

# SHSC 2023 Human Services Candidate Questionnaire

Seattle Human Services Coalition (SHSC) 2023 Candidate Questions

Email \*

info@votechristiana.com

What is your name? \*

ChrisTiana ObeySumner

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 an intimate understanding of human services from my work as a social equity consultant. I work with human services across Seattle on a routine basis. I am especially familiar with healthcare and disability workers and those that work with the unhoused population.

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 seen as opportunities to profit instead of being valued for the person they are. The role of the government is paramount because the government can end poverty if properly managed. Investing in public healthcare, better access to education, and other services would end poverty and create a better society.

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 on a deep level. As a black person, I have experienced discrimination hundreds if not thousands of times throughout my life. I understand that it goes further than a rude interruption of your day and that it can have lasting impacts on your physical and mental health. On top of this racism is systemic. Racism affects all of us and its existence has created a worse material reality for people of color across the globe. My role in addressing systemic racism is the same role I work in every day. My role is investigating instances of systemic racism, explaining how to address it, and eradicating it wherever I can. Racism has no place in society and I firmly believe that elected officials need to exert their political and personal power to stop racism whenever they can. An example of policy would be reparations for the black community in Seattle that has suffered from redlining and discrimination or pushing the state to free nonviolent drug offenders.

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 North Seattle. To help my community I would work in the same role I do now. My job is to listen to people, analyze the situation, and offer solutions. This would not change when elected. My door would be open and I would be as communicative as possible with my constituents. I'm running because of my community and if elected my community would remain my top priority.

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

The root cause of the ongoing homelessness crisis is a lack of public services for people in need and widespread rent gouging. Rents in Seattle are far too high and it's due to both corporate greed and lack of supply. If we build more and create legislation that protects renters we can make it much easier for someone going through a crisis. When you're able to afford housing you're able to stay off the streets. On top of that, many people end up unhoused because of financial emergencies, domestic disputes, and other personal crises. By funding services like healthcare, emergency housing, and more, we'll have options for people even when they're at their lowest so that they'll never end up unhoused.

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

The metrics of success are the percentage of income housing takes up, deaths that can be linked to homelessness, and counting statistics regarding housing. If all of these numbers go down while the number of people in housing goes up, that's a success.

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? \*

The role of the criminal legal system should be to protect people that are the victims of violence, harassment, and discrimination. The best community alternative to the criminal legal system is an aware and informed community. When people are friends with their neighbors, keep an eye on their neighborhoods, and are informed about what to look for in regard to gender-based violence; people can feel safe. Being able to go to a neighbor in a crisis or being able to walk through a park at night because the community is there to protect you makes a world of difference.

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? \*

We need to be teaching our children from a young age what is right and what is wrong. People that are taught from a young age what behavior towards them is ok, how to respond to it, and how to protect themselves are better off for the rest of their life. Conversely, people should be taught early on what behavior is unacceptable and they should face real consequences for their actions. Our schools need to adopt a more progressive curriculum regarding bodily autonomy and self-defense.

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? \*

My priorities are ensuring that the elderly population has access to the care that they want. When I am old one day I hope that I would be able to find the services I want without much hassle or cost. Our elderly population struggles with funding for the services they need and struggles even more with getting what they want. Elected officials can do this by paying social workers more, increasing the quality of elderly care facilities, and taking the time to listen to the concerns of the elderly instead of brushing them aside.

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

The largest priority is mobility access. The elderly community relies on public transportation and our pedestrian infrastructure more than most other age groups. We would do well to repair our broken sidewalks, build new ones, and protect pedestrians from motor vehicles. On top of that, transit that focuses on accessibility both for disabilities and for geographic service. Our transit network needs to be able to reliably and quickly take the elderly population where they need to go regardless of their movement capabilities.

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

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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

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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? \*

It's simple. We use progressive revenues to provide childcare as a public service or subsidize existing childcare to reduce costs for parents in Seattle. Living in this city is expensive and for most parents, it requires a dual income, but this isn't possible for those that can't afford childcare. Parents should be able to rely on their government and their community without worrying about the cost.

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

We need an unarmed, mental health response unit as an alternative to the police. There is no need to send a police officer to someone struggling with a mental health crisis when a social worker is far more equipped to safely deal with the situation. Additionally, as a part of public health services, therapists and psychiatrists need to be accessible to the general public. Mental health hasn't been taken seriously in government until the past decade and it's time we embraced it fully by enabling the most vulnerable members of our society to seek the help they need.

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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? \*

The first step to providing people access to cheap food is by decreasing rents across the city. Many smaller grocery stores and stores specializing in certain nationalities are forced to move further and further away from Seattle as a result of not being able to afford to stay. A diversity of food options is necessary for a diverse community and we can accomplish this by subsidizing grocery stores for the most vulnerable parts of the city. Reliable food support is difficult and it would be better served by a concentrated effort by the city. I propose a two-pronged approach. The first would be to bring all of the related organizations to the drawing board to create a unified city-wide program capable of providing food to those in need across the city whenever someone needs it. The second approach would be a widespread campaign targeting consumers and business owners encouraging them to donate food, stop food waste, and take the time to help out their community. We're all better off when we care about our neighbors.

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