

MNSCC Candidate Questionnaire



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House District 21A



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he/him/his | <https://mattbrunsformn.org>

Public Safety Issues

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

I can say with confidence that I feel comfortable in the communities where I live, work, and play. Of course, I am a 32-year-old white male and that comfort is a privilege I enjoy more readily than my Black and Indigenous neighbors and all people of color. More recently, however, tensions are high in greater Minnesota as we grapple with our history and the injustices inflicted upon community members. A great number of peaceful, non-violent protests have taken place fighting for policing reforms, but counter protests have emerged as well. These counter-protesters use racial slurs, threaten violence, enlist intimidation, and vandalize the personal property of those that I align myself with. This escalation of behavior makes me uncomfortable. It knows no boundaries. The station afforded

	<p>me by my privilege does not protect me. The behavior demonstrated by counter-protestors is forced upon any that disagree with them, regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation.</p>
<p>What does the phrase “public safety” mean to you? What builds safety? What detracts from it?</p>	<p>It is my opinion that the term “public safety,” means that all members of a community feel safe and cared for. When experiencing true “public safety,” people feel unencumbered by the forces of society when pursuing life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness - but it is only a measure of the symptoms caused by inequities in our society. Safety is built when everyone has a fully-funded public school, a place to live, food to eat, meaningful employment, and the perception that they are valued by society. When these needs are met neighborhoods are stable and community members build connections. With these connections they look out for and care for one another.</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>Many in my district will say that “public safety” is the absence of crime. This group places its emphasis on fighting the symptom that crime is and believes that it is ensured with an ever increasing police presence. They also believe that it is simply bad people that detract from the perception of public safety. From this position, they believe those that would commit crime should be monitored and live under a constant police presence. Another group feels that “public safety” is something that they are still fighting for. They do not feel safe as members of the community, as citizens that desire the freedom to live without constraints. This group believes that public safety is impacted when citizens do not have equal access to employment, healthcare, housing, food, and opportunity. When public safety presents itself, this group will feel comfortable with themselves when taking in something as ordinary as a walk without feeling the eyes of society judging their actions or feeling they need to change.</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>This is an issue with new light shining on it in my district. As we confront systemic racism there is an ugly side, perpetuated by a few, that is taking hold. It seems to be a fear-based reaction to change and a desire to maintain the status quo. A status quo that does not work for all members of our community. We need a community dialogue with all members present and respected voices carrying the message of equity. Too often these discussions are being held with too few members at the table. Community members need to explore their biases and begin to move forward. Explicit racial and other difference-based motivated crimes should be punished to the highest extent of the law. Our community needs to arrive at tolerance and get to acceptance. We are one and will succeed or fall apart together.</p>

Police Issues

What are your thoughts on the general culture of the police departments in your district?

The general culture of the police departments in my district pays service to equity with words and some actions, but there is room for improvement and I believe that any institution that hopes to be at its best is always seeking improvements. As a citizen, I have observed how squad cars seem to be more present in lower-income areas, including my neighborhood, though crime does not care about your address. Their actions in the last few months demonstrate that they are ready to grow and better serve all of their community members and that's the starting point we need.

* What police reforms, if any, do you think would help your district or the state?
Please elaborate.

One of the most impactful police reforms that would help my district, as well as the state, would be to put an end to "broken windows" policing. Numerous studies point out the racial injustices that occur as a result of this practice. I would also like to see the demilitarization of the police department and additional resources directed at mental and other social services to better meet the needs of a specific call or community member.

* What changes to police budgets, if any, would help your district or the state?
Please elaborate.

I believe funds may be better spent in expanding mental health and other social services to meet the demand of specific calls. These partnerships will likely require funding. The police department should also host community events and listening sessions at times that work for community members.

Are there any bills around policing that you would join or champion? What are they and why?

The BIPOC caucus of the Minnesota Legislature spent years crafting racial equity reforms related to policing and those are the bills I would join or champion, including their One Minnesota legislative agenda for 2020. As a 32-year-old white male, I'm not the foremost authority on race and equality. I would get behind those with the lived experiences and the solutions drafted based on results and long-term studies.

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?

In courts across the country we observe how much more severe the court penalties for Black, Indigenous, and people of color populations are when compared to their white peers. Their sentences are longer, their fines are higher. In many cases these results are tied to the biases of the court system or even a single judge. We need to set absolute standards for punishments to eliminate the impact bias has in our court system. Without these changes we will continue to see the oppression of people of color in our communities and as their populations grow across the state, will be damaging for generations in a number of ways. I will fight for these reforms, because we need to be advocating

	for the people of Minnesota, all of the people. Government is an agency of the people, that is who it serves, and who it should be working for.
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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>We need an immediate end to the bail system, this is a benefit only to the rich and allows them to skirt the full impact of the criminal justice system. House File 741 goes a long way in reforming the bail system and should absolutely be state law. Nonviolent parole violations should not be treated with such a heavy hand and there need to be clearer guidelines to sentencing to eliminate bias in the courts and limit the power one judge may have in perpetuating racial injustice.</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>The purpose of incarceration should be one of reform. Certainly, it is a penalty for a crime committed, but that time should not be wasted and incarcerated citizens should receive the necessary support to exit the system in a better place. The system is working well for some, according to the Department of Corrections and studies conducted by the University of Minnesota, but we continue to fail those that have a more substantial criminal history, often one that is tied to racial disparities in policing. Coupled with reforms to policing measures, those that are incarcerated need increased access to social services that prepare them for life after incarceration. They must also have the right to vote.</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>The alternatives to incarceration are any consequence that takes place outside the prison system. In many cases the problems faced by Minnesotans are better handled outside the walls of a prison and prepare them more rapidly and at a reduced cost to live the life they would like to have. Outside the system we can address mental illness, substance use disorders, and homelessness. Providing drug treatment and affordable housing costs much less than the accrued costs of keeping someone imprisoned.</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,</p>	<p>Access to healthcare, communication with friends and relatives, education, and other supports are everything for constituents that have been incarcerated. The time spent in the reform system cannot be wasted. It must be used to establish solid footing for the rest of their lives. Many are in the system because inequities or a lack of service before trouble hit them. The criminal justice</p>
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<p>education, and other programming while incarcerated affect your constituents?</p>	<p>system can be a blessing if enacted without bias and with the best intentions supported by research-based practices.</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>When drawing legislative districts, incarcerated persons should be counted as a part of the district when they had their last residential address. This helps de-incentivize the imprisonment, especially as we near the end of each decade and certain districts may be looking for greater pull.</p>
<p>Are there any bills around incarceration or probation that you would join or champion? Which ones and why?</p>	<p>I would rally in support of any bills that: ended debtors' prisons - a perversion of the criminal justice system and a waste of tax dollars, promoted alternatives to incarceration, encouraged parole and release to rehabilitated citizens, improved access to social services for the incarcerated so that they leave the system with access to affordable housing, gainful employment, and healthcare.</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>Constituents returning to their communities absolutely need access to housing, employment, healthcare, the right to vote, and other social services. Without these basic needs being met, it becomes very difficult for citizens to engage in the behaviors we hope to see from them through the reform process.</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 champion the right of every citizen to vote. Their continued participation in the system makes it a system that represents everyone. We need to put an end to legal practices that discriminate against those with criminal records in getting gainful employment, housing, healthcare, and necessary educational supports. Further, we need to make sure that the funding is there for citizens engaged in re-entry to get these supports. If we believe that incarceration is a system of rehabilitation, then the supports to complete transformational rehabilitation must exist beyond the walls of a prison. Changes to behavior take time, a long time, and we must understand that if we are to succeed.</p>

Public Health Issues

<p>What are your thoughts about how the Department of Corrections has responded to the coronavirus pandemic?</p>	<p>Although the department of corrections has acted in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, I believe more should have been done. Anyone not in for a violent offense should be released to put less people in harm's way, put less of a stress on the demand for PPE, and show that we value the life of a human being. Anyone near the end of their sentence should also have been released.</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>All public health crises fall hardest on the shoulders of those involved in the criminal justice system. In many cases these citizens and their families do not have the resources, including something as necessary as available time, to exercise, eat healthy, get preventative healthcare, and live without the constant burden of stress. All of these factors increase the likelihood someone will suffer from hypertension, heart disease, depression and other mental health conditions, diabetes, and even commit suicide or fall victim to gun violence. I know I am repeating myself, but I believe the governing bodies of Minnesota have the chief function of improving outcomes for the people. They are the agencies fighting for positive change in the lives of Minnesotans. I believe that to be my sole responsibility and will work with everyone, listen to and trust the data/experts, to write policy and make decisions that best meet that responsibility.</p>
<p>Personal Connections</p>	
<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 work in an Alternative Learning Center (ALC) for high school-aged students. Many can easily fall victim to or become participants in the criminal justice system and struggle with inequities in policing. These circumstances do not fall on them because they seek them out. They are largely a condition of their environment and without reform will lead to a never ending cycle that does not allow for them to improve their station.</p>
<p>How can your constituents support you in accomplishing any changes you've outlined here?</p>	<p>If constituents are serious about change, they need to engage with their leadership. Start with your city council and school board, run for those positions, join commissions specific to accountability and human rights, join and engage with groups fighting for change. Beyond that they can support my candidacy by volunteering, donating, or requesting a lawn sign, which can be done at https://mattbrunsformn.org.</p>