

MNSCC Candidate Questionnaire



Jon Olson
Running for MN
Senate District 20



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he/him/his | <https://jonolsonformnsenate.com/>

Public Safety Issues

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

Yes. I live in rural Minnesota. I know each of my neighbors in my development.

We keep an eye out for our neighborhood and rarely get solicitations or unknown people coming into our development.

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

Public safety is a nice "catch-all" phrase that generally means people are protected from crime. However, many people also seem to think it means you don't have to be exposed to homelessness, drug addiction, people in mental health crises, et

	<p>al.</p> <p>To me, public safety is a phrase that should mean we address all of society's issues, that we take care of people in the margins who may need assistance, and that we consider everyone worthy of safety and liberty.</p>
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<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'm a DFL-endorsed candidate, and I am well aware that most people in my district are "law and order" voters.</p> <p>That said, they have been universally able to condemn what happened to George Floyd, but their empathy diminished rapidly when they watched the protests erupt into vandalism, looting, and direct attacks on the police. Such actions DO NOT help the cause of addressing the systemic and institutionalized discrimination in our society.</p> <p>I have been advocating for fairness, equity, and justice in Minnesota, and will continue to do so for as long as I'm either a candidate, or a sitting Minnesota Senator.</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>Addressing mental health is a top issues in my district. The sheriffs and chiefs of police in my district tell me that roughly 50 percent of the calls their deputies or officers respond to are for people having a mental health crisis, often linked to drugs. But, the root cause is mental health. If we can create a robust mental health care system here in Minnesota, we can begin to address the any issues that are clearly connected to mental health, like homelessness, drug addiction, unemployment, violent crime, and many other things, too.</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>People in Northfield, the most progressive part of Senate District 20, are no in favor of abolishing the police. At least not in Northfield. The rest of the district has been led to believe, by the Republican talking points, that the MN State Legislative intends to defund all police departments in the state.</p> <p>Egad!</p>
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	<p>Whoever came up with the term "defund the police" was incredibly short-sighted and naive to think that idea would be supported by a majority of Minnesotans.</p> <p>Reforming the police, on the other hand, is an idea whose time has come, and many people support that if it will lead to better outcomes, especially between law enforcement and communities of color.</p> <p>I actually have a robust plan to fundamentally change how we train law enforcement officers in Minnesota, and I believe, based on all the evidence I've read and heard about, we'd be on the right track toward a 21st century police force if we created this new training regimen. However, we also have to break the idea of the "thin blue line".</p>
<p>* What police reforms, if any, do you think would help your district or the state? Please elaborate.</p>	<p>Honestly, the list is well beyond what I can address in this questionnaire. I'd much rather speak directly with people from your organization so we could drill down to all the details that matter. I suspect we might teach each other some very valuable ideas and new ways to approach this challenge.</p>
<p>* What changes to police budgets, if any, would help your district or the state? Please elaborate.</p>	<p>Law enforcement officers in my district are notoriously underpaid, which is a function of the municipal budgets available to cities in greater Minnesota.</p> <p>Equipment shortages are also a challenge for some communities, and jails that meet modern standards are a problem in Rice County, but both Le Sueur and Scott counties have already address that issue.</p>
<p>Are there any bills around policing that you would join or champion? What are they and why?</p>	<p>This is, again, something we should discuss in person. I cannot possibly explain these bills in the space allotted.</p>
<p>Criminal Court Issues</p>	
<p>Do you notice any inequities in the courts in your district? What do you see as the driving</p>	<p>This senate district is pretty white. Not much of a diverse population in Senate District 20, except for some Spanish-speaking groups in Northfield and a growing but still very small population in Le Center and Belle Plaine. Otherwise, mostly</p>

<p>force in those inequities? How can we count on you to respond to any inequities?</p>	<p>white.</p> <p>The inequities are more linked to socio-economic status than they are to skin color or ethnicity. That is changing, however, and diversity will alter in SD 20 over time. So, addressing systemic inequities, even in SD 20, and doing so now would be SMART!</p> <p>I am a retired commander in the US Navy. I served in society's most diverse population--the US military--for a quarter century. In that environment, we worked to create high functioning teams of people from all walks of life. I value and deeply appreciate that experience and it informs me we need to much, much more to change things here in Minnesota so we're delivering on the promise of what America's founding documents should mean for all of us.</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>Bottom line...Our criminal justice system needs to be reformed. There are a myriad ways in which this must happen, but bail reform, fines and fees, sentencing guidelines, how and why we keep people in custody (prison, jail, house arrest, work furlough, et al) matters.</p> <p>I don't know of any specific MN Senate bill numbers that currently address these issues, but I am certainly willing to work with other members of the MN Senate and House, with policy experts, with advocacy groups, and with victims groups to take on an honest and comprehensive review of the entire system in Minnesota.</p> <p>Incarcerating youths under the age of 18 is a major issue. We'd better address a whole host of other issues besides criminal justice if we want to see far fewer youth criminals in our state.</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?</p>	<p>Incarceration is to punish people for having committed VIOLENT crimes. I'm not ever going to be soft on violent criminals. No matter what, violent offenders need to go away. Period.</p>
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<p>If not, why not, and what would you do about it?</p>	<p>But other forms of crime...for those things we should probably find better remedies to ensure people pay a debt to society. I'm more than willing to listen to policy experts and those who study these things daily to learn about effective options, to include drug courts, diversion programs for youth offenders, and even counseling and work training/work release programs for non-violent adult offenders.</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 think I kind of answered this in my answer above.</p> <p>Bottom line, I'm willing to listen to what options may be on the table. I'm also willing to support alternatives that make sense and have a good chance of making society safer, and delivering on fairness, equity, and justice for all.</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>According to the three sheriffs in my district, a significant number of people spending time in the jails are people suffering from mental health conditions. So, if we really want to address incarceration, in my district, then we should invest heavily in mental health care to get people healthy and on medications to ensure they can live their best life, free from the ravages of mental health conditions that drive them to attempt to self-medicate, which leads to disaster.</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've heard great arguments for both cases.</p> <p>Honestly, I'm not sure which side I come down on in this debate.</p>
<p>Are there any bills around incarceration or probation that you would join or champion? Which ones and why?</p>	<p>I think we should address these issues as part of a more comprehensive and integrated approach to criminal justice reform, which would also be part of a more comprehensive approach to addressing societal issues linked to fairness, equity, and justice.</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>A friend of mine from my master's program at the Humphrey School educated me on the challenges with finding affordable housing for those released from incarceration. Incredible! She told me how many hours each day she spends just trying to find people housing, let alone keep them there indefinitely.</p> <p>I believe that once someone has paid their debt to society, we need to get them fully re-engaged in society, with all the rights and privileges that go along with citizenship. That would include allowing them to vote again.</p>
<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>I would be in favor of education, job training, and all forms of medical care (including mental health care) for those incarcerated in our state.</p> <p>I would also back housing support for people who have been released from incarceration and who are seeking to live their best life having paid their debt to society. I would also be in favor of ensuring we don't hold people forever accountable through credit checks, background checks, et al, once they've paid their debt to society.</p>

Public Health Issues

<p>What are your thoughts about how the Department of Corrections has responded to the coronavirus pandemic?</p>	<p>I think the Minnesota Department of Corrections was placed in a "no win" scenario by COVID-19. It is clear you cannot simply release violent, repeat offenders onto the streets just because COVID-19 has reached our area. Likewise, no one receives a death sentence in Minnesota, and packing people into prison cells merely speeds up the transmission of the virus.</p> <p>So, what does Second Chance believe is the optimal solution to this conundrum, because, honestly, I don't know what the best way is to handle this issue.</p> <p>I'm not sure we can adequately address the broader issues of who is incarcerated and why in the near term, while COVID-19 is raging, but we certainly must address those issues comprehensively over the next few years so we're only imprisoning those men and women who truly deserve prison time, primarily for violent offenses.</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>There is a public health crisis with regard to mental health in our state. There are any number of other health conditions that tend to ravage people on the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, including obesity, addiction to smoking, alcohol, and drugs, diabetes, hypertension, and the list goes on and on. Those conditions tend to impact people of color even more than white people because more people of color in Minnesota are living at or below the poverty line.</p> <p>So, again, if we're going to address systemic, institutionalized discrimination, then we need to radically alter the factors that lead to poverty, which leads to the other conditions I mention in the preceding paragraph.</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 taught at Metropolitan State University in the School of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice. I would recommend you contact Dr. James Densley, the current chair of the department, to ask him about my teaching and where I stand on these issues.</p> <p>I have always lived my life based on science, facts, and data, and I make decisions based on those things as well. I'm not an emotional decision-maker, and I'll commit to supporting public policies that are based on facts, science, data, and research.</p> <p>I support our criminal justice system, and law enforcement, but that doesn't mean I can't see much of it needs to be dramatically reformed to help us to create a more fair, equitable, and just society.</p>
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<p>How can your constituents support you in accomplishing any changes you've outlined here?</p>	<p>I am running a professional campaign. I have a plan to win. I just need campaign funds to pay for the digital ads and traditional mailers we'll need to use to reach voters more effectively since in-person events, and even door-knocking, are unlikely to happen in this election.</p> <p>I could also use volunteers to phone and text bank, to write post cards, to donate, and to help us spread the word about the campaign all across social media. Finally, I could really use the</p>
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help of communities of color in advertising my campaign. I want to have a diverse campaign team, but this district is dramatically white. If anyone who lives in SD 20, who is a person of color, I'd very much like to hear their perspectives on life in SD 20 and how we might make our district better for all.

Thank you for the opportunity comment on your questionnaire. I eagerly await Second Chance's decision on endorsing my campaign.

Sincerely,

Jon Olson

Commander, US Navy (Retired)

DFL-Endorsed Candidate

Senate District 20