

# MNSCC Candidate Questionnaire



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**House District 59B**



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## Public Safety Issues

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

This question depends on what is happening around me and what we as society consider threats. I understand that I live in a neighborhood that gets resources and has amenities that usually prevent violent and property crimes. In some ways that connotes a sense of safety. Yet because we as a society under-resource other areas of the district, the economic disparities are clearly visible with the homeless and jobless young people. It means that certain members of our community, those that we have continued to ignore, are not safe where they live, work, and play. I believe that every community should have stable housing, living wage paying jobs, and resources like parks and educational opportunities. With those things in place, I believe that more people, including me, will have a truer version of safety.

<p>What does the phrase “public safety” mean to you?          What builds safety? What detracts from it?</p>	<p>Public safety is a community effort where everyone understands not only their responsibility to themselves, but also to their neighbors. When there’s a greater sense that people are each other’s best security we can build a more robust community public safety for our community. I think that what builds safety in a community is when we house people in safe and affordable places to live. A place to live is a fundamental human right for any person. Housing is the cornerstone of safety. When we force people out of their homes and onto the street, our society traumatizes and disorients people which leads to a dismantling of public safety. Not putting people first detracts from the concept of public safety. The public aspect of public safety must emphasize how to provide for the needs of the public rather than providing for and protecting the needs of property and profits.</p>
<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>Across my district people have been discussing what public safety looks like. One aspect of public safety that people are discussing is the role of police in keeping the community safe. The ideas run from increasing funding for the police, having the police have a limited role, to abolition. One constant that runs through police discussion is that everyone wants to live in a world where people make it home safely at the end of the day. Everyone also agrees that there should be accountability for the police. Even people who may want an expanded role for the police agree that the department must be transformed and that the police should consider Black and Brown people as part of their mandate to protect and serve. Safety is also larger than the police in my district. People in my district need safe and affordable housing, living wage jobs, and constructive opportunities for youth. These are the types of investments in the community that people desire to help people lead thriving lives.</p>
<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 turn to violence when there are no other options. In parts of my district people are disproportionately more likely not to have a job, limited education opportunities, and unstable housing. My district is a diverse district, but gun violence disproportionately affects its Black and Brown members. I have heard too many stories of people shot because of domestic disputes or confrontations that turn deadly. I will propose policies and legislation that lead to safer storage of guns and certification requirements for people who have guns. I will work for more mental health resources in schools and the community to process the trauma of gun violence, violence from police, and decades of underinvestment. With better restrictions on guns, in addition to programs meant to address underlying issues of violence including loss of jobs, poverty alleviation, and mental health, we can curb the effects of violence in communities in my district.</p>

## Police Issues

<p>What are your thoughts on the general culture of the police departments in your district?</p>	<p>The culture of the Minneapolis Police Department is one that appears not to value the lives of Black people, other people of color, and poor people. People in these groups experience harassment or worse at the hands of the police. Because the police often view us as threats, there is little to no trust between the police and the community. Systemic racism is pervasive within MPD, and it continues to cause unnecessary pain and trauma in my district. When the city has been under curfew, it is Black and Brown people that are arrested disproportionately for violating curfew when white people are not for doing the same. I think that the police act with impunity because there is limited meaningful accountability for when an officer uses excessive force. My district includes parts of the fourth precinct, which is where Jamar Clark was killed. In the weeks after the murder of George Floyd, the police department in Minneapolis must be transformed and that is a clear sense across the district.</p>
<p>* What police reforms, if any, do you think would help your district or the state? Please elaborate.</p>	<p>I believe in divesting from the police and reallocating those dollars to better investment in peoples' needs like housing, education, mental health care, and living wage jobs. The police must be right sized to do a better job of addressing violent and/or organized crime. Currently police do not have the best track record of addressing those responsibilities. But that's at the city level. At the state level some reforms for police include ensuring that cities can hold officers accountable without fear that their decisions will be overturned. Police officers across the state must be held to a uniform set of professional standards. This would prevent officers that have bad records from simply moving to a neighboring police department.</p> <p>Police officers should also hold their own professional liability insurance similar to lawyers and doctors so that settlement funds no longer come from taxpayer dollars. Finally, police should not use tear gas or rubber bullets on people.</p>
<p>* What changes to police budgets, if any, would help your district or the state? Please elaborate.</p>	<p>The state does not have control over individual city police department budgets. To the extent that states can support cities in reallocating funds from their police departments to other social and public benefits is where the state should stand.</p>
<p>Are there any bills around policing that you would join or champion? What are they and why?</p>	<p>I would support the additional bills for police reform that did not pass in the last special session. Some of those bills focused on ending cash bail, strengthening the Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) Board, and enhanced accountability standards for police officers. I support these bills because they are poised to lead to stronger reforms for police accountability. We need to</p>

set the tone at the state level that police departments must hold their officers accountable and there are professional standards that must be met across the state to have a more uniform policies for policing.

**Criminal Court Issues**

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?

The court systems seem to work one way for people who are poor and another for people who can afford a lawyer. The court system often appears as two tiered system whose outcome is determined by how much money a person has access to. Additionally, biases of race and gender can play a role in peoples' outcomes in the court system. These biases in the current system must be broken down so that everyone who goes before a judge has the best chance at a fair hearing. My campaign and the work I do is committed to building a more equitable and just society. I plan on responding to these inequities through policies that will keep people out of the criminal court system such as providing people with their basic necessities like housing, a living wage job, and educational opportunities.

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.  
Are there any bills around criminal court practices that you would join or champion?  
What are they and why?

I would join or champion bills focused on eliminating cash bail. A criminal record is a disaster for people, and for many that starts before they even see a judge. The cash bail system as it stands now allows those who can afford the money to get out of jail until their day in court, while the poor find themselves waiting in jail because they did not have access to funds. When they sit in jail waiting for their next hearing it disrupts families, the maintenance of jobs, and puts housing at risk. In other cities where cash bail has been eliminated people come to court. It's time to end the cash bail system in Minnesota.

**Incarceration Issues**

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?

Criminal laws were developed to deter bad behavior. Addressing bad behavior focuses on the theories of restitution, retribution, and rehabilitation. Our society tends to focus more on the retribution, punishment, aspect of addressing crime. Incarceration is one of those punishments. Incarceration is usually framed as a way to rehabilitate a person, but society falls into its old patterns of punishment. I am still learning about prison abolition, but I believe that for people who commit most crimes, incarceration is not the best way to hold a person accountable or expect them to change. Incarceration and its consequences disrupt a person's life, and the stigma of being

	<p>formerly incarcerated makes it extremely difficult to reintegrate into society.</p> <p>For people who commit nonviolent crimes or crimes focused on property, I would divert them away from prisons. I am interested in introducing restorative justice into our society to hold someone accountable and give them a true opportunity to change.</p>
<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 am interested in establishing more restorative justice opportunities for people in the criminal legal system. I want to see more diversion programs used so that less people go to jail or prison. I believe that if you give a person an opportunity and support them, whether it be an education, a job, artistic or athletic pursuits, people will have less of a reason to engage in undesirable criminal behavior. These alternatives to incarceration focus on how to make the person whole and help them find a way to address the harm they've caused. That type of system would be truly restorative and rehabilitative. I'm learning in this space, particularly about what to do about people that may pose considerable danger. I look forward to engaging with people who have done deep work in this space on how we can utilize alternatives to incarceration across Minnesota.</p>
<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>When people are incarcerated, the separation it puts a strain on family situations, it means limited access to healthcare while inside with the potential to bring an illness into the wider community upon release, and it limits opportunities for education and job training. Then with the COVID-19 crises there is less opportunity for prisoners to engage with loved ones on the outside. With these limited opportunities for engagement, it puts people at a disadvantage when they are released. It can also take a toll on the rest of the community when a person is incarcerated because they are worried about their loved ones. It makes people feel hopeless that they can't help people that they know that are incarcerated, and that has an effect on the total wellness of the community.</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>People who are incarcerated should be counted based on their last known residence before entering prison. That is likely where the person will return to upon release, and it is those areas that should benefit from their count. Instead counties and cities that are predominantly white count the incarcerated people who are disproportionately from BIPOC communities. Those cities and counties then benefit from additional resources based on the increased count for people that cannot partake in those allocated federal resources. Incarcerated people also cannot vote so they cannot participate in the community where they are being counted. If any community should benefit from those numbers,</p>

	it should be the community of their last known address before imprisonment.
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<p>Are there any bills around incarceration or probation that you would join or champion? Which ones and why?</p>	<p>I would join or champion bills that decrease the amount of time that people are on probation. Minnesota likes to say that it has short prison sentences, but in reality, it has long probationary sentences which make it difficult for people to re-enter society. It makes it difficult for people to find jobs, secure housing, regain access to their children, and more. I also support the bill to restore the vote for formerly incarcerated people upon release. Once you have served time, then your rights should be restored once that time in prison is completed. By disenfranchising people after release, we continue to punish people for crimes that they have supposedly atoned for. This must change.</p>
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**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>These issues affect all of my constituents, especially those returning from prison. For people who are returning from prison, there are barriers to successful re-entry, and this can be more difficult for BIPOC people, people with mental and physical health issues, and people with disabilities. I will advocate for programs that will provide adequate housing that meets the needs of people returning from prison. Formerly incarcerated people must have support in accessing healthcare, securing a safe place to live, and a living wage job. Similarly support for formerly incarcerated people must also have a lens towards supporting those who re-enter who have disabilities. There should also be more funding for programs like Housing Support, Adult Foster Care Program, and AccessAbility.</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>	<p>If we want people returning from prison to re-enter society in a smooth manner, we have to provide the resources and support or housing, living wage jobs, and educational opportunities. We must also provide access to healthcare including mental healthcare. Prison is a traumatic place to be, and as a society we have a responsibility to formerly incarcerated people to recognize the time they've served and welcome them back into the community.</p> <p>I would make sure that re-entry policies do not have any unnecessary barriers that a person returning from prison may not be able to meet. I would also allocate resources to additional social services that have special programs for people returning from prison. When we do this, we are putting people's needs first and focusing on the wellness of a community rather than</p>
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forcing people to fend for themselves in a system with scarce opportunities and resources.

**Public Health Issues**

What are your thoughts about how the Department of Corrections has responded to the coronavirus pandemic?

I commend the efforts to get people out of prison on medical release for COVID. Yet, those releases are not happening in a consistent fashion. This means that people are getting sick, dying, in prison of a disease that we know is curbed when people wear masks and keep their distance from each other. Prisons are not designed for that, so it is inhumane to keep people in prison during a deadly pandemic. We need to move more quickly on releasing people from jails and prisons because of the public health emergency that we are in.

\* 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?

Infectious diseases within the prison system have an inequitable impact on people in prison as opposed to those who are out of prison. For example, hepatitis C infects about a 1% infection rate for people out of prison, but within prison that rate is anywhere from 12-35% of the prison population. This then impacts traditionally underserved communities, as those populations are overrepresented in prisons, when people returning from prison could be carrying an untreated infection. That is a public health crisis within the prison and for the wider community. I will work to make sure that public health crises in prison is addressed in a timely fashion and in a similar manner that we would address a crises in the outside community.

**Personal Connections**

\* 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?

One of my first legal cases was a suit about the health of prisoners infected with hepatitis C. From that I had a small glimpse into the lives of my clients who were incarcerated. As a society we have really thrown people away when we put them in prison. That is not right, and we need to remember that people in prison are people first. They have needs like everyone else, and regardless of the crime they committed, they should not be at additional risk of illness or death from poor public health or poor living conditions. No one deserves what our prison system does to people. Having that brief proximity to prisons will stay with me and remind me to also take into consideration the perspective of incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people in policy making.

How can your constituents support you in accomplishing

For any policy changes to take place, there needs to be buy in from the community. I hope that as I engage with them, that they engage with me to develop new approaches to policy. And when it comes time to pass a bill I want constituents to mobilize by

any changes you've outlined here?

talking to family and friends, sharing their stories and showing up in numbers either at the Capitol or in other decision making spaces. In order to bring about a more just and inclusive society we have to show up for it and demand it.