

MNSCC Candidate Questionnaire



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House District 7A



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Public Safety Issues

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

Yes. As a white, middle-class resident of a community with low crime rates and very low rates of violent crime, I personally feel my family and I are safe.

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

Public safety is the ability of the public to engage in the daily activities of life, ranging from living in their homes to engaging in public for work, recreation, and political activity without the fear or risk of harm, either physical or psychological.

Safety is built by the existence of respect for the person and rights of all citizens, both by authorities from the police to people interfacing with the public and by the general population. It is based on the concept that all citizens have the right to enjoy

	<p>and utilize the community, that all people deserve respect, courtesy, and freedom from physical restraint or injury, and that no group enjoys more or less of those rights.</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>In my community, Black, Native, and Latinx people regularly report that they are subject to attention and treatment that threaten their safety and well-being, including by the police and courts, by educators, by public-facing authorities in businesses and services, and by the general public. They report a strong feeling that they are at risk, are presumed guilty under many circumstances, and frequently suffer psychological indignities and sometimes physical harm from all of those groups. They argue that the structure of White Privilege must be addressed as the underlying cause of these problems, and that in many instances, beliefs in white supremacy are a factor.</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>A wide range of changes are needed, ranging from policies that hold police, courts, educators, and other public officials responsible for implementing change and fair treatment, and with penalties for violation, to work with Black and Native groups working to overcome white privilege and white supremacy and the public behavior they engender, to working with and providing leadership for white groups to first understand and recognize the existence and presence of white privilege and white supremacy and then taking steps to eliminate them from our community. There are efforts by many groups to accomplish that, but they need support, and it must be recognized that there are serious efforts to undermine reform in our community.</p>
<p>Police Issues</p>	
<p>What are your thoughts on the general culture of the police departments in your district?</p>	<p>For at least 25 years, the leadership of the Duluth Police and the St. Louis County Sheriff’s office has been progressive and has, I think, truly worked to deal with issues of abuse and unfairness. Success has been good in many instances, and the police in Duluth have been leaders in the community to try to deal with these issues. Local police were exemplary in their handling of the recent demonstrations and the issue of Black Lives Matter.</p> <p>But I think that there is still an undercurrent of bias in some members of the police, and that there is definitely still a culture of “police first, public second, Black and Natives last” in some officers. This has manifested itself in the efforts of the Police Union to prevent enforcement of sanctions against officers who have clearly violated norms or engaged in violent abuse, in the desire to militarize the police and adopt “warrior” stances in enforcement, and in the political activity of the police union.</p>

<p>* What police reforms, if any, do you think would help your district or the state? Please elaborate.</p>	<p>1.) There need to be statewide standards of outlawing some forms of restraint and abuse, including but not limited to choke holds, physical compression, over-restraint, and others.</p> <p>2.) Courses in “Warrior” culture need to be outlawed for police.</p> <p>3.) A statewide policy of appropriate and proportional response needs to be adopted by law, avoiding escalation of confrontations by the police in non-violent settings, and avoiding use of militarized attack tactics in controlling the public.</p> <p>4.) Further education of the police regarding de-escalation, racism, white privilege, and white supremacy needs to be undertaken, although the failure of these efforts in the past makes it clear they will not be sufficient without more stringent legislation.</p> <p>5.) Laws should require that all instances of killings by police must be investigated by outside agencies, preferably a state agency trained and charged with that responsibility, and the legal management of the cases should be under the control of the State Attorney General.</p>
<p>* What changes to police budgets, if any, would help your district or the state? Please elaborate.</p>	<p>Police budgets should be revised to finance the redistribution of some police responsibilities, including dealing with mentally ill or handicapped people, dealing with issues related to public intoxication, and management of family disputes and abuse by professionals trained in those issues and in counseling for them.</p> <p>Traffic enforcement other than life threatening behavior should be enforced and managed by a separate division from the criminal division.</p> <p>A disproportion of instances of police violence and killings arise from police being involved in the above types of issues, and not being properly qualified to handle them or being trained in being over-confrontational in dealing with them.</p> <p>In addition, we should defund the militarization of the police. Military style street warfare is not an appropriate use of community police, and is almost always unnecessary and a dangerous escalation.</p>
<p>Are there any bills around policing that you would join or champion? What are they and why?</p>	<p>I would back bills to codify all of the above ideas in state law, and would be open to other ideas of merit.</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?

Despite their low numbers in our community, Black and Native people make up an excessive number of the people in jail and convicted of crimes. The bail system contributes to having a much larger percentage of people being held from minority communities. There have been clear-cut instances of preferences by prosecutors and judges leading to discrepancies in severity of charging and of sentences.

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?

Cash bail obviously introduces penalties for low income into the system. It needs to be abolished for most non-violent crime, and used only for people whose low levels of connection to the community or whose wealth make flight a very strong possibility. If a person is so violent they constitute a danger to the community, they should be held regardless of their ability to pay bail. If not, they should be free pending trial.

Fines and fees are another clear-cut sanction against poverty. Fines should not be part of conventional criminal cases, and in misdemeanor cases there should be an option of community service, at a reasonable exchange rate above \$25 an hour, as a substitute for fines. Court fees should be abolished--courts should be supported by taxes.

Sentencing guidelines began as a reasonable idea, but have been abused beyond their usefulness. Judges, probation personnel, and ideally a community board should decide sentencing.

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?

Incarceration historically has two purposes.

The first is protection of the community. This applies only to a very limited number of people who are potentially either physically dangerous or prone to repeat crimes on a regular basis.

The second is rehabilitation of the convicted.

The legitimate use for the first purpose is very limited. There are some people who fall in “dangerous” categories, but they are actually rare. In most instances, mental health treatment, drug and alcohol management, or economic rehabilitation through education and job training and placement would eliminate most of the need to “protect” society. For many crimes, much shorter sentences have been shown to be as effective, or more effective in reducing repeat offense than longer, especially for property crimes.

<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>Drug and alcohol issues have a disproportionate impact on crime, both as crimes themselves and causes of crime.</p> <p>Intervention by special “drug courts” to divert cases from the criminal system, send people to rehabilitation, and then expunge records when rehabilitation is successful have been used in other states with great success, and in addition to helping people successfully are actually cheaper than criminal trials and prison.</p> <p>A disproportionate number of “serious” criminals are actually mentally ill or handicapped and should be managed as such. This presupposes the creation of a functional system of treatment of mental illness in Minnesota, but that would again be cheaper than the costs of managing mental illnesses through the criminal system.</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>Health care, including mental health and substance abuse rehab, are human rights, and should be provided to prisoners as they should be for all people. Emails should be available on a daily basis, and phone calls should be available on at least a weekly basis, with the understanding that they may sometimes be monitored. Charges for these should be the same as “on the outside.” Personal visits should be made available, including physical contact with children in most circumstances. And in that line, prisons should be located in areas where transportation is not an impediment. I am not completely informed on some of the nuances of preventing abuse of these rights by smuggling contraband and planning crimes, but would be interested to learn.</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 sentenced to less than ten years should be counted as part of their “home” district. People with longer sentences as part of the prison’s district.</p>
<p>Are there any bills around incarceration or probation that you would join or champion? Which ones and why?</p>	<p>I would support any bills to implement any and all of the reforms I suggest above. I would be interested in listening to any other suggestions.</p>
<p>Reentry Issues</p>	
<p>* People return from incarceration to every district in</p>	<p>As I have indicated above, re-entry is a critical part of rehabilitation and prevention of recidivism. Education and job</p>

<p>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>training in prison, job placement on discharge, provision of adequate housing, on-going support for drug and alcohol and mental health issues, protection of food security, ensuring availability of health care at affordable costs, and a system designed to support people and keep them from reoffending or violating parole is the goal. The model is that used by health care in keeping people well and out of the hospital. Again, this is cheaper than imprisonment.</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>People discharged from prison should be able to vote, even if they are on parole. Loss of rights and branding contradicts goals of re-integration with society, and engagement with the political system can be useful both in becoming part of the community and in dealing with feelings of alienation that are part of criminal actions.</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>Becoming sick or dying are not part of the penalty for any crime. The prisons need to take care of their population. First, they should carefully consider who actually needs to be in prison, and discharge people appropriately for their safety. Then they need to practice good distancing and hygiene, and make it available to prisoners.</p> <p>I am not personally aware of the details of how the Minnesota penal system is addressing this, but would welcome information on any important issues.</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>Significant impacts. I will be a champion in addressing inequities in our public health system.</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</p>	<p>My husband is a professional criminologist and teaches, writes, and does research on many of these issues. Otherwise I have not had personal experience with them. I have dedicated my career, both as a professional economist specializing in health care issues and as a legislator to creating programs that help people. I consider these issues central to my commitment to that.</p>
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<p>impact your priorities and/or stances?</p>	
<p>How can your constituents support you in accomplishing any changes you've outlined here?</p>	<p>I would welcome personal contact to discuss these issues, to learn more, and to learn about needed reforms. Obviously, I would welcome the votes and the support of people involved in this. Statewide, there is a clear-cut difference on these issues between parties. Supporting progressive DFL candidates in the effort to hold the House and retake the Senate would go far in setting up an environment that would address these issues, at least beginning to deal with the problems. Otherwise, we would be stuck in politics committed to ideas of punishment and dehumanization.</p>