

SHSC 2023 Human Services Candidate Questionnaire

Seattle Human Services Coalition (SHSC) 2023 Candidate Questions

Email *

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What is your name? *

Tammy Morales

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 are social assistance programs that help everyday people, families, and communities to alleviate stress (sometimes during moments of change) to help them function at their best. It is of the utmost importance. I spent the last 23 years working on affordable housing, food security, youth engagement, and more. Since becoming a councilmember, I've worked closely with Evergreen Treatment Services, Solid Ground, Seattle King County Coalition on Homelessness, Rainier Valley Food Bank, among others.

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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 exploitation. The government, if it wishes to stay legitimate, has an obligation to its people to address institutionalized poverty. Local governments at the federal, state, and municipal levels could all raise wages, implement permanent affordable housing and universal childcare, hold accountable and prevent exploitation of workers, remove Legal Financial Obligations, increase labor protections and union jobs, increase L&I capacity and funds, and so much more. But first and foremost: Put money into the hands of people.

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 a social construct but a nonetheless powerful oppressive tool deliberately implemented by colonizers and carried on through the systems and social hierarchies of today (that colonizers stood up and built to reinforce in the first place). The impacts of racism, particularly in America, are everywhere from redlining's impact on who gets to own a home, to who gets access to high quality education or healthcare. No matter where we look, the impacts of racism are large and they are harmful. Racism is a tool causing struggle and even death of our Black and brown people.

I have an individual, personal role and responsibility in my interpersonal life for anti-racism just as much as I have an elected duty to addressing systemic racism, fighting oppression, righting historical wrongs, and reaching reparations.

As an elected official, I have been pushing for generational wealth-building for our Black and brown families to increase ownership of homes and commercial property; passed the Race and Social Justice ordinance to ensure City departments use a racial equity lens in policy and budgeting decisions; am working with Larry Gossett to understand how a reparations program might work in King County.

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

I work closely with community organizations that represent the diverse constituencies in D2. As a former community organizer, it's important to me that the work we do is driven by the solutions and ideas that community members have. I've worked hard to bring their voices into the halls of power by actively inviting regular communication. We've built a coalition we call Seattle Within Reach that includes 35 organizations that work on various community development issues. We also hold regular in-district office hours to hear directly from constituents.

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

First: Housing scarcity. Second: The way capitalism/constant profit requires worker exploitation. Beyond that, the homelessness crisis is complex and requires wrap-around services that address more than just higher wages and housing, especially for our chronically homeless folks (about 30% of the homeless population). Another lens by which to address root causes of homelessness is the social determinants of health. In addition, some components that are often looked over but frequently predispose homelessness: Domestic violence, upending caused by our criminal legal system, discrimination, family homophobia and transphobia.

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

The metrics of success: 1) The number, percent, and rate of homeless folks who got into housing and 2) the number, percent, and rate of folks who stayed in housing. Similar to SUD and relapses being normal before reaching long-term sobriety, going from homeless to housed can have the same trajectory and so we need to incorporate that into our tracking, solutions, and care. We must also closely watch metrics that correlate with increasing the pace of production of housing AND anti-displacement.

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 criminal legal system can uphold safety for a survivor with red flag laws (removing guns from an intense situation) and restraining orders—which can help or even save lives. That said, I also know there isn't a one-size-fits-all response for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. But we also know that communities are strongest when we stand together and denounce bigotry and harm in all forms, from interpersonal to systemic violence. Interpersonal relationship-building in community is key.

Community-based alternatives responding to and even preventing gender-based violence include the Coalition for Gender-Based Violence, API Chaya, Consejo Counseling, Somali Family Safety Task Force, Refugee Womens Alliance, Greenlight Project. I would promote and support them with my platform as an elected official by advancing legislation that offers greater protections and resources.

There are also evidence-based methods of reducing gender-based violence with street design: transit with well-lit stops, and creating walkable, vibrant communities so there are more people around.

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 would partner with our County and State delegations to advocate for increased funding for healthcare services, shelters and counseling support. I believe it's also important to advocate for empowerment and bodily autonomy for women, which is why I have put funding in our City budget for mentorship and leadership programs for Black girls and queer youth. The White House recently announced a National Plan to End Gender Based Violence that includes some grant opportunities so I would be interested in activating our partners to seek those dollars.

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? *

I've had many conversations with elders who struggle to pay the rent and buy food and medication. Living on a fixed income offers a tenuous existence, especially if it is the meager income from social security benefits. When it comes to helping our seniors, we can advance policies like worker protections, Medicare for All and rent stabilization that can help prevent our elders from struggling.

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

Priorities for older adults living in the Seattle/King County area are accessibility, community and friends, walkable and safe neighborhoods, and affordability.

We know too well that when people age in place, they often face isolation, need funds to add ramps instead of stairs inside and outside their house, and struggle on stagnant wages while prices increase.

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. I agree that the 1% COLA increase the City recently offered to the Coalition of City Unions was poorly considered and it demonstrates the budget challenges the City faces. That said, we rely on contracted human service workers to provide city services, so we have an obligation to pay those workers fairly. I supported the recent resolution CM Herbold introduced to ensure that our human service contract workers are paid fairly.

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? *

First, I support universal childcare. We could achieve as much using funds from the payroll expense tax. We can and should also increase subsidies available to families so they can afford quality childcare and get themselves to work. City officials have to work with legislators for an increase in reimbursement rates, while working with federal officials for increasing the Child Care Development Block Grant.

We can also incentivize employers to help. Businesses are the biggest group not contributing to a solution, and yet they benefit the most from having workers who can rely on quality, affordable, accessible childcare. I will advocate for community benefit agreements for employers to provide on-site child care; This would certainly help worker retention. Employers should also contribute to employee childcare spending accounts the way some contribute to Health Savings Accounts.

It's also no secret that families are clawing their way into child care, waiting on waitlists, and hoping their kid has a place to go while they work. If we build more child care facilities, it would alleviate this stress.

Our Preschool Program offers important access to care for children 3-5 years old. While it's great that preschool educators get more funding, one unintended consequence is that these providers are compensated more than those who care for 0-3 year olds, who are typically women of color. We should increase compensation for those caring for infants and toddlers so that they don't shift to preschool programs and leave a provider gap for ages 0-3.

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

Barriers to addressing mental health involve stigma, lack of counseling providers and overworked medical professionals, inadequate insurance coverage and rising costs. We must train across departments and professions in the courtroom, police departments, victim assistance agencies and schools to prepare the justice community for situations involving people with mental illness, intellectual, and other developmental disabilities so that nobody is stigmatized when they seek help in any setting.

I have been a supporter of universal healthcare for a very long time. As a Board of Health member, I'm working with colleagues to expand addiction treatment services, increase prevention program awareness, and promote harm reduction strategies. Proposition 1 (the County's Crisis Care initiative) will, if passed, provide important resources for behavioral health services as well as capital funding for 5 crisis care centers across the county.

We also have a growing mental health crisis among our young people, who have increased anxiety and depression. Improving access to mental health care involves working with local health providers to increase the number of mental health professionals and ensuring culturally responsive care. Strengthening community-based mental health programs, such as peer support groups and early intervention initiatives, will also help build resilience. To support our young people, we allocated \$3M from the FEPP levy this year to expand mental health services in schools—and I made sure \$550k of it supports Black girls and queer and trans youth with resources in school for leadership and mental health.

We must also combine affordable housing with mental health services to assist our homeless neighbors.

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? *

Both HSD and OSE have important programs to increase food security in the city. At HSD, funding for the emergency food system supports food banks, meal delivery programs and student food bags for low-income people of color. It's troubling that Latinx are not included in the priority populations for these programs so I will be interested to learn why. OSE manages the Fresh Bucks program, which improves access to fresh produce at farm stands and farmer markets. My previous work as a food systems planner makes me especially committed to increasing food security among our vulnerable populations; that means ensuring that funding sources are not siphoned off back to the general fund and shifting funding so that our city budget reflects our declaration as a Human Rights City.

For all things that lead to insecurity, we must also take a holistic approach. We can alleviate insecurity with livable wages, union jobs, affordable housing, and affordable healthcare. I was the only Councilmember who stood up for permanent affordable housing (I-135) since the effort began.

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