

SHSC 2023 Human Services Candidate Questionnaire

Seattle Human Services Coalition (SHSC) 2023 Candidate Questions

Email *

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What is your name? *

Bob Kettle

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? *

Human Services meet the needs of our most vulnerable, and it works to prevent, mitigate, and solve problems facing our most vulnerable here in King County and Seattle. I'm familiar with the Utility Discount Program, the Seattle Youth Employment Program, and of course, Meals on Wheels.
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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?

Poverty has multiple root causes: institutional racism (such as redlining), pay and wage disparities, the lack of affordable housing, inflation, and that worker pay has not kept pace with inflation. As a pragmatic progressive, our government has to be as part of its good governance reducing and mitigating institutionalized poverty through effective programs and affordable housing. Government needs to first identify and then address those factors behind institutionalized poverty; a role it cannot abdicate.

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 not a monolith and has multiple expressions within the system. When it comes to housing, the impacts of racism show that communities of color in the city of Seattle faced and are still facing the legacy of redlining while now are getting priced out of Seattle as those neighborhoods where they could settle and raise a family go through gentrification. As a city council, we need to look to support our neighborhoods through support to invest in their communities and importantly their homes so they can stay in their neighborhoods. Doing so would allow for the building of generational wealth.

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

Communities – and what they need – are the root push for government action. Once I'm elected, I will encourage neighborhood community councils and an improved and more inclusive District Councils, to create a means to hear from the district neighborhoods in addition to the constituent outreach efforts of my office. We have to engage all members, either individuals or groups, of our community to ensure that any policy changes are a success.

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

Affordable housing, abrupt change in financial circumstances, and lack of mental health and addiction support. The lack of affordable housing is the biggest contributor to homelessness, and lack of mental health and addiction support means that people who can't access those crucial services can't keep any sort of stable employment or housing. If I am elected, I would work on creating effective and structured wrap-around support for those in crisis, including fixing our broken public health system and building more affordable housing.

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

More shelter beds and those beds being used, the creation of supportive housing communities getting used and the rates of sobriety going up, more affordable housing and public housing units being used.

Also, nearly a decade into this crisis the City Council is not consistently measuring the performance of its current expensive (and ineffective) programs. They aren't only failing the taxpayers – they are also failing to protect the well-being of the vulnerable. We do not have the luxury of infinite resources to waste money, and it's morally inexcusable that we're continuing to leave people without needed support. I will focus City resources on what we know works – to change, and even save, lives.

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 multiple factors that contribute to gender-based violence that the criminal legal system is equipped to handle or mitigate: keeping abusers from being able to purchase guns, mandating restraining orders (and the carceral consequences), sending abusers through programs like anger management and drug treatment. Since domestic abuse is related to power, it's important to use existing systems of power to punish abuse.

Community-based alternatives are best used in prevention programs. No one is intrinsically an abuser; by investing in community programs to lead prevention efforts, the legal consequences will be less over time.

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? *

Right now, the SPD is running short-staffed due to mismanagement by the current City Council. That means that officers and departments who would ordinarily be in charge of investigating and stopping these specific crimes are forced instead to be on patrol and to deal with street-level crimes. The first major solution I would bring forward is to fully staff the SPD and ensure those departments are back up and running. Another solution I'll personally work on is to review all of the programs the City of Seattle is currently funding to make sure those funds are being used the way they were promised and if they are achieving their program goals with respect to gender-based violence. Once that investigation is completed, the City Council can then discuss reallocating existing funds or applying for grants or potentially other sources of funds to ensure public safety needs are met.

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 need to make sure families are building generational wealth, and we need to make sure our senior citizens have the savings they need for a healthy and deserving retirement. As an elected official, there are several actions we can take to make our community safer and more welcoming for our elderly neighbors. We need to be mindful of the inflationary aspects of any proposed policies. Further, we can work on expanding the income threshold for assistance.

In addition, we can make sure our city is safe for everything by creating additional ADA accessibility requirements for all new city developments (sidewalks, new buses, ramps, etc.). We can also look at areas of our city that might have food deserts and limited transportation opportunities for the elderly, to make sure they are connected and have access to healthy food and medication. We must make sure Seattle is a thriving community for all ages.

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

Cities are vibrant when they are made up of diverse and multi-generational residents of all backgrounds and ages. We need to make sure all residents can thrive in our community, including our elderly residents. That means helping ensure financial stability, affordable housing that keeps elders in their homes for as long as they can and keeping those homes up to code and safe for them to live there. We need to make sure they have access to Human Services, and access to all needs (like food, water, shelter, element protection, etc.) close to their homes.

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? *

I agree that this is a crucial issue that does not get enough attention. The ramifications of our lack of available and affordable childcare can be felt throughout the economy. Too often one parent is forced to leave the workforce to care for their children because the cost of childcare is so high that it doesn't make sense to continue working and paying for childcare. I've been fortunate enough to be a stay at home dad but that's been by choice. In order to keep the valuable childcare workers we need to first increase their pay. As a city we can help by expanding the Seattle Child Care Staff Retention Payments and increase the funding allocated from the City's Payroll Expense Tax. The state can also help by expanding the Working Connections Child Care program to provide free child-care to any childcare worker as well as expanding the income thresholds to have income limits based on local incomes not state averages. We also need to help and encourage new providers to become a provider contracted with the city of Seattle. We could do this by providing business mentorship to new childcare centers or grants to help them get set up.

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

I strongly believe in wrap-around services to help those with mental health needs. Our county approved a levy to fund five care centers within King County, and if elected, I will make sure those levy dollars are put to work quickly. Mental health centers are needed to make sure our community has the facilities needed to support an increase in mental health needs. Additional funding needs to come from the state to build these centers. Once the funding is secured, we can increase access to mental health support across the city, and help support our neighbors experiencing mental health issues.

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? *

In order to effectively address food insecurity, it is crucial that we strengthen collaboration and coordination among hunger relief organizations, mutual aid groups, gov. agencies, and community organizations. Conducting a comprehensive needs assessment is a vital first step in doing so. Understanding areas of high food insecurity, cultural preferences, and specific challenges faced by different communities enables tailored food support programs to meet diverse needs. Improving transportation and distribution infrastructure is essential for reliable and efficient delivery of food to underserved areas, which can be achieved through partnerships with local food banks, delivery services, or the establishment of mobile food distribution units. Advocating for sustainable and long-term funding is also essential to ensure the continuity and stability of food support programs.

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