

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



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.

Amber Waldref

Candidate for Spokane County Commissioner District 2

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

There are many racial equity challenges in Spokane, from disproportionate health outcomes for residents of color (refer to Spokane Regional Health District "Odds Against Tomorrow" Health Report or the disproportionate impact of COVID on Spokane residents of color), to inequitable housing ownership among residents of color, to disproportionate jailing of Black and Native American people. My goal as County Commissioner is to always use an equity lens when making decisions. I will do my best to work with our other local governments, State and Federal partners on public policies that first recognize/understand/reveal the racial inequities and then work to address them. The best way to do this is to listen to communities of color and ensure BIPOC voices are engaged in the solutions.

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

This is a big question! Two thoughts. First, I believe we ask our law enforcement and legal system to do too much to address the symptoms of many systems that aren't working in our society. Police, sheriffs and jails are not equipped/not the best actors to address health, poverty, drug addiction. We need to invest proactively in our community in early learning, in affordable housing, and in health care/substance use treatment in partnership with State and Federal government, private entities. If we can do better to fix these broken systems, law enforcement can be more effective at developing community policing models and our legal system can be more effective at holding folks accountable and reducing recidivism. My second thought is that I would like a criminal justice system that is non-biased, fair and effective. One that uses effective practices to hold those convicted of crimes accountable, but also reduce recidivism and costs to the community. The McArthur Foundation grant to Spokane County was meant to pilot and test different reforms that could improve our system, like more pre-trial services, early release and supervision as appropriate, referring folks to drug court, veterans court, mental health services. There are many tools and we should use them in Spokane County.

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

When I served on Spokane City Council for 8 years, I tried to be as accessible as possible to meet with community members and follow up on concerns and suggestions. I take the role of public servant very seriously and believe my actions should be open and transparent. I was the first City Council member to hold monthly or quarterly coffee meetings out in the community that were open to the public. I also published a bi-weekly blog of what happened at the City Council meetings and what important decisions were coming up. I also published a

monthly e-newsletter that highlighted important policy issues and encouraged the community to weigh in and get involved. I plan to continue to communicate in this way, engaging and accountable as a County Commissioner.

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 County Commissioner, it is vital to review data and understand all aspects of county-wide law enforcement in partnership with the separately elected County Sheriff. I look forward to working with the future Sheriff to end disparities. As a County Commissioner, I can help do this through effective budgeting to ensure law enforcement has the training and tools it needs, as well as reimagining the Law and Justice Council/creating another regional body that can advise, review data, support reforms. I fully support the City of Spokane's Police Ombudsman program and worked to improve it while on the Spokane City Council. I hope to work with the community and our Sheriff's office and officers to ensure meaningful oversight and accountability at the County level.

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?

De-escalation is an incredibly important tool for all/any tense interactions/conflict between people -- including as a tool for law enforcement. I strongly support training in de-escalation and engaging other partners in the work who have specific training (social workers, mental health experts). There are very few times when military equipment might be used by local law enforcement. My preference is to focus on de-escalation rather than militarized solutions to conflict.

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

It is vital that we prevent students/youth from getting engaged in the criminal justice system. Data shows early engagement in the justice system is an indicator of lower graduation rates, lower future income/poor health. Schools need to be a safe place, but this can be accomplished without permanent police presence in our schools. Spokane Public Schools has done a lot of work over the past 8 years to put policies into place that are proven to reduce violence, out of school suspensions and arrests. It is important to hold students accountable for bullying and violence. Every step should be taken to do this without having to engage the justice system.

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?

Reproductive health care should not be criminalized. Unfortunately, with the fall of Roe v Wade, we will have additional people from other states seeking health services here in Spokane County. We should direct local law enforcement not to engage in any enforcement of anti-abortion laws from other states. We must protect public health workers. This could include specific policies and ordinances (City of Spokane has had some success in limiting noise and crowds near clinics).

Incarceration

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

I realize we have two older correctional facilities serving Spokane County that may need some updates for safety, but I am not supportive of a new, costly jail. The last estimates I saw before the pandemic were \$300-\$400M. It will cost even more now. For that type of money we could invest in safety improvements, more supervision, more efficient court communication, more mental health care, housing and substance use treatment, more special courts that address root causes of criminal behavior. We haven't even started to implement most of the proven strategies that reduce incarceration and crime. That's where I would like to start -- use the McArthur Foundation grant funding to test alternatives, find out what works, and implement so we can reduce overcrowding and reduce crime.

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?

The Justice Task Force had many knowledgeable people involved in making recommendations. I would support piloting these programs, collecting data, and implementing what works to reduce the jail population and reduce recidivism in Spokane County. Reducing the number of people who commit another crime is critical to promote more community safety and health. Whether or not we want to reduce jail population, we should be trying to implement many of these practices anyway if they are less costly and better at preventing more crime from occurring.

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?

While on Spokane City Council, I got involved in learning directly from those who had been justice-involved. I listened to many stories and helped pass a "Ban the Box" policy. For the past 5 years, I've been working out of Spokane's Northeast neighborhoods to increase health, safety, & economic opportunity for all children and families. Many families have been touched by the criminal justice system. At the NE Community Center we have partnered with local groups to support the formerly incarcerated specifically with housing, also food, clothing and employment. We have welcomed formerly incarcerated women into newly-created job training programs. I'm hoping to have one of these residents serve on our new Steering Committee. I've learned a lot as a Board member of the Spokane Housing Authority about the challenges of justice-involved people

getting housing. I was a founding member of the Safe Communities Taskforce,, a non-profit partnership working to reduce gang violence and support kids who have dropped out of school. Some of the members of the Taskforce are former gang members now working to reach out and engage youth.

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.)?

Just recently, I heard about an incident with a Russian-speaking family getting involved in our local courts partly due to cultural differences, partly because of language barriers. This was something being discussed by the Spokane County Human Rights Task Force, which I am honored to be a part of. We have more and more immigrants and refugees coming to our community from all over the world and they deserve to have interpreter services and court personnel who can be responsive to their needs. I would support funding training and hiring quality interpreters.

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?

We must recognize that the court system does not always work equitably. You see this in disproportionate sentencing of Black members of our community. Also, that more White incarcerated individuals were released during COVID compared to Black and Native American incarcerated individuals. I appreciate what the letter says about many individual decisions and biases creating a collective system that is unfair. What I can do as an individual is be aware of my conscious or unconscious biases and work to alter these/make decisions using an equity lens.

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 family members, friends, neighbors and former classmates who have experienced mental illness in their families. For too long there has been a stigma around seeking treatment and support for mental illness and you see this reflected in the lack of affordable care available (compared to medical/physical care). It is too bad it took so many people feeling the impact of the pandemic on their mental health to start investing more in crisis response, but I'm so glad we have a system that is rolling out that can be more effective and responsive. I will use my role as an elected official to reduce the stigma around mental illness and promote resources that are available to the community like 988 crisis response.

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'm interested in directing state cannabis revenues to local prevention, outreach and recovery services. This is similar to the how we've funded reduced use of tobacco and hopefully the future opioid settlement money with pharmaceutical companies will also come to WA State soon to be spent on education/prevention/treatment. I'm still learning and reviewing the Commit to Change initiative as it relates to arrests and prosecutions for possession -- I will look forward to learning more about potential legislation.

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?

I am not aware that Spokane County has helped fund shelter beds for domestic violence. It is vital that we have safe spaces for survivors to escape violence. I'm interested in exploring how shelter beds for domestic violence fits into a larger homelessness/housing plan for the entire County that can be implemented with a larger pot of City, County, State, Federal and private funding. It's important to get survivors of domestic violence housed in permanent supportive housing as soon as possible, so building more PSH is also important for long term safety and health. This must be part of a regional plan.

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

If there was one item to put on a ballot to ask voters to fund here in Spokane, it would be gap funding to ensure every family had the opportunity to enroll their children in early learning, quality child care and quality after school care. We've made a lot of progress. WA State has funded more pre-K classrooms and increased funding for subsidized child care and ECEAP. However, there are still families that fall through the cracks and can't access affordable early learning services. I've been participating in a working group coordinated with City, Spokane Alliance and School District leaders. My goal would be to continue to participate and contribute from the County perspective. The data is clear that children who get access to early learning benefit greatly later in life. It is the ultimate investment in increasing community safety and health.

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?

The number one reason people are homeless in Spokane County is that our housing market has become unaffordable -- there are not enough housing units that are affordable across the spectrum. We do not have enough low-income, permanent supportive housing, we do not have enough market rate rentals, we don't have enough market rate homes that affordable...so all prices are rising and causing a housing crisis at each level, which drives up housing costs. And those who have no place to go and experience barriers end up on our streets and in their cars. The County has long left homelessness challenges to be solved by the City of Spokane. The scope of the problem is too great. The County must partner

(which includes funds, capacity, staff time) with the City of Spokane, City of Spokane Valley and other municipalities on a regional homeless plan with housing providers, health care providers, social service providers engaged around the table. I would prefer creating a regional entity to implement the plan like in Houston, TX, where they have seen a lot of success. Government funding should be leveraged to build permanent supportive housing as much as possible. People need a roof over their head to be able to work, get health care/treatment or what they need to be safe and healthy.

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?

We do not have enough housing across the spectrum of incomes and households in Spokane. We need more housing for lower income/working families who may need subsidies, more market rate rentals, more market rate homes for sale. This will drive down the cost of housing for all. But developing thousands of units will take time, so using ARPA funds for rental assistance is a good stop-gap. The challenge is we need more density in our urban and suburban areas with proper infrastructure to support multimodal transportation. This will require more infill housing and changing zoning rules. As a County Commissioner we can work with cities to annex areas for more dense development in exchange for revenue sharing in these areas. Ultimately we want to avoid sprawling out into farmlands and wildlands, but this will require joint, careful planning and building trust and collaboration between city and County officials to promote more housing opportunities and be able to pay for the necessary infrastructure (sidewalks, trails, safety features).

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?

Now more than ever, we need a care infrastructure that is supported and trained in our community. This includes child care and home health care services and workers. This work is vital. It should not be seen as low-value work. This is a complex issue -- something to partner with our State and Federal government leaders to accomplish. We can't do it alone here at a County level, but we can lead the way.

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