

SHSC 2023 Human Services Candidate Questionnaire

Seattle Human Services Coalition (SHSC) 2023 Candidate Questions

Email *

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What is your name? *

Andrew J. Lewis

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? *

Oh man, where to begin. As the councilmember responsible for overseeing homelessness services, I have become intimately familiar with the incredible work our under-appreciated and heroic human service workers have been doing under appalling circumstances. I work on a daily basis with a wide-range of providers, including Purpose Dignity Action (PDA), Downtown Emergency Service Center (DESC), REACH, Plymouth Housing, LIHI, Compass, Bellwether, Catholic Community Services (CCS), and many more.

Human services are a foundational pillar of our Charter obligation to secure the health, safety, and welfare for ALL the people of Seattle. I am proud to work with this coalition.

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

Inequity of opportunity, systemic racism, and underinvestment in public services are the unholy triad forming the root cause of poverty. Making public education robust and high quality, raising pay and benefit standards for workers of all backgrounds, and subsidizing essential utilities that drive cost of living like housing and health care, are essential to reduce poverty. When those efforts fail, the government must provide a safety net. Failure to provide a safety results in social disorder and the false dichotomy of caring for our neighbor or incarcerating them. We must rise to the challenge to build a future based on engagement and wellness, and there is a government role in that work.

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?

Inequitable access to opportunity, combined with implicit bias and stereotyping, in the institutions and culture of the United States have perpetuated a systemic advantage based on race for white people. That is just the truth and has to be acknowledged. We see this reflected in the disproportionality of impact in our criminal legal system and the members of our community experiencing poverty. Municipal government can and must be a force for pushing back against these forces.

Examining disproportionately in the access to, and impact of, government programs is the first step. Promoting and advancing policies proven to reduce disproportionately of impact in enforcement of government policy, and benefits of government programs, needs to be the focus. This means elevating and hiring voices of lived experience, making sure programming is culturally competent, and centering wellness. I am extremely proud of my work getting the 'We Deliver Care' outreach teams on the street, fully funding JustCARE, and fighting to increase wages for front-line service workers. These are the policies that move the ball forward.

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

I have an incredibly open door and I am open to changing my mind when presented with new information. My record confirms that. I am in public service to solve problems. Not punt or triangulate while I climb the political ladder. This is the work I want to do, service on the City Council.

I pledge to continue to always make myself available. To work in partnership to advance our work forward and to build a community where everyone can thrive.

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

Professor Gregg Colburn authoritatively established in his recent book "Homelessness is a Housing Problem" that, wait for it, homelessness is a housing problem. This is not to dismiss that many of our neighbors experiencing homelessness struggle with public health challenges that can include behavioral health conditions. But, if as the competing "Seattle is Dying" narrative suggests, homelessness is actually a behavioral health problem, Baltimore and Detroit would have incredibly high rates of homelessness. They don't, they have plentiful housing and a lower price-point to subsidize housing. I find that to be dispositive.

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

The ultimate measure of success is navigating our neighbors experiencing homelessness into permanent housing. This can be housing with on-site supportive services in situations where that is warranted, or subsidized housing with no services or a light-touch.

Given that achieving this outcome is not possible within a 12-24 month timeline, emergency short-term measures to save lives and maintain public order are warranted and must be compassionately pursued. This includes measures like tiny house villages, enhanced shelters, and leasing or acquiring hotels and motels. These strategies can and must be pursued in the short-term.

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? *

When I worked at the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office I worked on the Family Intervention and Restorative Services (FIRS) program. FIRS responds to domestic violence, including gender-based violence, among juveniles with a de-escalation and counseling approach. It has been incredibly successful and led to a 62% drop in filings for juvenile charges of this type.

The criminal legal system is definitely problematic as a platform for healing and reconciliation. Where possible, diversion well before courts and prosecutors is the best way to amicably, and equitably, resolve interpersonal disputes.

That point conceded, there are situations where the intervention of the criminal legal system saves someones life by protecting them from an abuser. We cannot lose sight of the fact that there are community members who need the protection of the criminal legal system and there are community members who need to be held accountable for victimizing our neighbors. Striking the right balance is the highest charge of government and something we have historically failed at. We can and must do better.

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? *

I am open to working with the Coalition to find ways to integrate responsive services into existing programming and build up partnerships with organizations doing this work. But at the moment, I regrettably do not have a specific policy proposal to find the necessary funding for this specific purpose.

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? *

As of this writing I do not have a fully fleshed out proposal for this... but, increasingly, jurisdictions are going to have to look at universal basic income (UBI). I see no other way around this beyond earlier intervention to change the structural understandings of our economy to revert back to a system where defined benefit pensions were the norm. In the absence of that, the government must step up to, in essence, create a supplemental public pension.

This is challenging on the municipal level but not impossible. Lots of governments are experimenting. It is something I am open to looking into.

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

Access to long-term affordable housing, public safety, and inclusive public transit.

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?

Hell 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?

As a new parent I feel this keenly. The Family and Education Levy is our best platform to make investments
in this area. We need to increase subsidy when it is up for renewal.

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

Make services robustly funded and available on demand. As someone who has lost close friends to suicide
I feel this personally. We should aspire to be the best jurisdiction in the nation on behavioral health.

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 have made a strong start via JumpStart, but I acknowledge that investment is insufficient in and of itself.
I am committed to working with community to build on that first term success to find more options to
advance this priority.

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