. I support the Assault Weapons Ban of 2025 and a

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ban on high-capacity magazines. I'm a strong supporter of Ethan's Law for federal safe storage requirements, 76 percent of school shooters get their guns from a family member's home. And here's something most people don't know: in most states, you can be placed on an emergency psychiatric hold for being a danger to yourself or others, and the moment you're released, you can legally buy a gun. Only five states restrict gun purchases after emergency mental health hospitalizations. We need to close that gap.

I support a federal extreme risk protection order law that empowers families and law enforcement to petition a court to temporarily remove firearms from someone in crisis. Research shows these laws prevent suicides and mass shootings. The 2022 Bipartisan Safer Communities Act was a step forward, but it wasn't nearly enough. We need leaders willing to stand up to the gun lobby and fight for the safety of our kids and communities.

Climate, Energy & Environment

10. What specific actions would you take or propose to protect the climate and the environment? If possible, please name specific ties to New Jersey.

Right here in Lambertville, residents are living through a PFAS crisis. These "forever chemicals" are contaminating groundwater at levels more than ten times the federal limit. Across NJ-7, 80% of homes in the Upper Raritan watershed rely on private wells vulnerable to this contamination. I'll fight to pass the bipartisan PFAS National Drinking Water Standard Act (H.R. 4168) to codify EPA's limits into law before the Trump administration weakens them further. Trump's administration has already extended compliance to 2031 and is trying to eliminate limits on four PFAS chemicals. I'll protect NJ-7's waterways: the Delaware River along our Warren and Hunterdon border, the Musconetcong (a federally designated Wild and Scenic River and New Jersey's best trout fishery), and the Highlands watershed providing drinking water to five million people - all threatened by Republican attacks like the PERMIT Act (H.R. 3898) that would gut Clean Water Act protections.

On clean energy, I'll work to reinstate the tax credits in the Inflation Reduction Act which Republicans repealed. Trump's Day One executive order halting all offshore wind was ruled unlawful by a federal judge in December, yet his administration immediately issued a new 90-day "pause" citing bogus national security concerns. They killed Atlantic Shores, a project that would have delivered \$1.9 billion in economic benefits and powered one million homes. New Jersey had a path to 100% clean energy by 2035; Trump set us back. I'll fight to restart offshore wind, codify clean energy standards into federal law, incentivize electric vehicle usage, expand solar and energy storage, and ensure this transition creates union jobs. Climate change isn't abstract in NJ-7, it's flooding our downtowns during storms and warming trout streams in Warren and Sussex counties past survivable temperatures. We need to do everything we can to reverse the damage of the Trump administration and lower carbon emissions quickly.

Education

11. What is your vision for how the federal government should support education, including childcare, pre-K, public K-12 schools, and higher education, including affordability?

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Right now families are being squeezed from every direction: childcare costs rival rent while public schools face staffing shortages, and college tuition rises faster than wages. At the same time, Republicans in Washington have chosen to cut education, medicaid and food assistance to fund tax breaks for the wealthy while middle-class families are forced to pick up the tab. American parents feel the system is rigged against them when parents are forced to choose between working and affordable childcare. Meanwhile students are graduating with excruciating debt, often leading to bankruptcy. And schools are being asked to do more with less money. My vision for how the federal government should support education is guided by my firm belief that the government should work to strengthen public education, not privatize it, ensuring that education is affordable and equitable.

It is imperative that we treat education as an economic issue and a civil right and put students first. At the federal level, I will fight for universal childcare and Pre-K, because families cannot thrive if childcare and higher education is unaffordable. I support fully funding public K-12 schools, expanding mental health supports, and opposing privatization schemes that drain resources from public education. In regards to higher education, I back federal accountability measures like tuition increase caps, expanded Pell Grants, and student debt relief. Education was once affordable, but today it is a luxury. I will fight to make education affordable for working families.

Immigration & Border Policy

12. What is your vision for how the US government should handle issues around immigration, in terms of both policy and process?

The United States is a country of immigrants, enriched by generations who have fueled our economy and culture; 46% of Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children. But accelerating migration has challenged communities and overwhelmed our immigration courts, where cases can take years, sometimes close to a decade, to resolve. I support the bipartisan Lankford-Murphy border bill, which would have hired 4,300 asylum officers to decide cases in weeks instead of years, added Border Patrol agents, and given the president emergency authority to close the border during surges. The Border Patrol union endorsed it. I also support a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers, TPS holders, and essential workers who have built lives here, expanded legal immigration pathways to reduce pressure on the asylum system, and restoring the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program that Trump dismantled. Trump killed the bipartisan bill because he wanted a campaign issue, not a solution.

Trump has repeated and increased the cruelty of his first term, upending communities with the "largest deportation program in American history." He invoked the Alien Enemies Act—an 1798 law last used for WWII internment, to deport people without court review, deployed military forces for immigration enforcement, and even mistakenly deported mothers and fathers due to "administrative error." His approach is also making America less safe: Internal data show that roughly a quarter of FBI agents and large shares of other federal agents have been pulled off work like drug trafficking and child-exploitation cases to help with immigration enforcement. As a former ICE chief of staff put it: "It's a good time to be an American-born criminal—the fentanyl traffickers, the sex traffickers, they don't quit." I reject funding for inhumane mass deportation or using the military against immigrants. I support comprehensive reform that secures the border through adequate staffing and technology, processes asylum

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claims quickly and fairly, creates orderly legal pathways, and keeps federal law enforcement focused on the cartels and predators actually threatening our communities.

13. What immediate steps would you take to hold ICE, CPB, the attorney general, and others accountable for illegal actions?

Accountability requires transparency. ICE agents currently operate with fewer constraints than local police, they can wear masks, cover badges, refuse to identify themselves, use unmarked vehicles, and detain people without judicial warrants. That has to change. I support requiring all ICE and CBP agents to wear body cameras that remain active throughout enforcement operations, with footage available to anyone who is arrested or detained and their attorneys. When an agent's camera fails to record, the burden should be on the agency to prove malfunction, otherwise, discipline should follow. California's No Secret Police Act offers a model: ban masks and face coverings during enforcement, require visible identification, and strip qualified immunity from officers who violate these rules. At the federal level, I support the VISIBLE Act, which would mandate these requirements nationwide.

I also support conditioning federal law enforcement funding on compliance with accountability standards. Taxpayers deserve assurance that ICE agents follow the law. That means tying appropriations to body camera mandates, misconduct tracking, and cooperation with congressional oversight. To ensure independent oversight survives political pressure, I support the FALCON Act, which requires agencies to respond to Inspector General requests within 60 days or face discipline, including termination. When the Trump administration fired 21 inspectors general to avoid accountability, it proved why we need statutory protections for watchdogs. The Attorney General is harder to hold accountable by design, the Constitution gives the president removal authority. But Congress can demand testimony, issue subpoenas, hold officials in contempt, condition DOJ appropriations, and ultimately pursue impeachment for officials who refuse to enforce the law or who direct unlawful conduct. If Democrats regain the House, I would support aggressive use of all these tools.

AI, Privacy & Surveillance

14. What legislation would you support related to AI? Please address digital ID and digital currency in your response.

AI is less regulated than sandwiches in the United States, the FDA has detailed rules about what goes into your lunch, but no federal standard prevents algorithms from discriminating against you when you apply for a job or a mortgage, or require a healthcare procedure. I support the AI Civil Rights Act, which would prohibit algorithmic discrimination in employment, housing, lending, and healthcare, require independent audits before deployment, and give individuals the right to appeal AI decisions to a human being. I also support the No Robot Bosses Act, a bipartisan bill that would prohibit employers from relying exclusively on automated systems for hiring or firing decisions. And I oppose the Trump administration's executive order threatening to sue states that protect their residents from algorithmic discrimination.

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Digital ID systems pose serious surveillance risks that demand strong guardrails. Recent reports and court decisions have raised alarms about attempts to link sensitive federal databases, and judges have underscored that the Privacy Act still has real force. Any digital ID framework must include strict data minimization, prohibit tracking users across transactions, and preserve physical ID alternatives. I would oppose any system that could be exploited to restrict healthcare access or track Americans' movements.

Digital currency policy must balance innovation with consumer protection and civil liberties. I support strong anti-money laundering requirements for cryptocurrency, but I'm equally concerned about a poorly designed central bank digital currency enabling government surveillance of lawful transactions. The Federal Reserve should continue its research, over 130 countries are exploring CBDCs, and ceding this field to China would be a strategic mistake, but any digital dollar must have privacy protections built in from the start.

Campaign Finance and Coalition Support

15. Do you support public financing or stricter limits on outside (PAC/super PAC) spending? Are there any specific companies, organizations, or individuals you would refuse donations from?

Yes to both. I support public financing through opt-in small donor matching programs that amplify the voices of everyday Americans and reduce candidates' dependence on wealthy donors. I also support the DISCLOSE Act to force transparency on dark money groups, and I believe we ultimately need a constitutional amendment to reverse Citizens United and restore Congress's ability to limit outside spending that drowns out ordinary voters.

I was the first candidate in this race to pledge not to accept corporate PAC money or contributions from foreign national lobbying interests, and I've kept that commitment. I also refuse donations from the fossil fuel industry and from any PAC that takes money from the private prison or immigrant detention industry. These are industries whose profits depend on policies that hurt working families, and I won't be beholden to them in Congress.

Our democracy works best when it belongs to the people, not career politicians and big donors. That's why I've also pledged to ban stock trading by members of Congress, support a lifetime lobbying ban for former members, and put my own holdings in a blind trust. If we want Americans to trust their government again, we have to prove we're working for them, not for the highest bidder.

16. What coalitions and community partners are you currently working with?

We have endorsements from two national organizations, as well as 38 Democratic leaders across the district and state. Beyond that, we are in conversation with a large number of NJ-based and national organizations which want to help Democrats flip this seat. This includes organizations like the Working Families Parties, 32 BJ SEIU, a number of other unions, Planned Parenthood, the DCCC and dozens more. I'm

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happy to provide more detailed info about any of these endorsements and potential partners as is helpful.