

# SHSC 2023 Human Services Candidate Questionnaire

Seattle Human Services Coalition (SHSC) 2023 Candidate Questions

Email \*

team@vote4ry.com

What is your name? \*

Ry Armstrong

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 understanding, Human Services refer to a broad range of programs, resources, and support systems designed to meet the needs of individuals, families, and communities, particularly those facing social, economic, or personal challenges. The Human Service Providers that I would be most familiar with would be those providing shelter.

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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 ongoing houselessness crisis has deep-rooted causes that demand our attention and comprehensive solutions. One of the primary factors is the lack of affordable housing options, as rising costs and limited availability make it increasingly difficult for individuals and families with low incomes to secure stable homes. Poverty and economic inequality play significant roles, with low wages and income disparities pushing people towards houselessness. Additionally, mental health issues and substance abuse create further vulnerabilities, as individuals face challenges in maintaining stable housing and accessing appropriate support services. Systemic discrimination and structural inequities, such as racism and disparities in access to resources, contribute to higher rates of houselessness among marginalized communities. Insufficient healthcare access, family instability, and gaps in support systems also contribute to the crisis. Addressing these root causes requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses affordable housing initiatives (including a right to shelter), economic opportunities, healthcare access, social support services, and efforts to address systemic inequities.

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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 encompasses deeply rooted biases, prejudices, and discriminatory practices based on race or ethnicity. It is a system that perpetuates inequality, marginalization, and unequal treatment, resulting in significant impacts on individuals, communities, and society as a whole. Racism manifests in various forms, from overt acts of hatred to subtle biases and systemic inequities that limit access to opportunities and resources for marginalized groups. Its impacts include disparities in education, employment, housing, healthcare, criminal justice, and overall well-being.

As an elected official, my role in addressing systemic racism is to actively work towards dismantling it and promoting equity and justice. I see myself as a facilitator of change, advocating for policies, programs, and initiatives that address racial disparities and promote inclusivity. This includes promoting diversity and representation in decision-making bodies, advocating for equitable distribution of resources, and working towards reforms that eliminate discriminatory practices and policies.

To help end the impact of racism and racial injustice, I would propose policies that focus on several key areas. This includes comprehensive criminal justice reform to address racial disparities in policing and sentencing, promoting equitable education funding and curriculum that embraces diversity and multicultural perspectives, implementing affordable housing initiatives and anti-displacement measures to ensure access to safe and stable housing for marginalized communities, and advancing healthcare reforms that reduce racial health disparities and increase access to quality care for all.

To address racial inequities within the criminal justice system, I would support police reform efforts. This includes establishing independent departments, like 311 and 611, to handle non-emergent needs, mental health services, and community mediation. By ensuring law enforcement receives proper training and holding them accountable to anti-racist principles, we can work towards dismantling systems of white supremacy and oppressive power dynamics.

Additionally, economic empowerment programs, such as entrepreneurship support, job training, and equitable access to capital and resources, can help address economic disparities and create opportunities for marginalized communities.

It is crucial to foster partnerships and collaborations with community organizations, advocacy groups, and affected communities to ensure that policies are developed in consultation with those most impacted by racism. By centering the voices and experiences of marginalized communities, we can create meaningful solutions, challenge systemic racism, and work towards a more equitable and just society for all.

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

As an elected official, understanding community needs and fostering effective partnerships between communities and government would be top priorities for me. I would establish regular communication channels, such as newsletters, online platforms, and social media, to keep residents informed about government initiatives, policy changes, and community updates. This would encourage transparency, enhance accessibility, and facilitate ongoing dialogue with community members.

I would actively build relationships with community-based organizations, nonprofits, faith-based groups, and other stakeholders that have a deep understanding of the community's needs. These partnerships would facilitate collaboration and leverage existing resources and expertise to address community challenges effectively.

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

The ongoing unhoused crisis has deep-rooted causes that demand our attention and comprehensive solutions. One of the primary factors is the lack of affordable housing options, as rising costs and limited availability make it increasingly difficult for individuals and families with low incomes to secure stable homes. Poverty and economic inequality play significant roles, with low wages and income disparities pushing people towards houselessness.

Additionally, mental health issues and substance abuse create further vulnerabilities, as individuals face challenges in maintaining stable housing and accessing appropriate support services. Systemic discrimination and structural inequities, such as racism and disparities in access to resources, contribute to higher rates of houselessness among marginalized communities. Insufficient healthcare access, family instability, and gaps in support systems also contribute to the crisis. Addressing these root causes requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses affordable housing initiatives, economic opportunities, healthcare access, social support services, and efforts to address systemic inequities.

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

The primary goal is to help individuals and families experiencing homelessness achieve and maintain stable housing. Metrics in this category could include the number of people who successfully transition from homelessness to permanent housing, the length of time individuals stay in stable housing, and the rate of return to homelessness. Additionally, tracking employment outcomes and income stability is crucial in addressing the root causes of homelessness. Metrics could include the number of individuals who secure employment, increases in income levels, and the ability to access sustainable employment opportunities.

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? \*

To address these challenges and promote more effective responses to gender-based violence, it is crucial to explore and support community-based alternatives. These alternatives focus on survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and holistic approaches that prioritize the needs and safety of survivors. Community-based alternatives may include restorative justice programs, mediation, peer support networks, counseling services, and community-led initiatives that aim to address the root causes of violence and promote healing and accountability.

As an elected official, I would actively support and promote these community-based alternatives by advocating for increased funding and resources to sustain and expand these programs. I would work to foster collaborations between community organizations, social service agencies, and law enforcement to develop coordinated responses that prioritize survivor autonomy, safety, and well-being. Additionally, I would engage in ongoing dialogue with survivors, community leaders, and advocates to ensure their voices are heard and that policies and practices are shaped by their experiences and needs.

By recognizing the limitations of the criminal legal system and embracing community-based alternatives, we can strive to create a more compassionate, survivor-centered response to gender-based violence that empowers survivors, addresses systemic inequities, and promotes healing and justice in a way that respects the unique experiences and needs of diverse communities.

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? \*

Addressing the systemic shortfall in funding for solutions and responses to gender-based violence requires a multi-faceted approach. One key solution is to increase funding at the local levels to support organizations and initiatives focused on addressing gender-based violence. This includes providing funding for crisis hotlines, emergency shelters, counseling services, legal aid, prevention programs, and survivor support services. By prioritizing funding, we can ensure that these critical resources are available to survivors and that organizations can effectively carry out their important work.

Additionally, investing in prevention and education programs is crucial. By allocating resources towards comprehensive prevention efforts in schools, workplaces, and community settings, we can promote healthy relationships, consent education, and bystander intervention training. These programs should be inclusive and culturally sensitive, taking into account the diverse experiences and needs of different communities.

Furthermore, it is essential to prioritize survivor-centered services that provide comprehensive support for survivors of gender-based violence. This includes accessible and trauma-informed services such as counseling, legal assistance, healthcare, and housing support. Funding should be directed towards enhancing these services, ensuring they are available to all survivors regardless of their background, and addressing any barriers that may prevent survivors from seeking help.

Collaborative partnerships between government agencies, community organizations, law enforcement, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders are also crucial. By working together, we can create a more integrated and efficient response to gender-based violence, improve service delivery, and leverage expertise from different sectors.

Policy reforms that enhance the rights and protections of survivors of gender-based violence are essential as well. This may include strengthening laws related to restraining orders, improving access to justice, and addressing systemic barriers faced by marginalized communities. Policies should prioritize the empowerment and autonomy of survivors, ensuring that their voices and experiences shape the development of policies and practices.

Lastly, supporting research and data collection efforts can provide valuable insights. By better understanding the prevalence and impact of gender-based violence in our community, we can inform evidence-based policies, resource allocation, and program development. Funding should be allocated for research initiatives that focus on identifying effective strategies for prevention, intervention, and support.

By implementing these specific solutions, we can begin to address the systemic shortfall in funding for gender-based violence responses. It requires a commitment to prioritizing the safety and well-being of survivors, engaging in collaborative efforts, and advocating for the necessary resources to create a society free from gender-based violence.

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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? \*

Addressing elder poverty and ensuring the well-being of older adults is a critical priority that requires a comprehensive approach. As an elected official, our focus should be on implementing policies and initiatives that promote financial security, access to healthcare, affordable housing, and social programs for older adults.

One of our priorities is expanding access to affordable healthcare. It is hard to lift oneself out of poverty if one bad accident or ongoing health condition can wipe out your savings. Furthermore, affordable housing is crucial for older adults, and I would support initiatives that promote affordable senior housing programs, rental assistance, and aging-in-place strategies. By investing in social programs that support older adults, such as nutrition assistance, home-based services, transportation, and social activities, we can enhance their overall well-being and quality of life.

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

Some of the priorities for older adults would be what I've listed above: providing affordable healthcare, housing, and social programs.



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? \*

Addressing the issue of affordability and retention in the childcare sector requires a comprehensive approach. To make childcare more affordable and incentivize childcare worker retention, I would propose several solutions. First, we need to provide subsidized childcare specifically for childcare workers, recognizing the importance of their work and removing the disincentive for career advancement. Additionally, increasing funding for childcare subsidies is crucial to ensure more families, including childcare workers, can access affordable childcare services. This can alleviate financial burdens and enable workers to remain in the profession. Improving compensation for childcare workers is also essential, as higher wages can attract and retain qualified professionals. By advocating for increased funding to support higher pay, we can address the issue of low wages in the field.

Offering professional development and career advancement opportunities, such as ongoing training and pathways for growth, can further incentivize workers to stay in the profession. Finally, fostering public-private partnerships can play a vital role in addressing affordability and retention. Collaborations with businesses, foundations, and community organizations can help pool resources, share costs, and develop innovative solutions to make childcare more affordable. By implementing these solutions, we can create a more sustainable and accessible childcare system that supports both families and the dedicated professionals who care for children.

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

Increasing support for individuals struggling with mental health needs requires a comprehensive and compassionate approach. As an elected official, my commitment would be to work towards enhancing the available support systems. This includes advocating for increased funding and resources to expand access to mental health services. I would prioritize the availability of affordable and culturally sensitive mental health care providers, reducing wait times for appointments, and improving coverage for mental health treatments through insurance plans.

Additionally, I would support initiatives that integrate mental health services into primary care settings, schools, and community centers to improve accessibility. Promoting mental health education and awareness is also crucial. I would support campaigns and programs that educate the public about mental health, encourage open conversations, and provide information on available resources and support networks. By reducing stigma and fostering understanding, individuals are more likely to seek help early, and communities can become more supportive. Crisis intervention and suicide prevention efforts would be a priority as well. Establishing and adequately staffing crisis intervention hotlines (such as our proposed 611 line for mental health needs) and helplines is essential for providing immediate support to individuals in distress. I would work to expand suicide prevention efforts through community outreach, mental health training for educators and healthcare providers, and collaboration with mental health organizations. Supporting individuals with mental health needs also requires addressing housing instability. I would support initiatives that provide affordable and supportive housing options, working in partnership with housing organizations and mental health agencies.

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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? \*

First, I would advocate for increased funding for local food banks to ensure they have the necessary resources to meet the growing demand. This would involve securing public funding and fostering partnerships with private entities to provide financial support and capacity building.

Second, I would work to protect and enhance SNAP benefits by opposing cuts and advocating for policies that increase the purchasing power of recipients. This includes simplifying the application process and ensuring eligible individuals have access to these critical benefits.

Supporting local food production is another crucial aspect. By promoting urban agriculture, community gardens, and local farmers' markets, we can enhance food security and reduce dependence on external sources. Incentives for urban farming and supporting land access for community gardens would be important steps in this direction.

Collaborative distribution networks would ensure reliable food support across the city. By fostering partnerships between food banks, mutual aid groups, community organizations, and government agencies, we can optimize the distribution of resources and reach underserved communities effectively.

To address the diverse cultural backgrounds and dietary needs of residents, I would prioritize the development of culturally competent food programs. This would involve working with local organizations and community leaders to ensure that food banks and meal providers offer a wide range of culturally familiar and nutritious food options. Education on healthy eating habits and culturally appropriate nutrition resources would also be important.

Addressing transportation barriers is crucial to ensure access to food resources. Expanding public transportation options, implementing mobile food pantries or food delivery services, and providing transportation assistance through partnerships with community organizations can help overcome this challenge.

Lastly, adopting a data-driven approach would allow us to identify food insecurity hotspots and assess the specific needs of different neighborhoods. This information would guide resource allocation and inform the development of targeted interventions that address food inequities effectively.

By implementing these comprehensive strategies, we can continue to meet the needs of individuals struggling with food insecurity, ensure equitable access to healthy and culturally familiar food, and build a more resilient and inclusive food system for all residents of the City of Seattle.

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