

# MNSCC Candidate Questionnaire



Lindsey Port  
Running for MN  
Senate District 56

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she/her/hers | [www.lindseyportmn.com](http://www.lindseyportmn.com)

## Public Safety Issues

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

Yes, I do feel safe in my communities. First of all, I live in an upper middle class neighborhood, and my family is white, so we are afforded a lot of privilege in regards to our safety. I also live in the suburbs, with police officers who live and raise their families in our community, and good programs for mental health resources and drug treatment.

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

To me, public safety means the investments our community makes in order to create a safe environment to life and work. In order to build public safety, you need investments in early childhood education, after school programs, culturally relevant education and engagement, affordable housing, drug treatment programs, access to affordable food, and strong investments in mental health programs for all ages of residents. When any of

	<p>those needs are not met, the opportunity for unsafe actions increases, so I think when we invest more in enforcement than in prevention, that detracts from public safety.</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>My district is being bombarded by divisive messages that seek to play on the fear of others. We are definitely seeing a small, vocal group of residents who believe the only thing that matters for public safety is the force of our police departments. However, we are having increasingly encouraging conversations with a much wider cross-section of neighbors who believe a broader range of investments like those mentioned in the last question are necessary for a safe community. We do have a fair amount of racism in our district that still believes that people of color moving into our communities make us less safe, and lower income housing, especially multi-unit housing, lowers our safety.</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>We are battling an increase in drug use from the opioid epidemic, which is now spilling into the Somali community, especially Somali youth in our district. We have a lack of after-school programming and youth programming in general that is being advocated for by the Somali community to help combat this increase in drug use. We also need access to affordable treatment programs. Additionally, domestic violence continues to plague our state, and we need additional programs to help people leave unsafe situations, and we need to close the background check loopholes to keep guns out of the hands of abusers.</p> <p>I think the most important investments we can make are in after-school and youth community programming, as well as additional affordable housing, as youth homelessness is growing. We know early intervention and access to quality education and programming helps to foster safety in a community, and we should lean into those investments.</p>
<p><b>Police Issues</b></p>	
<p>What are your thoughts on the general culture of the police departments in your district?</p>	<p>Overall, we have a fairly good culture in our community police departments. Officers live in our district and raise their families here. They are connected to our community. Additionally, Burnsville had a progressive police chief for years, and was the first department to voluntarily wear body cams. His successor is an engaged and compassionate female leader, who has worked hard to continue that legacy. We always have more work to do in regards to use of force, deescalation, and implicit bias.</p>
<p>* What police reforms, if any, do you think would help your district or the state? Please elaborate.</p>	<p>Broadly, we need stronger use of force restrictions, a more transparent process around officer discipline, and a clear path to being able to remove officers who do not follow the guidelines.</p>

	Additionally, we should be looking at ways the legislature can limit qualified immunity.
* What changes to police budgets, if any, would help your district or the state? Please elaborate.	In our district, increased investments in affordable housing, mental health and drug treatment would be the smartest investments in making our community safer. I do not see a need for an increased police department budget.
Are there any bills around policing that you would join or champion? What are they and why?	I would join the full slate of bills the POCI caucus proposed last session. They are a comprehensive look at policing from many angles and would help to guide departments and the state in everything from use of force, to prosecution of officers, to training and recruitment.

**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?	I think the biggest inequalities are around income level. Lower income community members are not afforded the same level of legal aid because public defenders are so overworked. We need increased investments in public defender programs. This can often correlate to a system that is less fair to people of color, because in our district, people of color are disproportionately lower income.
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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?	Yes, I would champion ending cash bail. It is an outdated system that criminalizes poverty and we should end it now.
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**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?	The purpose of incarceration should be rehabilitation, and in extreme situations, removal from society a person who cannot safely engage with others. I do not believe our current system accomplishes this well at all. I believe we mostly incarcerate people based on poverty, for nonviolent offenses often related to addiction. I do not believe nonviolent drug offenses are best handled by incarceration in our jail and prison systems and we should overhaul that program entirely.
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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>Particularly in regards to drug offenses, I strongly believe in treatment programs over incarceration. Often nonviolent offenders drug offenders are jailed in a violent system that can lead them to become violent in order to survive. By incarcerating non-violent offenders in our current system, we are creating a breeding ground that can lead to increased violence once they are released, without ever addressing the underlying addiction that led to the offense in the first place. I support more treatment and group home solutions rather than incarceration.</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>Again, all of these programs typically cost money for incarcerated people to access them, so wealth or lack thereof creates huge differences in our incarceration system. I believe expanded access to all these services should be required to be available to all incarcerated individuals, regardless of their ability to pay.</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 honestly don't know the answer to this question, and would be very interested in talking with more folks about the positives and negatives of each scenario. This will be a vital issue next year, but is not something I have dug into previously.</p>
<p>Are there any bills around incarceration or probation that you would join or champion? Which ones and why?</p>	<p>I strongly feel all legislation around incarceration should be focused on lower our population of incarcerated persons, increasing education and treatment programs in our prisons and jails, limiting probation lengths, and be focused on rehabilitation and positive re-entry.</p>
<p><b>Reentry Issues</b></p>	
<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</p>	<p>All of these issues affect my constituents, and should be strongly considered as our responsibility to help mitigate the effects of. We cannot expect people to have a successful re-entry without providing resources that help them.</p>

<p>voting or civic engagement affect your constituents?</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>Access to housing is a vital issue we must address, as people with records have difficulty accessing low-income housing. Banning the box statewide to no longer allow employers to ask about criminal history is also important. Access to healthcare, including mental health and addiction treatment, is necessary for all Minnesotans and should be available to everyone, regardless of income or criminal record. Restoring the vote to those who have served their time in prison and have rejoined the broader society is absolutely vital, and I will champion that issue.</p>

**Public Health Issues**

<p>What are your thoughts about how the Department of Corrections has responded to the coronavirus pandemic?</p>	<p>While I think some work was done initially to decrease the number of folks incarcerated to lower the risk of the pandemic spreading inside our prisons, not enough has been done. We often do a very good job of closing off our jails and prisons from view so that the people are forgotten and their humanity can be erased as part of the broader narrative. I would have hoped the Department of Corrections would have been advocating loudly and bringing this issue to the forefront, but that has not seemed to be the case.</p>
<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>Any place where many people are gathered into a small space without the ability to move or leave, the possibility of viral spread becomes much greater. Everything from the seasonal flu to STIs to violence to pandemics will be heightened in an enclosed community. We must be willing to talk about the risk to prisoners and invest in mitigation and protection of people in the custody of the state.</p>

**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>While I have not personally experienced the criminal justice system, I feel deeply connected through my role as a potential legislator. People who go through the criminal justice system, from interactions with police, to courts, to incarceration, and probation, are all doing so through the systems we are responsible for implementing and overseeing. It is the state's responsibility to care for everyone in its custody, and that includes everyone who interacts in the criminal justice system. I strongly believe that my job as a candidate and a legislator is to bring the voices of those most affected by legislation to the process of writing the legislation. My commitment is to engage those who have been personally affected by the system to guide my work on these issues.</p>
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<p>How can your constituents support you in accomplishing any changes you've outlined here?</p>	<p>Sharing their own experiences in the criminal justice system is the only way we can bring those realities to the legislative process. I need to be in relationship with people who have experienced these systems first hand so I can legislate on their behalf.</p>
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