

# 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.

## Michaela Kelso

### Candidate for State Representative Pos 2 Legislative District 6

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

One of the major issues in Spokane is housing inequity. There are several neighborhoods in Spokane that have a significantly higher proportion of BIPOC residents than the city's/county's overall percentages would suggest. As a result of historical racist policies in Spokane and Spokane County rates of home ownership for BIPOC are significantly lower, and their average mortgage rates are higher than those of the white population.

Another issue is inequity in education. Despite SPS covering very diverse sub-communities, more money seems to get spent on schools/students in areas that have higher levels of income, and are majority white.

Inequity in education spending is a problem across the entire state. With a large portion of local funds being based on property taxes and property values, the difference in per student expenditures between schools on the west and east sides of the state, or between different cities, is often several thousand dollars. I will work with local and regional groups on legislation to help level the playing field - for example: changing the way schools are funded, and create programs to make home ownership achievable for for marginalizes and disadvantaged groups.

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

We need different types of response teams for different kinds of issues. Mental health professionals or community health nurses for incidences of mental health crisis and situations of potential neglect or inability of individuals to care for themselves.

Excessive bail needs to come to an end, as well as the process of automatically locking everyone up, no matter the severity of their crimes. We need to determine "good" reasons to incarcerate people - and then actually equally apply these reasons to everyone, no matter their background.

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

I plan to be accessible via dedicated communications staff, website updates and contact forms, and social media activity, as well as regular town halls, including during non-election years. I believe in asking questions, so my constituents are entitled to ask questions of me as well. I hope to maintain strong communication channels with community organizations in my district, and I am not afraid of admitting when I am/was wrong.

## **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?**

As a state legislator I would participate in the process of providing appropriate rules and guidance through legislation to law enforcement. We need legislation that protects whistleblowers and directs investigations into reported law enforcement misconduct. I would like to see a state-level civilian oversight board for law enforcement issues, similar to what was recommended by the Governor's Task Force on Independent Investigations of Police Use of Force from 2020. While I am absolutely pro-union, the fraternal order of police has been instrumental in blocking relevant disciplinary actions against offenders within the ranks of law enforcement agencies. This needs to stop. At the national level leaders of the FOP have made false and misleading statements to further their talking points, and they have been lobbying against the creation of civilian oversight boards in many states.

All LEO should be required to complete implicit bias training at least annually, and implicit bias training should be integrated into police academy curriculum, so that new recruits are introduced to the subject well before they might have to make decisions about people they interact with.

### **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?**

Considering that crime rates have been sinking for many years now nationwide, acquiring the military surplus equipment actually makes little sense. The militarization of local law enforcement is out of control. I was horrified to learn that the Sheriff's office invited the founder of "Killology" to train deputies to become more lethal/ready to kill without hesitation. Neither "option" helps deputies to learn about de-escalation, exercising restraint when encountering individuals experiencing mental health crisis, or being aware of racial/unconscious biases when dealing with BIPOC.

Instead of teaching police officers how to kill without remorse, we should emphasize their role of protectors of communities. Protectors don't go around harassing their neighbors.

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

I wouldn't have a big problem with LEO presence in schools if their job was to actually protect the students and staff. But as we've learned over and over again over the last few years, no such requirement actually exists, but instead the so-called School Resource Officers (a misnomer if I've ever seen one. What resources do they provide? Pens and papers?) often are called upon to

discipline students for alleged misconduct, stuffing the "school-to-prison pipeline." As a result of SRO's activities students from marginalized populations and communities are often incarcerated for what most would call minor infractions, simply because they lack the resources to effectively defend themselves.

**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?**

Considering the lack of privacy that results from our always-on society (especially knowing that multiple companies profit from selling location based information to LE), we should increase the number of tele-health appointments for medication abortions. This would protect medical personnel, clinics, and patients' privacy and physical safety.

If it doesn't yet exist, we should craft legislation that specifically protects the right to reproductive privacy, even for individuals that travel here from states that have anti-abortions statutes on the books.

**Incarceration**

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

We should not build a new jail, plain and simple. The largest portion of the jail population pre-COVID consisted of individuals in pre-trial detention and federal inmates. Reducing or eliminating bond requirements for most suspects would easily result in larger spaces for the remaining inmates. Community supervision would allow individuals to retain their jobs, making it more likely that they will not re-offend. How about we don't try and make money from "renting" bed space to other agencies, while we're at it.

Instead of building a new jail, we should fund crisis teams that can respond to individuals suffering from mental health problems, station mental health professionals at schools and increase our bed space in mental health treatment facilities.

**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?**

Besides my own (rather minor issues) I do not have any significant experiences concerning mental illness. However, I am aware how important our mental health is, and would work hard to ensure that many treatment options are available. Depending on the actual usage of the 988 hotline, I believe that we should provide funding at the state level, to ensure that the service isn't lost due to a lack of available counselors.

It is obvious to me that people without access to medical resources, without

stable housing, and unable to obtain gainful employment due to biases against the formerly incarcerated simply cannot re-enter society, no matter how much they might desire it.

**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 do not have any personal or professional experience with the criminal justice system and I only know a couple of people who have shared their experiences with me. I strongly believe in rehabilitation and second chances (or more if necessary). I do not believe that our current system is in any way able to actually provide meaningful rehabilitative measures. Without sufficient post- incarceration support and the obvious prejudice that exists in our society it is no surprise that recidivism is so high.

Once elected I plan to make decisions informed by the experiences of others, not my own opinions.

**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 a state legislator I am willing to write and introduce legislation that would provide funding for an increase in services. Technology can help us to provide these services state wide without having every language or culture represented in every office. Bias training, cultural sensitivity training, and working with employees who have difficulty seeing the problems their biases create are needed to address this.

**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 grew up in Germany, learning about the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime before and during WW II. I have absolutely zero understanding why people aren't willing to learn about past injustices to ensure that they are not repeated. Acknowledging that it happened doesn't infer guilt on later generations, no matter how often that is implied by certain elements.

The letter is a good first step. I hope they are following it up with actions.

As a legislator I hope to further efforts to actively address the systemic racism present in our own laws. As a white person I don't know all the ways racism permeates our system, or may not recognize them without help, but I can promise that I will listen when something is brought to my attention.

**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?**

Besides my own (rather minor issues) I do not have any significant experiences concerning mental illness. However, I am aware how important our mental health is, and would work hard to ensure that many treatment options are available. Depending on the actual usage of the 988 hotline, I believe that we should provide funding at the state level, to ensure that the service isn't lost due to a lack of available counselors.

**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 really like the idea of redirecting cannabis income for this task. A lack of resources would make it very difficult to set up a successful program.

**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?**

Everything basically comes down to money. Either we spend the money on counseling, social services, housing assistance, mental health resources, etc, or we will spend it on funerals, medical bills, and incarcerated perpetrators. While we have a number of community organizations that offer shelter services, they are obviously not funded to the level they need to be.

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

Fully funded universal pre-school services from age three. For that we need to rapidly scale up programs for early childhood educators and appropriately fund qualified teacher positions. We need to ensure our educational professionals are paid well and have sufficient resources. Teachers shouldn't have to pay for supplies for their classrooms, especially not at their current salaries.

## **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?**

I see several issues as possible causes of homelessness: Lack of mental health treatment facilities, lack of affordable housing, lack of sufficient addiction treatment spaces, and a lack of a strong crisis support system. I see so many unhoused people who are having obvious mental health issues - whether as a result of substance abuse, or as the cause of substance abuse - I cannot help but wonder how much better they might be/get if they had stable housing and specific support services.

Since the beginning of the pandemic we've also experienced a massive housing shortage as more people move to our "more affordable" region. Local families have been priced out of both the rental and purchase market.

**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 city took a good first step recently when they authorized multi-family housing to be built on single family zoned lots. However we have a far greater need than just a few hundred (if even) new housing units being permitted within the next year, when the program will go down to only duplexes being authorized on single family lots.. I am in favor of rent controls to protect tenants, expanding rental assistance and making it easier to qualify for.

Instead of continuing to build out into the suburbs, we need to build up. Before we authorize yet another subdivision, we need to build affordable housing near essential services so that it doesn't require owning two cars for families to go to work, school, and shop.

At the same time we also need to ensure that public transportation and other essential infrastructure (schools, shopping, medical care) is built up as well.

**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?**

For years studies have shown that the longer seniors can stay in their homes, the healthier they remain. One big obstacle to that is usually cost. Our current health "care" system is too expensive, often leading to rationing of care and a lower quality of life.

With universal healthcare we could expand in-home care for lower income seniors, especially since they will have lower medical expenses. Lower medical expenses also mean that they will be able to more easily afford their housing expenses.

## **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