

# 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.

## Chris Jordan

### Candidate for Spokane County Commissioner District 1

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

I'm running for County Commissioner in District 1. The extent of racial disproportionality in the justice system is a problem in Spokane and throughout our nation. I have seen data showing that in America, Black and white folks use drugs at similar rates, yet Black people are charged three times as often for drug related offenses – this is an example of a systemic injustice. We need to work together with community groups and law enforcement to identify solutions and work toward improved equity and effectiveness in our system. However, today we have County leaders who dragged their feet on common sense reforms like body cameras, and who won't acknowledge that improving equity in our system is a valid goal. I believe it is, and that we need to listen to community voices and the voices of law enforcement to chart an effective path forward that builds trust, improves outcomes, and protects all community members.

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

We must have public safety and there must be accountability for criminal conduct, especially for violent offenders. I've worked to protect children in our community as a state attorney and have seen children victimized by physical, sexual, and domestic abuse. However, we know the majority of inmates in the County jail have a behavioral health problem. I do not support defunding law enforcement – but I would like to see investments in our system that prioritize prevention and target the root causes that fuel so much crime. That's why I support using a portion of Rescue Plan funds to make mental health and drug treatment more accessible in Spokane. I would also like to see increased focus on smart policies like diversion, re-entry support, and well- designed supported release – let's explore how to expand drug court in appropriate cases. I would also like to see expanded opportunities for the community to give input into justice system issues. Everyone in Spokane deserves to feel safe and to be treated with dignity and fairness.

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

I would strive to be as accessible as I can to all corners of the community while balancing the demands of the commissioner job and personal commitments. I will do my best to show up and listen, even if we don't always agree on everything. I believe a constructive dialog is central to democracy. Elected officials do need to be accountable to and listen to those they serve,

## **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?**

Many actors influence the justice system including elected sheriffs, police chiefs, legislators who set state law, judges who hand down sentencing decisions, juries, appeals courts, and others. However county commissioners can impact the system as well at the local level, through participation in and convening of committees – as one example. County leaders sidelined and restructured the Regional Law and Justice Council without advance notice to the community in a way many advocates say diluted community input and voices. As commissioner I would strive to include community voices and input into decision-making. As stated above I believe improving equitable outcomes is an important goal and I would seek to partner with law enforcement and community leaders on practical, effective solutions while ensuring public safety. Our community is not safe unless the community trusts law enforcement - accountability for misconduct is central to building trust.

**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?**

I would like to learn more about this issue, and the current status of de-escalation training from both law enforcement and community advocates. Clearly this is a critical skill all officers must have. I am encouraged by the recent program in Spokane that pairs mental health professionals with officers to respond to situations which call for that expertise. Early results show the program is diverting a significant number of contacts to mental health interventions. This is the kind of program I would support exploring and expanding.

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

Decisions about safety in public schools are made by elected school board members and state officials, not county commissioners. However the County can impact the juvenile justice system. I have practiced law in juvenile court and worked as a member of the Juvenile Court Improvement Committee to support trauma-informed values in the court system. I believe children are our most valuable resource and preventing the kinds of tragedies and trauma I've observed in juvenile court is a big part of why I'm running. Our juvenile court system is recognized as innovative and should continue to support every possible opportunity for young people to rehabilitate themselves and to learn the skills needed to be safe, respect others, and thrive in the community.

**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?**

I am disturbed the Supreme Court ripped away a constitutional right from women that was settled and widely recognized – disregarding 50 years of judicial precedent in the process. I understand and respect that many people have a

personal moral objection to abortion. However the question for law and policy is “who decides?” I believe reproductive freedom is part of a woman’s fundamental dignity and autonomy. I support Washington State’s privacy law which codifies the protections of Roe in state statute. I believe the County should prohibit any County employee or law enforcement official from participating in any out of state abortion investigation – in order to protect patients accessing care, and to protect our providers from radical right wing laws being adopted in other states.

## **Incarceration**

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

I do not support building a new jail at this time. I have significant concerns that building a new jail would raise taxes, costing taxpayers over \$300 million, and I question whether it make us safer. At a time when families are already feeling the pinch, this is not a wise use of limited resources. Imagine what we could do with \$300 million to invest in programs that target the root causes of crime and help address the untreated severe mental illness and drug addiction in our community. I do intend to listen to those who raise safety concerns with the physical state of the jail, but I believe our focus should be on preventing crime in the first place and pursuing smart policies that improve overall community safety and wellbeing.

### **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 look forward to continuing to review these recommendations and seeking input from stakeholders. However I believe a well designed supported release program for those charged with nonviolent offenses – which connects defendants with resources like housing and treatment, holds a great deal of promise. I am open to such creative programs to reduce the jail population and target underlying drug and mental health conditions, as long as public safety can be protected.

### **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’ve served seven years as a state attorney focused on child safety cases. While these cases are civil, they sometimes overlap with the criminal system. I was impressed with the professionalism and dedication of the law enforcement officers and social workers I partnered with to keep children safe. I have great respect for the vast majority of officers who do a dangerous and demanding job to protect the public. I also frequently work with parents and families with extensive justice system involvement. My court team was awarded the Hope Award for treating these clients with dignity and fairness. I was also awarded the Judge Triplett Teamwork Award for outstanding problem-solving at the courthouse. I supported and was inspired by Parents For Parents, a program connecting parents in the system with those who have been through it before and succeeded. I advocate for Peer Support because I’ve seen it work. My focus as an attorney was keeping children safe, but also helping families heal – and

addressing safety issues, such as untreated mental illness or addiction, lack of parenting skills, etc. - with services, treatment, and support. I saw hundreds of people – many formerly incarcerated - access treatment and change their lives for the better. This gives me great hope!

**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.)?**

As someone who has not been through the experience of being marginalized in this way, I know I can't truly understand this pain. However I can do my best to be open to the experiences of others and to work for improved systems to be fair to all. I'm married to the daughter of a Filipino immigrant, and have heard stories of a neighbor in Spokane telling her to "go back to that island where you came from." This story reminds me that we have work to do to make our communities truly welcoming and fair to all. I have experience handling court cases involving clients with language barriers. I sought to connect clients with needed interpreter services and saw what a challenge this can be for those struggling to understand already stressful, complex, and traumatic situations. I also pushed for trauma-informed values in our court system. I am open to learning about more ways county commissioners can promote trauma-informed responses and strategies.

**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 believe the story of America is about constantly striving to live up to our highest values as a nation – liberty and justice for all. At our best, we recognize each person's dignity, and uphold democracy and the rule of law - our diversity makes us great! As President Biden often says, we haven't fully realized these ideals – but Americans keep pushing to build a More Perfect union in each generation. I am proud of the progress we've made to protect civil rights, purge overtly racist laws, and strive for greater opportunity for all. However, it is clear we have much work to do to ensure that every person is treated fairly. As a lawyer I dealt often with the Indian Child Welfare Act – a law passed to remedy past discrimination. I worked hard to collaborate with Native American tribes, to listen, and show respect. In one of my cases, we held a joint hearing of the Spokane Tribal Court and County Superior Court – showing mutual respect and joint problem-solving is possible. I also attended and supported trainings on diversity, equity, and inclusion. I would bring this collaborative, open attitude to office. Americans don't look at our systems and say "Good enough." No, we seek to make our country (and our states) More Perfect as we seek to live up to our national creed.

**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 spent approximately 7 years handling child safety cases where untreated severe mental illness is present in a large number of cases. I have seen clients connected with treatment that changed their lives for the better. I believe we need to make treatment programs more accessible in our community and support using Rescue Plan funds to achieve this goal. I would like to rebuild the capacity of our Health District and support having a medical doctor on the Health Board. A strong Health District can help successfully implement the 988 system. I am also open to other ways the County can help roll out this resource.

**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 funding for substance use disorder programs, prevention, outreach, and recovery support services. I have not called for legalization of all drug possession as I have seen the severe damage illicit drugs can cause in our community, particularly as it relates to victimizing and shattering the lives of children. However I do believe our systems must shift from a primarily criminal justice-oriented response to a more medical and treatment-oriented response when it comes to low level drug possession.

Treating drug addiction solely as a criminal justice problem is very expensive. We must understand medical responses to addiction may be cheaper and more effective. That's why I support prevention efforts, expanding treatment, and diversion efforts like drug court.

**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?**

Unfortunately I have seen significant domestic violence issues impacting many families in Spokane. Exposure to such violence also traumatizes too many children. I remember a recent case where a child's mother was seeking counseling through the YWCA, but the wait list was months long. I am glad Congress recently (finally!) reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act. I would seek to partner with providers, legislators, and stakeholders to take stock of current resources and identify solutions.

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

Making sure our families in Spokane have access to high quality, affordable childcare programs is a top priority. This is an economic issue, a fairness issue, but also a child safety issue. I have repeatedly called on Spokane County to invest millions of dollars of Rescue Plan funds into childcare stabilization and subsidies to help working families afford childcare until increased funding becomes available from other sources. County inaction on this issue has delayed needed investments. The County should act today! I am proud of the advocates - unions, churches, nonprofits, synagogues and allies - who continue to raise awareness of this issue and push for childcare stabilization funding from Spokane County. I am also committed to working with providers, and other

stakeholders on strategies to create a sustainable system in Spokane going forward.

## **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?**

Housing affordability in our community is a big concern. As a person of faith my heart breaks for what people experiencing homelessness go through on a daily basis to survive. We need to be compassionate and smart in responding. The causes of homelessness are complex and include a lack of affordable housing. Addiction and untreated mental health issues also play a role and services addressing these issues are important to moving people out of homelessness. We need more determined regional leadership on this issue – this is not just a city problem. I'd like to see our region adopt a data-driven approach, and am interested in creative ideas working in other places, like pallet houses, peer support intervention, and permanent supportive housing.

### **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?**

Our community has faced an affordable housing crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis squeezes working and middle class families trying to afford a place to live, or a home to call their own. I support expansion of middle housing options to begin to respond to this crisis and stabilize housing prices. I believe rental assistance is an appropriate use of Rescue Plan funds to help prevent people from being evicted coming out of the pandemic, when Covid-era rental protections have expired. I am proud of my past work in this area – I led a coalition of community groups working with Columbia Legal Services to pass a bipartisan law helping homeless schoolchildren and families – the Homeless Children Education Act. I also helped design the Homeless Student Stability Program, which provided grants to school districts to aid homeless families with children with casework, rental assistance and other support. I am fortunate to be endorsed by the Washington Housing Alliance Action Fund and look forward to partnering with advocates and stakeholders to promote more affordable housing choices for Spokane residents.

### **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?**

Long term care is a major issue affecting many families throughout the country. Those who lack natural family supports may be especially vulnerable. I support targeted tax relief for low income seniors and believe Spokane County should look at raising its property tax exemption threshold for low income seniors. These are folks living on a fixed income trying to pay their taxes and stay in their homes when the cost of living is increasing. However beyond this measure, I am

encouraged Washington State took the step of creating the WA Cares Funds, a long term care program. As county commissioner, I can partner with state lawmakers to identify gaps in the system and push for improvements - listing the voices of constituents. I am proud to be endorsed by 16 labor unions and organizations including Services Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 775, which represents in home caregivers. I would look to partner with our labor unions and workers who understand these issues best to identify solutions to help keep vulnerable populations housed and well-supported.



## **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