

Derek Sanders
Thurston County Sheriff Questionnaire

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses will be extremely helpful for us to make an informed decision about whom to endorse for the office of Thurston County Sheriff in the upcoming election. Please email the completed questionnaire to endorsements.olympia.indivisible@gmail.com and feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

If you are the incumbent, what would you consider to be your most significant accomplishment?

Please answer the following questions.

Why are you running for Sheriff?

As a current Thurston County Deputy Sheriff, I recognize the Sheriff's Office is headed in a dangerous direction. The lack of leadership, transparency, and accountability do not fall in line with the expectations set by our community. We need 21st century policing that not only delivers high quality services but does so equitably and transparently. Significant internal and external mismanagement is leading us to a dangerous public safety crisis that must be addressed. I have the experience, skills, and community commitment needed to move our office in a positive new direction.

List your education, law enforcement training and/or certification relevant to the Sheriff's position.

- Graduated from Tumwater High School in 2011
- Hired on with Lacey Police Department as a Community Service Officer in 2014
- Hired on with Thurston County Sheriff's Office as a Deputy in 2016
 - Attended Basic Law Enforcement 720 hour class
 - State certified Emergency Vehicle Operations Instructor
 - State certified Field Training Officer

The Sheriff's office has a wide variety of responsibilities. One of them is hiring people with varying expertise to carry out the functions of the office. What is your experience in hiring and managing people?

As a Deputy I haven't been in a position to directly hire employees, however I have been part of the hiring process. I'm often selected to do ride-alongs with prospective hires and provided feedback critical to hiring decisions. Having gone through the hiring process within the last decade, I understand where there is need for improvement. We need to revamp our hiring and onboarding process to ensure we are hiring deputies that reflect the diversity of our community.

How does/or can the Sheriff's department promote diversity, equity and inclusion in its workforce?

The Sheriff's Office is making no effort to promote diversity, equity, or inclusion in our workforce. As the only Person of Color in this race and, if elected, the only African American Sheriff elected in Washington I will work tirelessly to change that. Our workforce—both commissioned and civilian—must to reflect our community. We need to do more listening, learning, and *acting* on the

feedback we receive from the community and incorporate it in our hiring, policies, and operations. If we are going to serve our community we need to be an active and engaged partner.

What are the most important issues facing Thurston County law enforcement in this campaign?

Adapt to the times and community expectations. We are here to serve the community. We can't do that unless we are intentionally engaging and listening. This includes hiring, policy implementation, and operational best practices. We need to find ways to more tightly integrate with the community and build relationships, whether this is through community oversight opportunities, volunteer opportunities, career opportunities, and so on.

Employee morale. We are facing a historic staffing crisis due to mismanagement. This results in mandatory overtime, minimum staffing standards not being met, burnout, among other things, all of which create a safety hazard for employees and the public. Thurston County is now the lowest paid full service agency in the County, and subsequently among the lowest staffed Sheriff's Office in the state.

Transparency and accountability. This should be a foundation in everything we do. Our agency has had significant deputy misconduct and incidents that have been swept under the rug. This validates community mistrust and directly contributes to low employee morale for those trying to do the right thing. We must ensure we are accountable, transparent, and willing to continuously improve.

How is your campaign being funded?

My campaign is being funded by friends, family, and community members who want to take our Sheriff's office in a positive, community-driven direction.

What is your vision for the Thurston county sheriff's department?

A top tier, professional agency that is heavily intertwined with its constituents through a holistic approach of prevention, services, and enforcement. Leading the agency, I will foster a culture where Deputies *want* to work here and citizen input is valued and acted upon to reach public safety goals.

Does the Sheriff's office have the authority to decide not to enforce laws that were enacted by either the legislative or initiative process? Explain your answer.

It depends on the situation. If there is a state mandate that is passed by the legislature it should be enforced. However, if it is a misdemeanor crime not threatening life or public safety I believe officer discretion is important. It's what has allowed me to decide that instead of taking someone to jail for theft, I can pay for their \$17 in food as an alternative. It is also what allows a Deputy to not write a speeding ticket, or impound a vehicle.

Could a decision not to enforce a law create an incident where Thurston County could be held liable?

This is the far more important portion of this question: what are the risks of the decision, and if something goes wrong, is it something you're willing to stand in the face of scrutiny for? Discretion

must be articulately explained, because unchecked it can be a weapon wielded to enforce racism, aporophobia, and an unbalanced criminal justice system. Regardless, the Sheriff's Office could very likely be held liable when choosing not to enforce a law, which means the taxpayers are on the hook. We need to be very careful to ensure we reduce liability exposure while still being equitable and treating residents with respect and compassion.

How would you prioritize nuisance violations of the law? For example speeding and noise complaints? Explain your position.

Nuisance laws are impactful to the peace and tranquility within our unincorporated county. Our county, and the reasons people move out to the county, are extremely diverse. Some move out to the county for peace and quiet, and others move out to the county for the ability to set up a dirt bike track on their two acre parcel. The needs of both must be balanced, and violations for such noise issues should be dealt with in accordance with county ordinance, education and being a good neighbor first, with enforcement being a last resort.

Speeding is in a separate category as it is a factor in most of our collisions in the county. Because of this, I would classify speeding as a public safety issue. What does not change for me is how we handle the issue:

1. Education – explain *why* it is necessary to slow down (numerous fatality collisions in the area, school zone, etc)
2. Engineering – should we reconsider a speed limit change? Is the speed limit reasonable?
3. Enforcement – After taking into consideration the aforementioned, is a speeding ticket going to improve overall safety
 - a. Can alternate programs be installed rather than cash penalties where the violator can be educated instead of purely receiving a financial punishment?

Since the George Floyd episode the Washington State Legislature has passed legislation designed to prevent a similar incident happening in Washington State. What is your opinion of this legislation and its effectiveness?

I fully support the efforts to decertify officers and deputies who have been found to have committed qualifying misconduct. For far too long, an Officer could commit an inappropriate action and get fired for dishonesty, then apply at the next agency. With expanded decertification funding and authority, we can ensure that such an individual never holds a position of authority ever again.

Some of the reforms related to police tactics and tools I absolutely agree with such as banning chokeholds, ammunition larger the .50 caliber, and no-knock warrants, as well as greater review and approval for use of tear gas. Others have had severely negative impacts on our community and public safety, such as: a near ban on police pursuits, a ban on investigative stops (amended in 2022), an unintended ban on less lethal bean bag rounds, and changing the standard of pursuits from probable cause to reasonable suspicion. I believe we can still achieve the objective while working toward better legislation.

What are your thoughts about the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program in Thurston County? Do you support the expansion of the program recently approved by the Thurston Board of County Commissioners?

I have fully supported this program. The 50-year-old War on Drugs has failed all involved parties, and a new approach to simple possession of narcotics has been long overdue. A good deal of thought was applied in LEAD's creation. I attended the most recent LEAD community Zoom call and was happy to hear about the success this program continues to have in our county.

What is your position on cash bail?

Cash bail is a broken system and needs to be reformed to be more equitable. I've personally witnessed someone unable to bail out of jail for vehicle prowl because they didn't have the resources while a wealthy man driving 3x the speed limit hit and killed a man while driving drunk easily posted his six-figure bail. The Sheriff doesn't control the bail system, but if I could it would be based on:

1. Severity of the crime
2. Risk of re-offending, considering criminal history
3. Risk of not appearing for court, considering prior failure(s) to appear
4. Whether a firearm was present during the alleged crime

These four assessments would all be given numeric values, and if the numeric value reaches a certain point, the defendant is held in custody to keep the public safe. This would ensure that those under the poverty line aren't held indefinitely while those who have cash on hand breeze through the criminal justice system.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my candidacy for the position of Sheriff. This Sheriff's Office has the potential to become the pinnacle of what a law enforcement agency can be with the right leadership. Residents and Deputies alike have expressed a strong interest for new leadership, and I'm ready to get to work. Thurston County deserves better and I am committed to working with the community to deliver those results.

Derek Sanders
Candidate for Thurston County Sheriff