

SHSC 2023 Human Services Candidate Questionnaire

Seattle Human Services Coalition (SHSC) 2023 Candidate Questions

Email *

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What is your name? *

Alex Cooley

For which position are you running? *

Seattle City Council District 1

Seattle City Council District 2

Seattle City Council District 3

Seattle City Council District 4

Seattle City Council District 5

Seattle City Council District 6

Seattle City Council District 7

King County Council District 2

King County Council District 4

King County Council District 6

King County Council District 8

Other:

What is your understanding of Human Services? Which Human Service Providers are most familiar with? *

In my view, Human Services is a vital part of our city, considering its goal of connecting the most vulnerable with solutions and opportunities. I have worked as a respite care provider for two years, so I'm incredibly familiar with human services and have witnessed its workings from the inside.

What do you think is the root cause of poverty? What do you think the role of Government has in addressing institutionalized poverty? *

In my opinion, the root causes poverty of poverty include income enequaity, underfunded school, food insecurity, lack of adeuqate healthcare, continuous rise of costs of living. The government has to adequately allocate resources, as well as provide direct provision of goods and services.

What is your understanding of racism and its impacts? What do you see as your role in addressing systemic racism? What solutions, ideas, or examples of policies would you offer toward ending the impact of racism and racial injustice? *

Racism is oppression of one group by another based on race to keep them disenfranchised and vulnerable. by rebuilding or replacing the existing systems. The most important way to address systemic racism is through our public safety academy, which consist of creating ofn our own safety academy.

As an elected official, what steps would you take to understand community needs? What is your approach to partnerships between communities and government? *

First, by consistently being in the community. While there are many ways to do that, I see an act as simple as giving a knock on someone's door and asking them about what matters to them as vital. Holding meetings, townhalls frequently and consistently is vital to understand the needs of the constituents.

What do you believe are the root causes of the on-going homelessness crisis? *

Housing affordability and cost of living. Secondly, not addressing the issue of the speed and scale that it requires.

What would you say are some examples of metrics of success when it comes to the homelessness crisis? *

The reduction in the number of people recorded as homeless during the annual one-night count.

Survivors of domestic and sexual violence frequently enter the criminal legal system due to their victimization, but criminal legal responses are problematic for most survivors for a variety of reasons. This is especially true for Black, Indigenous, and other survivors of color, refugee and immigrant survivors, and gender non-conforming survivors. What do you see as the role of the criminal legal system in responding to gender-based violence? Do you know of any community-based alternatives to responding to violence and how you would promote or support them? *

Investing in upstream solutions to this type of violence in the first place is paramount. After all those opportunities have been exhausted, rebuilding our criminal legal system that would be focused on restorative justice and rehabilitation, as opposed to the current system of punitive justice.

At least one-quarter to one-third of people in our community will experience gender-based violence in their lifetimes, yet solutions and responses to domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking are significantly under-funded. Given this, what specific solutions would you bring forward to address this systemic shortfall? *

The funding for the programs described above will come from progressive tax sources.

According to the GAO nearly half of all people over 55+ and approaching retirement have no retirement savings. When individuals begin to think about retirement, approximately 50% of them will have to depend solely on Social Security as they have no pensions. This is a big factor in the reason that more older adults continue working past expected retirement. What are some of your priorities in tackling elder poverty and ensuring that our older adults are taken care of? What are some actions elected officials can take to help prevent poverty for older adults? *

The priority is increasing the existing safety net in the form of improving the Supplemental Security Income. We also have to increase the healthcare provision, especially for chronic conditions, often seen in seniors.

What do you consider as some of the priorities for older adults living in the Seattle/King County areas? *

The priorities of Seattle/King County seniors in my opinion include affordability, public safety, transit, healthcare.

City officials and nonprofit leaders agree that wages for human service workers do not reflect the education required, difficulty, or value of their work to build well-being. A 2022 City of Seattle funded study conducted by the University of Washington School of Social Work found that King County human service workers are paid at least 37 percent less than workers with comparable skill sets in other industries. The report provides several evidence-based recommendations that the City of Seattle can implement now to begin closing the gap. *

The primary near-term recommendation in the report is an immediate seven percent increase to all City of Seattle funded human service contracts. This represents the minimum level of investment needed in the short term to address high rates of turnover and align human service worker pay with the rest of the labor market.

Will you support and prioritize funding for a seven percent increase in city-funded human service contracts to address systemic wage inequity?

Yes, I think we should go further than seven percent.

Over the next few years, the City of Seattle will have an opportunity to build on these investments and support the substantial wage increases recommended by this report. We call on City leaders to work in concert with other public and private funders to identify the revenue necessary to pay the full cost of providing essential, lifesaving human services to all Seattle residents. *

Will you commit to partnering with SHSC and other human service funders to secure the additional revenue necessary to close the 37 percent wage gap that human service workers face?

Absolutely.

Many childcare workers struggle to afford childcare. Childcare workers in our coalition hesitate to accept promotions because they are concerned that higher pay might disqualify them from receiving a childcare subsidy that they themselves rely on. This is causing quality childcare providers to leave the profession altogether. In a recent survey of former King County childcare workers, one of the main reasons cited for leaving the field was the need to provide affordable childcare to their own children. A lack of access to affordable childcare has ironically created a shortage of qualified early learning professionals. What solutions would you offer to make childcare more affordable and incentivize childcare worker retention? *

We need to expand the Seattle preschool program, so that is it abundant, giving the opportunity to those who work within the childcare system. Secondly, we have to make housing more affordable, and by reducing housing costs, the costs of childcare services will drive down.

What are some ways that you would work to increase support available to folks struggling with mental health needs? *

Helping to facilitate the implementation of King county proposition one. Creating a public safety system that has a third leg focus on mental health care ad substance abuse disorder, while appropriately paying the care providers that make up that division.

Food banks and free meal providers in the region have always struggled to meet the needs of the public. During the pandemic there was an increase in resources to local food banks. As the pandemic has waned, the resources are also receding, yet the demand for food bank services has increased, especially with cuts to SNAP benefits and inflation. What solutions would you offer to continue to meet the needs of people struggling with food insecurity and ensuring that neighborhoods across the City of Seattle have equitable access to the healthy, culturally familiar food? How do you ensure reliable food support is available despite a much-varied landscape of hunger relief organizations and mutual aid groups? *

By increasing direct contributions form the city budget that go to these programs.

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