

# Spokane Candidate Questionnaire

The member organizations of Smart Justice Spokane and Spokane Community Against Racism (SCAR) Platform for Change coalitions asked candidates running for Sheriff, County Commissioner, Prosecutor, Judge, Washington State Representative, and Washington State Senator to respond to 20 questions about racial justice, policing, housing, incarceration, services, and community.

See them all at [spokanecandidates.org](http://spokanecandidates.org)



Smart Justice Spokane is a broad coalition of over 30 organizations working together to end mass incarceration and eliminate racial disparities in our local criminal justice system. We organize and mobilize together for effective, restorative solutions that are driven by the experiences and needs of those impacted by the criminal justice system. The recovery and integration of those caught up in the criminal justice process is essential for a strong, healthy, and just community.



Spokane Community Against Racism (SCAR) Platform for Change is a coalition advancing a vision of systemic change for the Spokane community that embraces a holistic vision of public safety. This vision reexamines what is considered crime, accounts for its root causes, and recognizes that shared prosperity and community care are at the heart of a healthy society.

## Deb Conklin

### Candidate for Spokane County Prosecutor

#### **1. What racial equity problems exist in Spokane and how will you use this position to fix them?**

There are a myriad of ways in which racial equity problems exist in Spokane County, from the continuing consequences of red- lining, to choices of where to build highways, to the criminal legal system. I will address those in which the Prosecutor's Office has a role.

Red-lining affected mainly city property, so the county may not have a role in that. But I would look at whether there are parts of the county that continue to have inequities due to that practice.

Racial inequity is endemic in the criminal legal system. We've had firm data since at least August, 2018 (when the Burns Report came out) that there are significant racial disparities at every step in the system. I will look at every aspect of the prosecutor's role and ask what policies and procedures create those disparities, and we will address them. I will immediately change the practice of filing charges based on probable cause and have a 'proof beyond a reasonable doubt' standard for filing charges. I will also implement a policy of following Criminal Rule 3.2 that creates a presumption that people will be released on their own recognizance. Once these two policies are implemented, we will look at what racial disparities still exist and the causes of those disparities will be addressed.

#### **2. You have an opportunity to re-envision law enforcement and the criminal legal system in Spokane County - what should it look like?**

I will start by implementing a system in which we reduce crime and save taxpayers money by adopting evidence based practices in every phase of the criminal legal system. Emphasis will be on identifying the root causes of criminal behavior and using incentives to fix those causes. This means more use of pre-trial diversion, therapeutic courts and alternatives to incarceration in sentencing – when we can do so without compromising the safety of the community.

Long term, I would work to move our focus from 'law enforcement' to 'public safety'. This would include using resources to deal with mental health and addiction as health care issues, instead of criminal issues. When appropriate we need to send resource people (mental health professionals, family counselors, etc...) on calls instead of, or at least along with, sworn officers. The primary contact would be the resource person, with officers present to do their best to ensure everyone's safety.

#### **3. How can the community hold you accountable day-to-day in-between elections?**

I will have an open door policy. I will be available for people to meet with me about issues as they arise. From the beginning, I will offer regular meetings with groups who have concerns about our law enforcement system – communities of color, mental health

advocates, SMART justice advocates, representatives of those who are unhoused, or housing insecure and others. We need to work together to create a system in which people are not punished for their identity, or life situations.

## **Policing**

### **1. What is your role in ending racial disparities in law enforcement stops and arrests, and in advancing meaningful oversight and investigation of law enforcement?**

The prosecutors' office has the opportunity to significantly influence the choices Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) make in their work. When LEO behavior results in unjustified stops, questioning, or arrests, it is important for the prosecutor to communicate to the LEO what the problem is, and why prosecution of the charges won't succeed. When a pattern appears in LEO mistakes, our office will offer training for Law Enforcement agencies to help correct those mistake patterns.

Investigation and prosecution of charges against LEOs by local agencies has always been problematic. The various entities – State Patrol, Sheriff, City Police and Prosecutors work closely together by the very nature of their work. As a result, it can be difficult to have any local entity objectively assess those charges. The State of Washington has passed, and is in the process of implementing, legislation establishing an office at the STATE level to handle those investigations and prosecutions. This is an opportunity to bring more objectivity to this work. Our office will offer support in implementing this legislation.

### **2. What is your assessment and position regarding the militarized culture of law enforcement, lack of appropriate norms and requirements for de-escalation, and continued use and purchase of military equipment by law enforcement?**

In May of this year, the President issued “Executive Order on Advancing Effective, Accountable Policing and Criminal Justice Practices to Enhance Public Trust and Public Safety”. Section 12 of that Order seeks to severely limit the transfer of military equipment to domestic Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs). I hope that this will end such transfers. It is not healthy for domestic law enforcement to see itself as quasi-military. Domestic LEAs serve a totally different function, requiring different equipment and different approaches. We need to change from the quasi-military model to a public safety model. In a public safety model, the whole orientation of the LEA changes.

Both the Spokane Police Department and the Spokane County Sheriff's Office have adopted an official policy of using deescalation practices and requiring training. However, this is a significant culture change for both agencies and will continue to need to be monitored and compliance needs to be encouraged. We also need to keep up with improvements in deescalation training, including clear definitions and measurable standards to determine whether it is actually being used in practice.

### **3. What are your thoughts about police presence in our schools and how juveniles are impacted by the legal system?**

Using sworn police officers in schools has resulted in increases in criminal charges and incarceration of students. This is not healthy for the students, the schools or the community. It is also one source of the racial disparities in the criminal legal system. LEOs should only be in schools when called by the school leadership for a specific legal

crisis that endangers students and/or staff.

**4. With the fall of Roe v. Wade and the resulting projected increase of nearly 400% in people coming to Spokane County for abortion care, what will you do to protect pregnant people's right to abortion care without being criminalized, especially if they are traveling to Spokane County for that purpose? How will you protect medical personnel and clinics in the same context?**

The prosecutor's office does not serve in a law-making function. Washington has made it clear that our state is not going to criminalize the health care decisions of a pregnant person, or health care providers offering that care.

The only way our office would be involved in this issue is if another state sought to extradite someone from Washington to that state for a violation of the other state's abortion laws. Our office policy and practice would be that we will not extradite anyone for actions that are legal in the State of Washington. An analogous situation is the countries that do not have a death penalty and refuse to extradite people to the United States if they would face the death penalty.

## **Incarceration**

**1. What is your position on Spokane County building a new jail?**

We do not need a LARGER jail. However, it is likely that Spokane County needs a NEW jail. The current facility is in poor condition and does not offer needed resources. However, we cannot begin the conversation about a new jail until we have reliable information about what size we need. And we cannot have reliable information about size until we have a prosecutor's office that: 1. follows existing law on pre-trial release and charging decisions (thereby reducing reliance on the jail); 2. uses proven, evidence-based practices to reduce the unnecessary use of the jail; and 3. uses pre-trial diversion and our therapeutic courts to reduce crime by addressing some of the underlying issues that lead people to break the law.

**2. Which of the recommendations of the Spokane County Justice Task Force to reduce the jail population, as outlined in the below documents, do you support or oppose and why?**

I support most of the recommendations that came out of the Justice Task Force. Many of them are common sense practices, most of them having proven effective in other jurisdictions. The prosecutor's office needs to stop being a road block to implementing effective, evidence-based reforms that will increase fairness, reduce costs, and preserve families.

**3. What experience do you have with the criminal justice system and what have you done to engage the voices of the justice- involved or formerly incarcerated in your work?**

I was a Deputy Prosecutor in Clallam County WA 1983 – 1987. At that time, I was not aware of groups that advocated for justice- involved or formerly incarcerated people. I'm not sure they existed in Clallam County at that time. However, as a pastor I have been involved in justice work. I've walked with people

involved in the system. I've been support for families with an incarcerated family member. I've supported local groups in their work to 'ban the box' and implement reforms through the Spokane Regional Law and Justice Council.

**4. Our courts continue to lack trauma-informed training and responses, culturally appropriate responses, and interpreter services and training around the immigrant community. People describe being shamed, ignored, and frustrated by our current system. How can you, in your role, help change this (including funding, training, increased staffing etc.)?**

I will ensure that no case handled by my office proceeds without certified interpreters and other services needed by members of various communities. Office staff will receive training in working with those who've experienced trauma, and those from cultures other than the dominant culture in our community. Staff in particularly sensitive positions – such as working in the domestic violence or sexual assault units – will be required to demonstrate that they have mastered these skills in order to work in those units. Failure to treat each person with respect will not be tolerated in my office.

**5. The Washington State Supreme Court issued a letter acknowledging that our court system is racist and asked every member of the legal community to work on this. What are your thoughts on this statement and what are you doing about it?**

I agree with the statement issued by the Court. I will bring to this work my experience and training – especially my work with “Why Race Matters: History, Systems and Strategies”, a racial equity discipline offered by Greater Spokane Progress in cooperation with other justice organizations.

I have met with BIPOC individuals and groups over the last two years as I prepared to run for office, and as I planned and executed my campaign strategies. I will continue to listen and learn from these communities.

**Services and community**

**1. What experience do you have with persons experiencing mental illness and how will you use your position to ensure there is an effective rollout of the recently authorized 988 crisis response system?**

I have often walked with people with mental health issues during my 25 years of ministry. I have helped obtain resources, been an advocate, and been part of support systems. I am not sure how the prosecutor's office might be involved with implementation of the 988 system.

**2. With the goal of addressing the root causes of substance use disorder, what is your position on legislation to partially redirect state cannabis revenues to local prevention, outreach, and recovery support services and end arrests and prosecutions of people for possessing drugs for their personal use?**

I support the redirection of revenue to services.

In the 2022 legislative session, the legislature responded to the Blake decision declaring Washington's law (creating strict liability for simple drug possession) unconstitutional. They passed a bill that makes simple possession a misdemeanor, in a law that sunsets at the end of the 2023 legislative session.

I would like to see Washington try a program that makes simple possession of most drugs a civil infraction (similar to most traffic citations) with a system for increasing consequences for repeated infractions, and incentives for participating in, and succeeding at, addiction treatment. This would avoid creating a criminal history for someone who struggles with drug addiction, but is not dangerous or engaging in criminal behaviors.

**3. Domestic violence continues to be a great concern in our community, with too few shelter beds. How do you plan to address this issue?**

While the prosecutor's office cannot address the issue of shelter beds directly, we can and will, address the backlog in the office of DV prosecutions. If offenders are promptly charged, arrested, and sentenced, that would create a space of time for those affected by the violence to create and implement a safety plan, which should reduce the need for shelter beds.

**4. How would you address the early learning gap in our community?**

I will ensure that the policies and practices of our office do not unnecessarily disrupt families and cause Adverse Childhood Experiences that interfere with young children's ability to learn and develop in healthy ways.

**Housing**

**1. Why do you think people become homeless in Spokane County and what will you do to address that? For example, what do you see as the County's responsibility to provide shelter and transitional housing as well as partnering with the City of Spokane?**

People in Spokane County become homeless for a host of reasons. Some people will be chronically homeless for a variety of reasons that often have to do with mental illness or addictions. But there are many more people who are without housing for financial reasons. Since 2008, we have seen a major increase in the number of working people who are unhoused. This will only get worse as the gap between wages and housing costs continue to increase.

There are also people with mental illness and addiction problems that can successfully maintain stable housing with enough support. I believe the Housing First model works and saves money. Spokane needs to adopt a region wide Housing First program with the cooperation of Spokane County and the cities within it – particularly Spokane and Spokane Valley.

**2. What is your vision for dealing with the lack of housing in our community? What funding (such as using ARPA for rental assistance), tenant rights and protections, affordable housing and infill are needed to keep people housed?**

The first thing that the County needs to do is obey the laws on zoning and the Urban Growth Management Act. The Prosecutor's office can explain to county commissioners why it is not acceptable to ignore the law and incur the costs of lawsuits at taxpayers expense (which the county keeps losing) so that developers can get rich creating urban sprawl. The county needs to work with Spokane and Spokane Valley to find creative ways to increase urban density and create quality, affordable housing.

Spokane County should look into creative alternatives (such as land trusts) for acquiring and owning land on which to build high quality, low income housing. The prosecutor's office needs to have attorneys who support such solutions and will be motivated to propose creative solutions that comply with the laws.

**3. People who once had stable housing are often put at risk due to inadequate aging- and disability-related personal care and supports. How do public and private funded in-home services fit into your plan to address our housing crisis?**

This is primarily a legislative and financial issue. Other than having attorneys to work drafting legislation for the Commissioners, I'm not sure how the prosecutor's office has a role in this.

## **Spokane Community Against Racism Platform for Change Coalition Partners:**

Spokane Community Against Racism (SCAR)

Asian Pacific Islander Coalition (APIC) -  
Spokane Chapter

Eastern Washington Progressives

Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience

FUSE Washington

Greater Spokane Progress

Hispanic Business/Professional Association

Latinos en Spokane

MAC Movement

Muslims for Community Action And Support

Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane  
(PJALS)

Planned Parenthood Advocates of Greater  
Washington and North Idaho

Progressives of Spokane County

RAIZ of Planned Parenthood

Red Skirt Society

SHAWL Society

Smart Justice Spokane

Spectrum Center Spokane

Spokane Alliance

Spokane Ministers' Fellowship

Tenants Union of Washington State

## **Smart Justice Spokane Coalition Partners:**

ACLU of Washington

All Saints Lutheran Church

Carl Maxey Center

Chihak & Associates – Disability Attorneys

Disability Rights Washington

Community Building Foundation

Community-Minded Enterprises

Freedom Project East

Fuse Washington

Fulcrum Institute Dispute Resolution Clinic

Greater Spokane Progress

I Did The Time / Revive Center for Returning  
Citizens

KYRS Thin Air Community Radio

League of Women Voters Spokane Area

Martin Luther King Jr. Family Outreach Center

NAMI Spokane – National Alliance on Mental  
Illness

Neighborhood Alliance of Spokane

Northwest Fair Housing Alliance

Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane

River Warrior Society

SEIU Healthcare 775 NW

Smith-Barbieri Progressive Fund

Spokane Branch Unit 1137 NAACP

Spokane Community Against Racism

Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium

Spokane Tribe of Indians

Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane

University Legal Assistance, Gonzaga Law  
School

Washington Community Action Network

Washington Education Association, Eastern  
Washington

Washington State Council of City & County  
Employees – Local 270 AFSCME