

# MNSCC Candidate Questionnaire



David Wiester  
Running for MN  
House District 63A

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he/him/his | <https://www.facebook.com/groups/WiesterForMNHouse/>

## Public Safety Issues

Do you feel safe in the communities where you live, work, and play?  
Why or why not?

I feel safe because my demographics and my fortunate life circumstances make me low risk for being targeted by crime. I want people of other demographics and life circumstances to also feel safe here.

What does the phrase “public safety” mean to you?  
What builds safety? What detracts from it?

Public safety means, to me, making a reasonable effort to minimize the people's risks of becoming injured or ill due to conditions in the community. Listening to the people's concerns and having the willingness, knowledge, and resources to respond to those concerns builds public safety. Disinformation about public safety issues and unwillingness to fund solutions detract from it.

<p>What is your understanding of the diversity of opinions around public safety in your district? How do your constituents think about what builds safety and what detracts from it in your district?</p>	<p>I haven't seen any poll results specific to my district, on this topic.</p>
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<p>What changes do you think would help prevent violence and other undesirable behavior in your district? How will you go about making those changes?</p>	<p>People need more economic opportunities, including a living wage and affordable housing, so as to reduce the economic distress that increases some people's risk of destructive behavior.</p> <p>I support raising the minimum wage to \$15, implementing a temporary wage subsidy for small businesses to help them adjust to the increased cost, and banning local ordinances that zone out multi-unit housing.</p> <p>Having a criminal record creates obstacles to employment, educational, and housing opportunities - adding to the economic stresses. Thus, I want to increase funding for public defenders to reduce wrongful convictions. I also want to eliminate cash bail and release low-risk suspects with wearable GPS trackers so that they don't have to choose between (a) losing their job because they were stuck in pre-trial detention and (b) accepting a plea deal for something they didn't do just so that they can get out of detention and back to their lives. Re-legalizing marijuana will also reduce needless convictions.</p>
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**Police Issues**

<p>What are your thoughts on the general culture of the police departments in your district?</p>	<p>The general culture seems to me like one that tells us it's only a few bad apples that are causing the problems - but then fights tooth-and-nail to resist any efforts to hold those bad apples accountable. During the George Floyd protests, what were the good cops doing to stop the bad cops who were aiming riot munitions at people's heads and assaulting journalists? Nothing, as far as I can tell.</p> <p>To answer your question, it looks to me like a culture that tolerates criminal behavior against the people who they are supposed to be protecting.</p>
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<p>* What police reforms, if any, do you think would help your district or the state? Please elaborate.</p>	<p>Require police to carry professional liability insurance. This would cover settlements with victims of police crimes. Problem cops would eventually become uninsurable and have to change careers.</p> <p>Establish a permanent independent prosecutor to address crimes believed to be committed by police. Abolish qualified</p>
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	<p>immunity. Send state-employed legal observers to attend protests and other highly-policed events to monitor uses of force. Repeal the state law against residency requirements. Embed short-range transponders in police badges so they can still be read, with a smart phone app, if they get covered up.</p> <p>Fund training for cops who want to become peer counselors. That way, cops who need support dealing with the stress of the job but are reluctant to discuss their issues with 'outsiders' can get the help they need and, hopefully, not become bad cops.</p>
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<p>* What changes to police budgets, if any, would help your district or the state? Please elaborate.</p>	<p>Some of the budget should be re-allocated towards having some current police duties performed by other types of professionals. A cop may be the preferred choice for apprehending a dangerous suspect. However, there are increased questions about whether cops are the ideal people to respond to domestic disturbances, assist people having mental health crises, or determine where homeless people are supposed to go. There are situations where some sort of counselor is the preferred choice for certain types of calls – with a cop nearby to assure their safety. That being said, I think that both cops and social workers who go out into the field should be subject to psych evaluations. This would be to try to distinguish between those who want to protect and serve versus those who want to abuse their state-sanctioned authority to bully people.</p>
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<p>Are there any bills around policing that you would join or champion? What are they and why?</p>	
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**Criminal Court Issues**

<p>Do you notice any inequities in the courts in your district? What do you see as the driving force in those inequities? How can we count on you to respond to any inequities?</p>	<p>In the U.S., in general, there are ongoing problems with bias. A lot of people harbor unconscious bias based on various factors that can affect how they treat others (e.g. jurors deciding whether to acquit or convict a defendant, prosecutors deciding who to charge or not charge someone, cops deciding whether to make an arrest or issue a warning, judges deciding who to give harsh vs. lenient sentences). Racial disparities in sentencing have been well-documented for decades. Juries have been found to be more likely to convict suspects who are wearing jail uniforms in court (i.e. suspects who couldn't afford bail).</p> <p>We need more implicit bias training for everyone in the criminal justice system (including jurors). Statistical analyses looking for connections between how defendants are treated and defendants' demographics could be helpful. I'm open to other suggestions about how to correct inequitable treatment by the criminal justice system.</p>
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<p>Diving into topics like bail, services for crime survivors, court fines and fees, special prosecutors, and sentencing and probation guidelines can illustrate how public policy has immense and diverse impacts on Minnesotans.</p> <p>Are there any bills around criminal court practices that you would join or champion? What are they and why?</p>	<p>I would introduce legislation to abolish bail. The bill would call for the release of low-risk suspects with (a) wearable GPS trackers and (b) temporary restraining orders against them contacting their alleged victims (if any).</p> <p>When poor people (disproportionately People of Color, in Minnesota), can't afford bail or bond, they face weeks or months in pre-trial detention. This can result in the loss of employment and/or housing. People in this predicament tend to feel tempted to accept a plea deal (even if they're actually not guilty) just to get out of detention and back to their lives.</p> <p>Release low-risk suspects so that they can fulfil their obligations to family, employers, and landlords; and prepare for trial. The wearable GPS tracker would be for locating defendants who fail to show up for court.</p> <p>Putting court fines and/or fees on a progressive scale to make them proportionate to defendants' incomes is something that should be considered.</p>
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**Incarceration Issues**

<p>In your opinion, what is the purpose of incarceration? Do you believe that incarceration accomplishes those purposes well? If not, why not, and what would you do about it?</p>	<p>I perceive the current purpose of incarceration as mainly for punishment and secondarily for rehabilitation. I'm not sure how good of a job it currently does at rehabilitation people. Some convicts can be rehabilitated. I support a more rehab-focused response in these cases. For convicts who are not yet at a place, on their spiritual journey, where they are ready for rehab, punishment will have to suffice.</p> <p>The matter of which convicts should receive rehabilitation vs. which should receive punishment vs. which should receive a combination of the 2 approaches is something that should be decided by people who know a lot more about psychology and criminology than I do.</p>
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<p>What do you know about alternatives to incarceration and how they address violence and other undesirable or criminalized behavior? What incarceration alternatives do you support and why?</p>	<p>I've heard of restorative justice programs where convicts have to work with people and/or communities that they have victimized. These programs are to try to actually fix/compensate for damage they've caused and/or to get convicts to gain more connection with who they've hurt. I'm in favor of including this kind of thing to the criminal justice toolbox. I've heard of other cities that employ teams of ex-gang members who patrol high-crime areas and try to peacefully intervene in situations that have the potential for escalating into further violence. The initial results look good. If this approach continues to show good results, it should be expanded.</p>
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<p>* Every district in Minnesota is home to people who have experienced incarceration. How do you think issues like access to health care, visits/phone calls/emails, education, and other programming while incarcerated affect your constituents?</p>	<p>If people had poor health care while incarcerated, then the resulting health problems will follow them into the community and potentially increase the receiving community's health care costs. I'd assume that people who have insufficient and/or overpriced contact with the outside, while they're incarcerated, then that'd impair their ability to re-integrate into a society that they've had no or limited contact with. If incarcerated people need education, then I'd think it makes more sense to offer that while they're inside rather than 'passing the buck' to the community that receives them after release. It's better for both ex-cons and the communities that receive them if said ex-cons are not worse off, upon release, than when they went in.</p>
<p>* For purposes of drawing legislative districts, should incarcerated persons be counted as part of the district where they are incarcerated, or should incarcerated persons be counted as part of the district where they had their last residential address? Or something else? Why?</p>	<p>I believe that incarcerated persons should be counted as part of the district where they most recently resided. Counting them as part of the district where the prison is located – a district that they otherwise might not have any community connection to – seems duplicitous to me.</p>
<p>Are there any bills around incarceration or probation that you would join or champion? Which ones and why?</p>	<p>I would introduce legislation requiring that, if a private, for-profit company uses Minnesota prison labor, they should be required to hire at least 50% of the ex-cons who previously worked on their projects. If a convict is good enough to make money for a company while they're inside, then the convict is good enough to make money for that company after they get released.</p> <p>When I say, 'hire,' I mean living wage jobs (\$15/hour for unskilled, more for skilled, full benefits). The company needs to make these positions available in Minnesota. If a given for-profit company does not have any facilities in Minnesota that can hire Minnesotans, then they should not be able to use our prison labor.</p> <p>The for-profit use of prison labor reduces the number of available jobs. It also incentivizes more incarceration as a source of cheap labor. Ex-cons need gainful employment so they'll be less tempted to return to a life of crime. Prison labor should not be an easy source of cheap labor to undercut workers.</p>

**Reentry Issues**

<p>* People return from incarceration to every district in Minnesota. How do you think issues like access to housing, employment, health care, recovery resources, mental health supports, basic needs, and voting or civic engagement affect your constituents?</p>	<p>If people returning from incarceration cannot obtain housing and employment, then society bears the costs of increased homelessness and recidivism. If they can't get health care, recovery support, and mental health support, then public health is diminished and quality of living is reduced through having more residents needlessly suffering with treatable problems. If people returning from incarceration are able to vote and to participate in civic engagement, then that would hopefully build more sense of connection to the community and reduce recidivism.</p>
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<p>What, if any, changes would you make to re-entry policies? And what investments, if any, would you make to re-entry supports in your district? Why?</p>	
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**Public Health Issues**

<p>What are your thoughts about how the Department of Corrections has responded to the coronavirus pandemic?</p>	<p>I don't have enough information, at this time.</p>
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<p>* What, if any, public health crises do you think have inequitable impacts on people who are involved in the criminal legal system, and how can we count on you to respond to these public health crises?</p>	<p>I don't have an adequate response to this question.</p> <p>Instead, I like to make an additional point that I didn't get to make in other questions: Most sex offenders can be rehabilitated. This rehabilitation training is available to people who have been convicted of sex offenses. I think that people who have such urges but haven't acted on them should be able to enroll in rehab as a preventative measure. This could potentially be a win-win by (a) preventing someone with sick urges from getting a criminal record and (b) preventing someone from being victimized by them.</p>
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**Personal Connections**

<p>* Are there any ways in which you feel personally connected to issues in policing, criminal court, incarceration, and/or re-entry? What is personal about these issues for you, and how will that impact your priorities and/or stances?</p>	<p>I feel very fortunate that I have lived 49 years with no significant personal connection to our criminal justice system. It distresses me greatly that so many others have not been so fortunate. A few years ago, a friend of mine was incarcerated for a felony he had committed. When he was released, my wife and I chose to resume socializing with him since (a) he had served his time, (b) he was cooperating with his rehabilitation program, and (c) we figured that if the only people willing to associate with him were other ex-cons, then that wouldn't help his rehabilitation. We wanted to support him in becoming a</p>
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	<p>better person. We saw, second-hand, how re-entry can be difficult. I also want people who I don't personally know to be supported in improving themselves after they've served their sentences.</p>
<p>How can your constituents support you in accomplishing any changes you've outlined here?</p>	<p>By voting for candidates who support such changes, by contributing time and/or donations to organizations the lobby for such changes, and by regularly making sure that their elected officials know their views on these issues.</p>