

SHSC 2023 Human Services Candidate Questionnaire

Seattle Human Services Coalition (SHSC) 2023 Candidate Questions

Email *

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What is your name? *

Andrew Ashiofu

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? *

I have a deep understanding of human services as I currently work in the industry as a clinic supervisor at Healthpoint and I have previously been unhoused.
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What do you think is the root cause of poverty? What do you think the role of Government has in * addressing institutionalized poverty?

The root cause of poverty is corporate greed. People are not paid an equivalent amount of money in relation to the labor they exert. Our society routinely takes advantage of hard work and forces people into cycles of poverty that are inescapable without an insane amount of luck. The government has a large role to play in addressing institutionalized poverty. The funding for public services in this country is nowhere near where it should be and placing that responsibility onto charities and non-profits is a stopgap solution that will never amount to structural change. We need to get people off the street and back on their feet and that's not possible without trust and resources.

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?

I understand racism deeply as I have been discriminated against because of my race in my daily life. However, it goes beyond small experiences as racism exists on a structural level spanning from access to public resources to the consequences of climate change. My role in addressing systemic racism is in my daily life as I work to provide healthcare to marginalized groups but as a member of the city council, it goes beyond that. I believe in setting up a form of reparations, experimenting with universal basic income, and acknowledging the city's role in victimizing marginalized communities as they are disproportionately affected by pollution and climate change. We need to move forward by acknowledging the past and I will make sure that happens.

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

As a member of a plethora of local organizations, I am heavily involved in my community here in cap hill. I would keep a clear line of communication between me and my constituents by continuing to attend local events, keeping regular office hours, and using my networks to hear complaints and concerns. My current approach to partnerships is using the expertise of nonprofits to inform government policy. Ultimately I'd like the government to step in and provide the care that community organizations are focused on.

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

The root causes are rent prices, emergencies, and poverty. People become addicted to drugs and develop mental health issues as a result of being on the street. I was kicked out of my house as a result of coming out as gay. I struggled with the mental health toll of being on the street but at the end of the day, the reason I was on the street was because of one crisis.

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

The metrics of success are bringing down the overdose rate, bringing up the rate of unhoused people being accepted into housing programs, and the stability of those housing programs once someone has gotten access to them. We need to ensure that all of these numbers trend in a positive direction but also that they stay that way.

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? *

There are many community-based alternatives ranging from support groups to neighborhood watch. These groups can be informed of a person's struggle and provide both support and protection. Our legal system fails time and time again to punish the violent offenders that deserve punishment and protect the victims once they've left the courtroom. Sexual and domestic violence are a huge cause of homelessness and other crisis and the city could benefit from empowering the victims. This would enable people to get back on their feet without worrying about retributory violence.

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? *

A specific solution would be bringing in groups focused on gender violence and hear their solutions. We need to hear from victims and experts before any policy is passed. However, I fully support decriminalizing sex work as it would enable sex workers to go seek protection from the legal system without fear of being persecuted themselves. Additionally, the Seattle community would benefit from publicly available self-defense courses and city-organized safety measures. The more eyes we have on the street and the more aware the population is, the safer our society will be.

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? *

We can start by increasing access to city-run elder care ranging from in-home care to retirement homes. When there is no profit incentive we can focus on the care our elderly need. Additionally, we can work to ensure that social security remains safe in Seattle as the republican party works to erase it on a national level.

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

We need better access to healthcare for our elderly community and we need to ensure that they have access to community and social interaction.

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

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?

Yes

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?

The solutions to this are by subsidizing or fully funding childcare and childcare workers. Childcare work will
become a more attractive option for qualified professionals if the pay matches the work required.
Additionally, childcare is far too expensive and the government needs to be partially or fully funding
childcare operations around the Seattle area.

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

My solution will continue to follow the plans I've set out in previous answers. All issues regarding health and
human services can be solved by listening to experts, paying professionals a healthy, living wage, and
funding services so that all people will have access to them.

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?

We need to lower rents if minority groceries are going to be able to exist in Seattle in the future. Large
corporations are replacing small businesses and in the meantime, it creates food deserts. We solve food
insecurity by lowering the prices of food, rent, and by providing people with transit access to the food they
need. Additionally, I would like to begin a pilot program of Universal Basic Income for our most vulnerable
citizens. This would enable them to spend more and decrease their food insecurity.

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