SHSC 2019 online candidate survey questions

What is your name?
Ami Nguyen

1. For which position are you running?
Seattle City Council District 3

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

As a public defender, I work with people who are homeless, struggling with mental health and fighting addiction on nearly a daily basis. District 3 consists of very compassionate constituents. Unfortunately, many are just one emergency or paycheck away from being homeless. While our city has experienced great economic growth, we’ve also experienced many challenges that have lead to an increasing number of people experiencing unmet basic human needs including food, shelter, bathrooms, showers, medical attention and mental health treatment.

3. What has afforded you the privilege and power to run for office, and how will it impact your role in this position?

I am the daughter of Vietnamese refugees and relied on government program such as Section 8, food stamps, school lunches and public education as a child. I had the privilege of having these programs available to my family along with caring public school educators who encouraged me to attend college. I not only graduated from college, but also received a law degree and dedicated my career to public service. My personal and profession background as a public defender and former tenants’ rights attorney has shown me that we need a city council member who understands the struggles that so many of our constituents are experiences. It has also shown me what is possible if we invest in the right programs to help people. As a council member, I will work hard to
ensure that our policies are effective to help the most marginalized and vulnerable communities in our city also have a voice at the decision making table.

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?

As a public defender and former tenants' rights attorney, I work with low-income, immigrant and vulnerable communities. I ensure that my clients are being heard and represented in court, where there is frequently unequal power structures. I am client-centric and base my priorities on the specific needs of my client. I make suggestions to clients, but at the end of the day, I advocate for what my client wants to do with their case.

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?

While the federal government has cut back resources to inform people how to sign up for health care, cities and states need to increase their efforts to inform residents how to apply for free or low-cost medical insurance.

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?

There are many reasons why immigrants and refugees would not apply for services. The Public Charge amendment caused many low-income immigrant and refugee families to stop applying for government benefits in fear that it would make them ineligible for permanent residency of citizenship. Recent increases in ICE raids and King County jail's failure to protect immigration information is another reason poor families would avoid reaching out to human services programs. Until the environment changes, I would remove any questions requiring immigration status information. Depending on the resource, I would also make reporting of additional personal information optional. This may result in us losing some federal funding that requires immigration and personal information, but we need to find other ways to fund human services programs and make our immigrant and refugee families comfortable reaching out for their basic needs.

7. Over half Seattlite 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 would expand just cause protections for renters with fixed term leases who are up for a lease renewal agreement. We need to make it easier for renters to file habitability
complaints against landlords and schedule inspections within 72 hours of the complaint being filed. We need to schedule specific dates for landlords to fix issues rather than leaving it open ended. Seattle should also make records of habitability complaints open to the public so future tenants can see the complaints made and how quickly landlords responded/fixed the complaint. Landlords who continuously violate or fail to fix habitability codes should not be able to collect full rent. They should only be allowed to collect partial rent since they only lived up to part of their promise to provide habitable conditions. The Seattle City Attorney’s Office should also have an affirmative litigation department that sues slumlords on behalf of tenants.

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?

I would advocate for capital gains tax to fund our efforts to address the homelessness crisis.
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?

In speaking with child care providers, I learned that subsidies, provided for low-income families, are too low. As a result, the provider no longer takes clients with subsidies or close their business altogether. We need to ensure that we provide higher subsidies so that child care providers can stay in business and pay living wages.

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?

During my practice as a public defender, I recognized the conflict of interest for having the domestic violence victim advocate’s office under the authority and funding of the prosecutor’s office. Sometimes an alleged victim asked me for help because they did not agree with how the prosecutor was handling their case and did not feel that their victim advocate was advocating for what they want. If elected, I would advocate to remove the domestic violence victim advocate office from the prosecutor’s office and make it an independent department. I would also ensure that we hired and/or train culturally informed advocates.

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?

As a child, I relied on free school breakfast and lunch. Ensuring that our residents, especially children, have enough to eat is very important to me. We need to take advantage of federal programs, such as free school lunches, so that our local tax dollars for schools isn’t unnecessarily paying for school lunches when we can be reimbursed by federal programs. Non-profits such as Asian Counseling and Referral Services (ACRS) have established culturally sensitive food drives. We need to continue supporting these non-profits who already have the community relationships and knowledge to provide culturally appropriate food.

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?

I believe in restorative justice, especially in incidents where an alleged hate crime is involved. If a person is alleged to have committed a hate crime, incarceration is not going to help address trauma experienced by the alleged victim, and the alleged suspect will continue to live with the hate after being released. It is better to practice restorative justice so that the alleged suspect can question where their hate comes from and be able to eradicate such thinking. For the alleged victim, it may provide some therapy to hear from the alleged suspect and contribute to the alleged suspect’s growth away from being hateful.
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?

I recognize that the need for human services is a city, county and state wide issue. I don’t see how I can address the needs of District 3 without addressing the need of human services as a city. Ensuring that we address this need as a city will actually make district representatives more effective. For example, a non-profit in one district may be able to more effectively address the needs of a certain population. Therefore, a referral to that out of district non-profit makes sense. What the districts and city needs to do is develop a comprehensive program for non-profits to communicate with each other so that we can have our resources reach as many people as possible.

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, definitely. Human service employees are paid too little and experience secondary trauma everyday. We need to ensure that we pay them well and provide quality health services for them too.