What is your name?
Jeanne Kohl-Welles

1. For which position are you running?
King County Council District 4

2. What do you know about the unmet basic human needs in the district you would represent?

Unfortunately, basic human needs such as quality health care, housing, child care, transportation, food security, safety, and other services are still going unmet in District Four and throughout King County, less so in some parts of the county than others. But, in fact, they are going unmet across the Country as a whole. As the Chair of the Council’s Health, Housing and Human Services (HHHS), and as Chair of the King County Board of Health (BOH), I am very tuned in to the need for additional resources, especially given the cutbacks at the state and federal level and projected increases in population growth. Poverty and displacement of housing are increasing throughout King County, in addition to growing income inequality, gentrification, proportional reduction in federal funding, and the increasing structural gap between available revenue and the cost of providing services in a rapidly growing county. These all have resulted in a significant impact on our county’s General Fund resulting in severe reduction in services, especially to our most vulnerable residents. We cannot claim that all residents in District 4 and around the County have their basic needs completely met, which is exactly why I sought out positions on the Council that are poised to support human services entities. Many years ago, I was a single mother of five, and I understand how difficult it can be to make ends meet. I’m dedicated to making sure that government structures, along with partnerships with the private sector, do all possible to ensure all our residents and families are able to get the support they need to live healthy and productive lives.
3. What has afforded you the privilege and power to run for office, and how will it impact your role in this position?

I benefited from the privileges afforded a white woman who grew up in a stable household in a working class neighborhood with college-educated parents. I was never subjected to the wide-ranging effects of racism, whether overt, implicit, symbolic, or systemic. I always knew that I would attend college, as my parents had, which led in my case to a position as a public school teacher, then on to earning a Ph.D. in the Sociology of Education at UCLA and a successful career as an academic. My academic career and research, which focused on educational and economic equity, discrimination and harassment in the workplace and in educational institutions, and social problems and social change, eventually led to my interest in public policymaking and public service and eventually to holding elected office. These privileges opened the door for me to run for office. Knowing this, I have prioritized listening and empathizing as key values that I use when making decisions that impact the constituents I represent. I will continue to examine all policies and funding decisions through the lens of equity and social justice. I serve as Chair of both the Board of Health and the Council’s Health, Housing and Human Services Committee, and am committed to doing everything possible to achieve equitable access to comprehensive health care, child care, housing, transit and other crucial services, especially for historically underserved and marginalized groups.

4. What experience do you have in listening to and amplifying community voices? In what ways do you base your policies and priorities on the needs of those who will be most impacted by them?

Throughout my years in public service, I have always worked closely and consulted with my constituents, other community members and leaders, advocacy groups and other stakeholders when developing or considering legislative and funding decisions. I understand the importance of hearing directly from those most affected by decisions made by elected officials. I’ve consistently focused on using my position to bring more voices to the table. While serving as Chair of the Senate Labor & Commerce Committee, I worked closely with labor unions and advocacy groups for working families. I have taken a collaborative approach on every policy area on which I’ve
worked while in the Senate and on the King County Council, including human trafficking, sexual assault and harassment, medical marijuana, and unequal access to affordable health care, child care and early learning, higher education, and housing, as well as income inequality, green spaces and clean air and water. And with regard to upcoming work, I am currently drafting legislation to create a King County Youth Commission that likely will be introduced later this month or in August. And I have directed my staff to schedule regular meetings with major human services advocacy groups and coalitions with whom we work at the Council in order to assist me in developing the work plan and agendas for the Health, Housing, and Human Services Committee. If my years in public office have taught me anything, it’s that we are here to serve. I’ve always tried my utmost to be accessible, responsive, and effective, which drives my work on the Council.

5. The cost of health care increases every year. Recent federal policy changes have threatened the long-term sustainability of Medicaid — such as attempts to reduce funding or turn the program into a block grant — and have aimed to undermine the viability of private health insurance markets — such as eliminating the individual insurance mandate from the Affordable Care Act (ACA) or not defending the ACA in court. Given so many barriers being placed at the federal level, how would you work to improve health care access at the local level to ensure stronger and more vibrant communities?

I support Executive Constantine’s steps to bring universal health care to our County. He recently announced that King County will introduce a study to determine the feasibility of reopening the Washington State Health Insurance Pool, which would provide health insurance to Washington residents who are denied insurance. When he announced his new steps, I was quoted in the press release, “It is truly tragic that so many people living in King County – one of the wealthiest regions in our nation – are still unable to attain quality and reliable health care without fear of breaking the bank or because of their immigration status. I applaud Executive Constantine for acting urgently to ensure health coverage for all of our neighbors – especially our most vulnerable.” He also announced that the County will work diligently to better provide access to health care, including
primary care, emergency care, and free cancer screenings, especially to immigrant and refugee communities in collaboration with the King County Immigrant and Refugee Commission. In April, I co-authored an op-ed in The Washington State Wire in support of SB 5822 with Bevin McLeod of Alliance for a Healthy Washington, Vicki Lowe of the American Indian Health Commission, and the Teamsters Joint Council 28. Although the bill did not pass, many parts of it were included in other legislation that did. Achieving universal health care has been a goal that has not occurred for a ridiculous lengthy amount of time. As Chair of the BOH and of the Council’s HHHS Committee, I have prioritized funding of health care and other essential human services on the County level. I was the lead sponsor in implementing the Best Starts for Kids (BSK) Initiative (approved by voters in 2015) that funds programs to improve the health and well being of all King County’s children and youth. The BSK programs invest in prevention and early intervention for children, youth, families, and communities, including ending the school-to-prison pipeline and racial disproportionality in our juvenile justice system, as well as BSK’s YFHPI (Youth, Families, Homeless Prevention Initiative). Working on implementing those programs will continue to be a priority in my second term. I also was the lead sponsor on the VSHSL (Veterans, Seniors, and Human Services Levy) implementation and governance legislation to support financial and housing stability and service provision for these groups. VSHSL includes human services funding to ensure that programs and services, including affordable health care, are available and accessible for vulnerable persons. I have also stood up for our local health care systems despite the federal restrictions as well as reductions in our core foundational health programs imposed by the Legislature. Specifically, over the past three years, I have led the Council’s efforts on women’s health, safety, and participation in the workforce, As an example, when the Trump Administration announced funding cuts for reproductive health care, I was part of the local rebuke. I stood with Planned Parenthood and King County Executive Dow Constantine to reaffirm our support of immigrants, refugees, Planned Parenthood and low-barrier women’s health care and reproductive health care specifically. And afterwards I was interviewed live in person and in taped interviews on local TV broadcasts. Last year, while I served as an alternate, I supported the vote by the King County Board of Health placing restrictions on limited pregnancy centers that posed potential health risks for women. I currently serve as the Chair of the King County Board of Health and have created a subcommittee on Domestic Violence, Sexual Violence and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.
6. Federal policies over the last few years have created a climate of fear for immigrant and refugee communities across the country. Even Washington State, long a welcoming environment, is no stranger to these challenges, as the recent Department of Licensing scandal showed. This climate of fear impacts immigrants and refugees of all statuses, and new research shows this fear is driving immigrants away from health and human services programs they are legally eligible to participate in. What would you do to leverage local systems and resources to bring immigrant and refugee communities back out of the shadows?

As Chair of the Board of Health and the Council’s Health, Housing and Human Services Committee, I recognize the damage our current political climate is inflicting on the health and well-being of immigrants and refugees. I cosponsored the creation of the County’s Immigrant and Refugee Commission, which provides a formal way for immigrants and refugees to engage with King County government and to advocate for their needs. The goal is to improve services to immigrants and refugees by providing more language support and culturally-appropriate educational outreach and materials to help with understanding and navigating County services. The commission also gives these communities a role in planning, decision-making, and monitoring. Following the announcement of Trump’s travel ban, I also cosponsored a motion to allocate $750,000 in the 2017-2018 Biennial Budget to organizations supporting immigrants and refugees, with $300,000 of this dedicated to a legal defense fund for immigrants and refugees in the County. And, as a member of our four-person Budget Leadership Team last Fall for the 2019-20 biennial budget, I secured funding to expedite the Sheriff’s processing of U-visas T-visas (for immigrant victims of crime and trafficking, respectively, who assist law enforcement in prosecuting the perpetrators) in order to provide the means for immigrants and refugees to stay in our country and to smooth the path to citizenship. I sponsored an amendment to our supplemental budget, approved by the Council on Wednesday, June 26, on funding a new position at the Sheriff’s Office to further expedite such processing. I am currently working on language for our next supplemental budget, likely to be taken up in September, to eliminate the application fee for the U-visa and T-visa for those who are victims of crime. I am committed to continuing to find structural, policy-driven avenues for immigrants and refugees to find relief within our
local government, in addition to continuing to be an outspoken advocate for the rights of immigrants and refugees in our community. I also commit to continuing to work with advocacy groups such as Northwest Immigrant Rights Project and Entre Hermanos, among others, to advocate for the most relevant and effective reforms. Jorge Barón, ED of the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project and a well-known immigrants rights activist in the area, has personally endorsed my campaign and has stated, “I appreciate Councilmember Kohl-Welles’ leadership in advancing policies that protect all residents of King County and especially for her work in standing up to the attacks of the current federal administration against immigrant and refugee communities. She has helped to ensure that our county will continue to identify ways to be a more welcoming place for all.” In addition, I have been able to get through measures relating to labor trafficking, frequently involving immigrants and refugees or individuals who have been coerced to enter the country unlawfully and subsequently been forced into unlawful activity. As part of my work, the County worked with consultants to study the extent of labor trafficking in the County, with their recommendations made turned into legislation of mine to make significant changes in our procurement policies, such as requiring ethical sourcing. I’ve introduced legislation that will appear next week on a work plan and procurement policies regarding funding allocated to the anti-trafficking response outlined by the 2019-2020 Biennial Budget. Last summer, I sponsored legislation with CM Dunn that resulted in creating an awareness campaign in partnership with the Port of Seattle, Sound Transit, King County Metro, the City of Seattle, and some corporate sponsors, such as Delta Airlines and Alaska Airlines, to promote visibility, such as in our buses, light rail, and at SeaTac Airport, on how to get help for trafficking victims and survivors.

7. Over half Seattleites and over 40% of people in King County are renters. Currently in most of Washington State tenants can be forced to move with only 20 days’ notice and even within the city of Seattle, there is no guarantee that a landlord will renew a tenant’s lease. [For King County Candidates] As part of the King County Council, will you enact just cause protections to give tenants stability? [For Seattle Candidates] As part of Seattle City Council, will you expand just cause protections for renters with fixed term leases who are up for a lease
renewal? [For both] What are your plans and strategies to protect renters?

Yes, I do support enacting just-cause protections in King County as well as support increasing other protections for renters, as I did while serving in the Senate. As an example, I sponsored an ordinance in the Council that was passed last year that prohibits landlords or home sellers in unincorporated King County—where the County has land use regulatory authority—from denying people housing based on source of income. (I sponsored the legislation in the Senate earlier). And I am scheduling a briefing on just-cause eviction and potential protections at the July 30th meeting of the Council HHHS Committee. In addition, I am currently working with CM Larry Gossett on eviction protection as well as renters’ displacement legislation, including on fixed-term lease renewals as compared to monthly rentals (relating to City of Seattle’s eviction protections having unanticipated consequences for leasees), inclusionary zoning, a fund for displaced renters, and creating a renters’ commission. Also, CM Gossett and I are going to be meeting with Edmund Witter, who runs the Housing Justice Project with the King County Bar Association, and Xochiti Maykovich with Washington CAN, regarding our introducing an ordinance relating to just-cause protections and assisting displaced tenants. Another model which I believe could be expanded is The Best Starts for Kids Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Plan. It was part of the BSK Implementation Plan legislation back in 2016, which I led, that included funding for case management and flexible financial assistance, which has had considerable success. One of the most appealing parts of it has been that youth and families can get immediate assistance that will help them avoid entering homelessness situations. For example, it has enabled families to have a month’s rent paid in order to help ease financial pressure. And, our Veterans, Seniors, Human Services Levy has been providing essential assistance to veterans, seniors and vulnerable populations through Master Leases, tenant assistance and other targeted programs. These groups have been particularly vulnerable to evictions and displacement, especially for those who are on fixed incomes. VSHSL also includes housing subsidies including Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers, state Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) funds, and rapid rehousing assistance. And these programs work. With the targeting of programs to assist veterans, youth and families in exiting homelessness, their numbers have been significantly reduced in the past two years’ Point in Time Counts.
8. In 2018, the consulting firm McKinsey and Company conducted an extensive analysis of the current crisis response and homeless housing programs in Seattle and King County. They found that our region dramatically under-invests in housing and other system-wide responses, while the numbers of people experiencing homelessness grows. They found that between 2014 and 2017, the number of households accessing homelessness services grew by an average 11 percent a year, while funding grew by an average 2.4 percent a year. The McKinsey analysis estimated an additional investment of between $360 and $410 million per year for at least ten years is required to make and maintain progress in solving homelessness. Such added resources would bring our community in line with sister cities and counties addressing homelessness and affordable housing crises. What are three specific revenue options (local, regional, and state) you would use to generate the necessary funds to fill the gap between current local, state, and federal dollars, and the housing and service system investments required to do the job for Seattle and King County residents experiencing homelessness?

All counties in our state are struggling with budget problems, especially King County, as a result of Tim Eyman’s I-747 which caps the growth limit for property taxes at 1% a year, regardless of inflation rates and population growth. At the state level, we have been lobbying the legislature to correct this by authorizing the ability of counties to include inflation and population growth as factors in determining property taxes, and I will continue to lobby the Legislature to reform our tax code. Washington has the most regressive tax structure in the nation. We also need to eliminate the non-supplant restriction to allow special levies to fund existing services and programs and to adjust the qualifying income level on senior property tax exemption to a percentage of county median income and allow extension of the exemption to local levies. Nonetheless, I am very pleased the Legislature did make a good start this past session, e.g., in providing $1.75 million for the Housing Trust Fund, up to $2.50 increase in the document recording fee for certain documents for cities to increase residential building capacity, and for permitting counties and cities to use REET money for affordable housing. And I
was very pleased that $3 million was included last year for modular housing which I had requested of the Capital Budget Chair Sen. David Frockt), and to determine revenue sources that could be tapped locally for the creation of these units, either by diverting funds or re-alloacting resources. The State also passed HB 1406, which allows cities and counties to retain a portion of the sales tax to invest in affordable and supportive housing. This reallocates money rather than raising taxes, and is well timed to respond to the housing crisis we face now. I am eager to work with my colleagues to determine how to equitably allocate that money to support sustainable development. At the County level, I am able to propose legislation to implement property valuation discounts for TOD developments in order to maximize the resources available for them and provide support in the creation and development of inclusionary and incentive-driven developments. The Regional Affordable Housing Task Force (now a Committee of the Growth Management Planning Council) has outlined specific regional, local, and state funding sources that should be utilized to meet the demand for affordable housing. To ensure funding, the plan outlines a multi-pronged approach that both utilizes unexplored revenue streams, as well as works to maintain affordability in construction and acquisition. I am supportive of the collaborative approach of the plan and am a member of the new Committee and was of the RAHTF. The County is also able to take big-picture leadership on creating and implementing a regional land-use development strategy to ensure equity in the way that these TODs are built and where they are located. Also at the County level, we now have the authority to include funds in our allocations from the ST3 revenue stream that will be coming in, which is estimated to be $10 million for next year with continued growth after that. We passed legislation two years ago to establish our priorities through our Puget Sound Taxpayers Accountability Act (PSTAA) to allocate those funds for vital educational and supportive human service programs, including early learning, K-12, and post-secondary age band categories, specifying targeting of low-income kids, and kids of color, foster youth and youth experiencing homelessness, kids in the child welfare system, and those who are justice-involved and, importantly, kids at risk of involvement in the justice system and/or school-to-prison pipeline. We are currently in the process of determining the percentage of funds to be distributed in each of the three age band categories. The City has an opportunity also to utilize unused revenue sources and pursue opportunities to reduce
the cost of development in their own ways. I am committed to continuing to work collaboratively with them to maximize the impact of local government. I am pleased to have the endorsement of the Washington Housing Alliance Action Fund.

9. Seattle and King County are in the midst of a child care crisis because child care is expensive and unaffordable for many working families. At the same time, some child care providers cannot afford to pay workers a living wage and stay in business. What ideas do you have for solutions?

I will soon be the lead sponsor introducing legislation to improve child care access and affordability, and provide additional support to child care providers and workers. Given that at the Federal level, funding for human services broadly and child care support specifically is being cut (or may be, based on the President’s budget proposal), it is even more important that local jurisdictions do what they can to support working families. The legislation will include addressing the disproportionate impacts on lower-income women, women of color, women living in rural communities, and younger women. It will create a King County Child Care Assistance Program for low-and moderate-income families, support the creation of new child care facilities, expand child care supply and contribute to reasonable costs for child care providers. It also will establish a Child Care Task Force. The legislation will be based on the study conducted and recommendations made by the King County Women’s Advisory Board. I also hope to make permanent an existing infant-at-work program which I cosponsored as a pilot program, and an employer-supported child care program. We have some provisions for funding through Best Starts for Kids, and need more. In addition, the Council is currently working on determining the level of funding to go into early learning, as well as K-12 and post-secondary programs, through the Puget Sound Taxpayers Accountability Act. [This is the ST3 funding we’re starting to receive. See above. Fortunately the Legislature clarified in the recently concluded session that the funds can be used for capital purposes which is exactly what is needed for expanding child care access.]

10. Survivors of gender-based violence frequently enter the criminal justice system due to their victimization, but criminal justice responses
are woefully inadequate and problematic for most survivors for a variety of reasons, especially Black, indigenous, and other survivors of color, refugee and immigrant survivors; and gender non-conforming survivors. What specific solutions will you bring forward for addressing issues of gender-based violence in our city? What mechanisms would you employ to shift the structural oppression and racism, specifically in criminal justice institutions?

As Chair of the Council’s HHHS Committee and of the King County BOH, I view gender-based violence, structural racism and sexual discrimination as serious public health issues. I recently sponsored the legislation confirming the members to form a new King County Task Force on Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Inclusion. The work of the Task Force is to develop recommendations for the Council on next steps to improve inclusion in County services – including the criminal justice system and the Sheriff’s office – and to ensure that all County residents can access the range of services and are treated with respect. I was a cosponsor of the legislation last year to create the task force. And, significantly, as Chair of the BOH, I included in our 2019 Work Plan, which was approved unanimously by the Board, creation of a new subcommittee on Domestic Violence, Sexual Violence, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. I appointed Colleen Echohawk, Director of Chief Seattle Club, and Mary Ellen Stone, Director of King County Sexual Assault Resource Center, as Co-Chairs. The County Council plays a role in overseeing the operation of the King County Sheriff’s Office. During the past 2019-2020 Biennial Budget, we included several expenditure restrictions that require the KCSO to share its progress and provide evidence about the implementation of existing and new policies before releasing parts of their budget. One of these was mentioned earlier in this questionnaire, regarding the KCSO’s responsiveness to U-visa and T-visa requests that streamline the path to citizenship for victims of crime and trafficking. Now, the KCSO must demonstrate how it is processing these requests in order to release further funds. In addition, we have jurisdiction over OLEO, the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight, which has an overseeing role of the KCSO operations. We recently have approved additional FTEs for OLEO and provided it with additional authority. Equity in the justice system is a high priority for me, which is why I serve on the LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion) Policy Coordinating Group and sponsored legislation prohibiting youth solitary confinement and moving toward Zero Youth Detention.
11. Describe how you would represent your constituents to ensure there is a pathway to emergency food services for all who need it. What policies and investments would you support so that residents across Seattle and King County have equal access to adequate, culturally appropriate, healthy food?

Access to adequate food is a problem for about 30% of King County families with young children. The need is especially pronounced in families of color and in the LGBTQ community. Supporting basic needs such as access to healthy food is of course a key priority for me, as Chair of both the BOH and the Council’s HHHS Committee. The Best Starts for Kids programs help fund critical programs and organizations that directly provide healthy food to King County children and families. We work closely with organizations such as the Tilth Alliance, WestSide Baby and Eastside Baby Corner to serve communities throughout the county. The Veteran’s, Seniors and Human Services programs also fund food banks, meal delivery and other basic human needs. I work every day to increase support and funding for these critical programs and have secured grants for many of the food banks in my District through the Community Services Operating Funds available each biennium, including the Queen Anne Helpline, Ballard Food Bank, FamilyWorks Food Bank, local senior centers, and other human services-oriented groups. And, as Chair of the BOH, I have started a new subcommittee on Healthy Eating and Obesity.

12. According to a 2017 FBI report, nationwide reports of hate crimes increased by 17% from 2016 to 2017; by 32% in Washington State, and 198% in Seattle. Within Washington State, 38% of reported hate crimes were in Seattle. The City Auditor analyzed data that reported hate crimes doubled from 2014 to 2016 and doubled again from 2016 to 2018. 54% of the crimes related to race/ethnicity and 32% sexual orientation. What are your ideas for responding to hate crime in our region without criminalizing communities of color?
A risk any time that criminal penalties are strengthened or made more serious is that it will have the unintended consequence of increasing the criminalization of communities of color, due to the systemic racism and implicit bias involved in and compounded by the various levels of our criminal justice system. For that reason, I have not been supportive of raising mandatory minimums at the state level. However, I would be supportive of the legislature broadening the definition of hate crimes that we have in our current RCW. This definitional reform at the state level would enable victims broader support for their charge, and would give prosecutors more room to argue their case to hold the perpetrators of hate crimes responsible. At the County level, I would be supportive of broadening the number of protected statuses within the County to include marital status, homelessness, age, parental status, gender identity, and political ideology. The City of Seattle has included this under city law, and especially given that there has been significant increase in hate crimes in South King County specifically, it would be the responsible thing to do.

13. As a city, we have moved to district representation. However, the needs of our residents are not necessarily most efficiently and effectively addressed by district. Nonprofit services most often cross multiple districts and people who make use of the services interact with providers throughout the city. How will you work to represent both the needs of your district as well as Seattle as a whole?

As a King County representative and a longtime District 4 resident, I understand well that issues impacting my district do not exist within a vacuum, but rather interact closely with the larger Seattle and King County issues. I approach my work collaboratively, working with other elected officials and geographically broad groups, as well as representing and being responsive to my constituents and organizations located in my district. Fundamentally, a successful County government is good for my constituents in District 4 specifically. A big part of being a representative is knowing when to really push for something on behalf of my constituency and amplify their voices, but also knowing when to step back and embrace teamwork. I consider myself fortunate to have been
practicing this balance for more than two decades, and believe I am well-positioned to continue. And, as a direct example of what I am working on currently, I am the Council lead on the proposed creation of a regional homelessness authority, likely through establishing a PDA, that likely will be transmitted in August to the Council by Executive Constantine and to the Seattle City Council by Mayor Durkan to the Seattle City Council. As such, I created a leadership advisory team to work with me and DCHS and the Exec to flesh out the proposal. I also have scheduled a meeting with our Seattle City Council counterparts and elected officials representing Sound Cities Association in order to work collaboratively in developing a coordinated approach in achieving a positive outcome.

14. Will you support an automatic annual inflation adjustment tied to the CPI-W for the City's human services contracts so providers can maintain current levels of service as costs of doing business increase?

Yes, I would support this on the County level as well. It’s important that as the cost of living and doing business in King County increases, that we are taking into account those costs in the way that we provide benefits. If we are serious about making sure that the County continues to be a place where diverse groups of people can survive and thrive, we need to make sure that we are intentional about supporting the growth of our human services programs that enable people to live healthy and successful lives.