

# Thurston County Commissioner Candidate Questionnaire

## **1. What skills and experience do you bring to this office?**

I will bring a voice to the table that hasn't been heard in this capacity. The voice of women, young professionals, parents and immigrants.

### **Education:**

I have a bachelors in Business Administration from Christian Brothers University (Memphis, TN). I attended the University of Washington Law School, but left after completing a year and half due to financial hardships, an issue well known to many in our community. I believe my education in both law and finance bring a new perspective to the county.

### **Work and Community Experience:**

Community service is a value instilled in me by my family. My parents taught me (and my two siblings) a strong sense of serving our community, I have served my community in various roles since I was 13 years old. I have used my skills set to help my community in any way I can. I am passionate about helping people, getting their voices heard. I know first hand and understand what it's like to not have your voice heard and to not be counted.

Shortly after leaving Law School, I was working in Seattle as a Law Clerk/Office Manager. During that time I had a sizable amount of clients from Honduras. The Honduran government had closed down several consulates around the country and were not financing *traveling consulates*. Honduran nationals in Seattle needed to transmit their documents with immigration but couldn't do so without a passport. The closest consulate was in California and people were afraid to travel. I reached out to the Honduran Consulate in California and found out what it took to get them here and work with this community. Three months later after hosting fundraisers, writing letters and rallying up community members, I was able to get the California Honduran Consulate to visit Seattle and the clients that desperately needed their passports were able to obtain them!

I have been a Judicial Assistant for Thurston County Superior Court since 2015, in this position I have seen community members at the lowest and hardest part of their lives. I am more than familiar with our local Criminal Justice System and how it affects the underprivileged.

## **2. What is your vision for Thurston county?**

My vision for Thurston County is one where our community is thriving. Where fiscal responsibility isn't only practiced and demanded from community members, but is also expected from large corporations and developers in our area. In my vision, Thurston county has affordable housing and our environment is protected, our waterways and the salmon that has graced this land for centuries.

I want Thurston County, our community, its families and its children to thrive. Thurston county must keep the charm that attracts so many newcomers, we must keep current citizens and residents living here and keep future generations coming back to their community and not moving away. As a first generation immigrant I can tell you that there is no price for community. Once it's gone, we cannot get it back.

## **3. What do you consider to be the most pressing issues facing the county in the next few years? How would you address these issues?**

Affordable housing is one of our most pressing issues. Finding a balance between urban growth and rural protection from over development.

Crippling high property taxes. Families of all walks of life, young professionals and lower income residents cannot keep living here if we continue raising property taxes. We need to find more progressive revenue in our county instead of always relying on regressive taxation to foot the bill from people that can't afford it.

We need to protect our ecological resources. If our federal, or state level government won't take an initiative to protect our environment, we as a County must set that example.

## **4. What are your county budget priorities?**

Revamping our Criminal Justice budget. The county cannot afford to be going into a deficit, and continually filling our jails up will not solve this. We need to assess and plan better. We need accountability and more oversight within the departments. Replenishing our rainy day fund, and boosting our agricultural economy with incentives.

## **5. The rainy day fund has been greatly diminished. How would you go about addressing this?**

Assessing where we stand as a county and reexamine our financial needs. We need long term and short term budget planning. We need to access and demand state support for county functions that involve our county acting as an agency for the state. I.E. Seattle Tunnel Partners v. The State of Washington, this trial took so many county resources, including staff time, judicial time, jury, and other county expenses. The county needs to get refunded 100% and more for hearing state civil matters in Superior Court.

## **6. What is your plan for the growing problem of homelessness in Thurston county?**

Short and long term solutions for addressing our houseless/homeless crisis in Thurston County, and we have to reevaluate the needs. Is it people suffering from addictions and mental illness or is it rent-burdened citizens that cannot afford a viable home? The houseless in our community are marginalized. They are treated as criminals. Arresting people for not having a house is not the answer. The tough hand approach just puts a costly burden in other areas of our criminal justice system and our jails, as well as being ineffective. Many houseless/homeless citizens don't have the means to clean after themselves, and this affects our environment. We need to have clean ways to dispose of all the trash and items used by them. That way our environment doesn't have a second hand impact on this issue.

**7. What is your position on County policies where growth and the environment seem opposed?**

We can't stop growth from taking place, but we can direct it to the most appropriate location. We can't just allow developers to build anywhere, because overdevelopment will be harmful to our natural resources and our environment.

**8. What is your position in the Rocky Prairie Development Logistics Center?**

The Rocky Prairie is one of five rocky prairies in the world and the only one in Washington state. There is a lack of forthcoming answers and many concerns with the planned industrial center. This company is promising jobs but they do not clearly state how many jobs will be offered. How many will be automated jobs? Do they plan to outsource their workforce? The air quality will deteriorate from the constant traffic and 24/7 operation. The water and ecological effects it will have in the air would be disastrous. The Development Logistic Center can be built anywhere, but you cannot rebuild a prairie.

**9. The County Commissioners sit as a quasi-judicial body. What background do you have for making decisions of a legal nature?**

The vast majority of my work experience has been in Law. While in college I worked as a legal assistant, and handled criminal defense and immigration matters. During and after Law School I worked at an immigration/personal injury firm as a Law Clerk and later as their Office Manager.

I am a Judicial Assistant for Thurston County Superior Court, I have been in this position since 2015. Under this capacity I have been exposed to and have become familiar with civil, criminal and family law matters.

**10. What is your position on the current system of cash bail?**

The current system imposes a burden on low income people and families. This also creates a backlog on the system and burden on taxpayers. We should increase the use of pre-trial services, which will have the added bonus of improving court appearance rates.

**11. Did you support the proposal to move the county courthouse to downtown Olympia?**

As an employee of Thurston County Superior Court all Court Administration staff must comply with judicial ethics rules, due to this I cannot give my opinion or thoughts on this matter. However, in the capacity of County Commissioner my job would be listening to my constituents' concerns and respecting the people's wishes. As County Commissioner I will be a representative of the people.

**12. What are your thoughts on immigration and federal enforcement of deportation of undocumented immigrants within Thurston County?**

Many undocumented immigrants pay property taxes that benefit our county. Thurston County should not repay them by becoming a place of fear or a place where families are torn apart.

**13. Mental health services are currently inadequate to address mental health issues in Thurston County. What do you recommend to solve this problem?**

Mental health is a complex social issue that requires a multidisciplinary approach and community support. An assessment of community needs, service consumers and community providers to address and approach proactively as opposed to reactively. Continue education to promote awareness in the de-stigmatization of mental health not only of our community but of mental health, social services, law enforcement and independent community providers. Work closely with mental health organizations and health centers to assess what is currently working and what is not working in order to build on the strengths of current programming and models of service in place so we don't have to reinvent the wheel. The clubhouse model with a strong wrap around support for individuals experiencing houselessness/homelessness concurrently with a housing first model may help individuals who lack the social support or resources. Additionally, the removal of obstacles or barriers to make mental health services accessible by all in Thurston County. Recruit and employ culturally competent mental health professionals and paraprofessional staff to work directly with the patients. This may mean assessing what services are provided and the needs of each individual organization and working with their current resources to assess how to approach deficits within the organization.

**14. Do you support an initiative to provide public power to Thurston County?**

I will support an initiative that my constituents support. I will listen and support the people's voices.

The candidate assumes full responsibility for all answers to this questionnaire. Your responses to this questionnaire should be considered public knowledge as we cannot assure confidentiality when making the questionnaire available to our membership.