

# 2023 Denver Municipal Candidate Questionnaire on Public Safety & Policing



## ANDY ROUGEOT

*The candidate's responses to each question are in italics and are written word for word. No edits were made to spelling or sentence structure per 501(c)3 guidelines.*

**The seat you are running for:** *Denver Mayor*



### Public Safety:

Denver Taskforce for Reimagining Police and Public Safety's Definition of Public Safety: Public safety ensures that all community members decide how to organize a social environment that provides the freedom to live and thrive with the protection and support of social, physical, mental, and economic well-being. Safety is not a function of armed paramilitary forces with a proven track record of racism and violence. Public safety prevents, reduces, and heals harm.

**1) Do you agree with the above definition of public safety? If not, how would you define public safety?**

*Public Safety is the protection of the people of Denver and their property from danger, injury, and other damage.*

COVID-19 highlighted the need for investments in the system of safety and health. People in Colorado prisons were seven times more likely to contract COVID-19. Black people in Denver are more likely to be incarcerated than white people in Denver. Black people across Colorado represented a disparate amount of COVID-19 deaths.

**2) What is your vision for public health and safety in Denver? What, in your opinion, are the factors that are preventing Denver from achieving your vision of public safety?**

*Denver is inarguably less safe under Mayor Hancock. Murders have nearly tripled over the past ten years, unsheltered homelessness has doubled over the past four years, and we are one of the nationwide leaders in car theft. To build a safer Denver, we need to increase funding for policing, not decrease it. As Mayor, I will increase funding for police to add four hundred additional police officers, decrease 911 hold times, and to get illegal guns off our streets.*

**3) In your words, what is the connection between public health initiatives and public safety initiatives?**

*If the people of Denver are not physically safe, public health initiatives will not be successful. That is why increasing funding for police and enforcing the camping ban are critical tools for increasing the safety and health of our city.*

**4) Are you familiar with the Denver Reimagining Police and Public Safety Taskforce's work over the last two years and the resulting 112 recommendations?**

Yes

**5) What behaviors or activities are currently criminalized in Denver that you view as outdated and harmful?**

*I disagree with this question. Effectively decriminalizing fentanyl and car theft is why Denver is less safe. Our issue as a city is we are not aggressively enforcing our laws and pursuing criminals.*

## **Police Accountability and Reform:**

Lawsuits regarding Denver Police officers' behavior have cost the City and County of Denver almost \$17 million in 2022 — a significant rise in the last five years and the third-highest figure since 2010. Denver taxpayers are currently responsible for settlements when a law enforcement officer's behavior is deemed inappropriate.

**6) Would you support the City in moving away from being self-insured to possibly pooling insurance with other municipalities, thereby decreasing the taxpayer's burden to pay for the settlements? Why or why not?**

*I would not. As Mayor, I will appoint a city attorney who will defend our city and the conduct of our police officers, which will eliminate the need for these payments.*

**7) What role should body cams play in prosecution, absolvment, and accountability in officer-involved shootings?**

*I believe body cameras play an important role in providing an impartial view of a officer's encounter.*

## Housing/ Homelessness:

Covid-19 has disrupted Denverites' access to basic needs, including employment, housing, and access to substance use and mental health treatment. Throughout the pandemic, shelter use in Denver has increased by 54%, while unemployment rates rose from 2.8% to 7.1%. During the pandemic, sweeps of homeless encampments reached an all-time high. According to reporting by the Denver Post, hundreds of thousands of tax dollars were spent in 2020 on these repetitive, unhoused sweeps. Additionally, people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are 10% times more likely to have contact with police than people living in shelters. A recent Urban Institute analysis of Denver Police Department data found that arrests were disproportionately for offenses associated with unsheltered homelessness among this SIB target population of 2,181 in 2018.

### **8) How do you plan to address displacement and gentrification while balancing Denver's need for growth and more affordable housing?**

*Housing is unaffordable in our city for first time home, young families, and blue-collar workers. As Mayor, I will ensure our teachers, fire fighters, and police officers can live in the communities they serve by fixing a broken permitting department, eliminating regulations that are blocking the construction of affordable housing and getting corruption and money out of the approval process.*

### **9) What is City Council's role in addressing homelessness? What tools do you believe will be effective in addressing homelessness in Denver?**

*The City Council, along with the Mayor, are critical to ensuring we are aggressively enforcing the camping ban to get the homeless off the streets and into mental health and drug addiction services.*

### **10) Many of the Taskforce Recommendations are aimed at stopping the criminalization of homelessness and poverty(i.e., addressing "crimes of existence") and reducing contact between the community and armed law enforcement officers. If elected/reelected, will you support and work to implement these recommendations? Why or why not?**

*I believe the taskforces recommendations are counterproductive, and the that the solution to the skyrocketing homelessness in our city is aggressive enforcement of the camping ban to get the homeless off the streets and into mental health and drug addiction services.*

## Behavioral Health and Substance Use:

Colorado is 47th in the nation for access to mental health services. One out of every three men and four out of every five women imprisoned in Colorado have moderate to critical mental health needs. As of March 2022, 12.7% of Coloradans who died in police encounters this year suffered from mental illness. Denver drug overdose deaths surged for the second straight year. Deaths related to opioids surged by 308% between 2019 and 2021, according to city data. Recent evidence from cohort and modeling studies suggests that Safe-Use-Sites are associated with lower overdose mortality (88 fewer overdose deaths per 100 000 person-years [PYs]), 67% fewer ambulance calls for treating overdoses, and a decrease in HIV infections. With a 12-1 vote, the council approved a framework for creating a government-sanctioned supervised drug use site in the city. The only condition was that the state legislature had to pass a law clearing the way for a supervised-use facility. Nearly four years later, the Colorado General Assembly has not cleared that path.

**11) If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you support policies that increase access to long-term treatment, limit drug arrests, and implement evidence-based harm reduction services, such as safe consumption spaces? What methods would you employ?**

*As Mayor, I will veto any City Council policies allowing safe injection sites. Safe injection sites do not make our city safer, and do not work in reducing drug use.*

A study conducted in 2020 on the STAR pilot 911 response program in Denver found that mental health specialists responded to calls involving trespassing and other nonviolent events and found a 34% drop in reported crimes during the six-month trial. The study by Stanford scholars also showed that the direct costs of the alternative 911 approach were four times lower than police-only responses.

**12) What do you think is the role of STAR and other community-based programs, including LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion) programs? How do you envision funding them?**

*I think STAR is a valuable and successful program. However, the effectiveness of is undermined by an underfunded and understaffed police force. As Mayor, I will ensure Denver has an additional four hundred police officers, so STAR teams can safely perform their work.*

## Community Oversight:

Since the release of the Task Force Recommendations, The Citizen Oversight Board (COB) was granted the ability to appoint, by and with the consent of the City Council, the Independent Monitor, who serves at the pleasure of the Board. The Independent Monitor was a position that the Denver Mayor previously appointed. The COB was additionally granted regular access to public safety department leaders and confidential records.

Although this change is a big step forward, there is still a call for increased citizen oversight over Denver Police and ensuring that DPD operates with accountability and transparency. The COB oversees the independent monitor who receives and processes complaints about DPD, the Denver Sheriffs Department (DSD), and sworn personnel. The COB also monitors investigations into officer-involved shootings and in-custody deaths and publicly reports on findings.

### **13) Will you support giving the COB and the Office of the Independent Monitor subpoena power to pursue these investigations? Why or why not?**

*I will not. The Mayor is elected by the people of Denver and is accountable for the various departments of the City. A bureaucratic, unelected board is not accountable to the people of Denver.*

### **14) In your view, what is the role of citizen oversight of DPD and DSD? How will you improve this process or be vocal and supportive regarding improvements that could and need to be made to our accountability structures?**

*Citizen oversight of DPD and DSD is critical, and is ultimately best expressed through the ballot box, not through a bureaucratic and unelected board.*

## Gender-Based Violence

Denver has experienced an increase in the reporting of sex crimes over the last three years. The prosecution rate for these cases in DA McCann's office is roughly 44%, meaning the DA chooses to prosecute 44% of sex crimes cases referred to her by the DPD. The other 56% are not prosecuted for various reasons, such as the victim's wishes, a perceived lack of evidence, and a belief that a jury will not convict.

The following policy questions are related to sexual and domestic violence. At least one of your answers should include a specific policy change or initiative that would specifically reduce violence-related trauma experienced in the LGBTQ, disabled, and Black and Brown communities. In Colorado, "restorative justice" is only offered for victims of sexual violence when the perpetrator has already been incarcerated.

**15) Would you support a statewide policy or local pilot that created an optional restorative justice model for victims of sexual assault or domestic violence through diversion (i.e., without using incarceration)? Please explain why or why not.**

*The above statistics point to a failure of our Districts Attorney to aggressively pursue and prosecute sexual assault. We need to properly fund our police to be able to investigate these crimes, and Denver deserves a Mayor who will hold our District Attorney accountable to pursuing prosecution against these offenders. A rapist should be prosecuted and jailed, not "diverted" and released back into Denver to commit this heinous crime again.*

**16) Generally speaking, do you believe DPD has sufficient enforcement resources to reduce sexual and domestic violence in our communities? Briefly explain why or why not and what type of funding changes you would propose if any.**

*Denver Police Department does not have sufficient funding to reduce crime and domestic violence in Denver. The police force is drastically understaffed and underfunded, making Denver less safe.*

**17) Please briefly outline any initiatives, if any, you believe the city should take to reduce sexual violence and domestic assault without the use of incarceration.**

*Men who commit sexual assault or domestic assault should be prosecuted and jailed. A women fleeing an abusive husband should know that she and her family are safe, not worry every day about a knock on their door from their abuser.*

## **Mayoral Specific Questions:**

**A. What are your priorities for the qualifications of the next Police Chief?**

*As Mayor, I will prioritize hiring a Police Chief who is committed to making Denver safer by aggressively enforcing our laws, including enforcement of the camping ban and laws against convicted felons carrying weapons.*

**B. What is your view or understanding of the relationship between the city council and the mayor? Do you want to make any changes to this current relationship?**

**As Mayor I will work close with City Council to increase funding for our police force, enforce our camping ban, and to build more affordable housing in Denver**

**C. Do you currently have a working relationship with the Denver City Council?**

**I am not a politician, I am a former Army officer and small business owner.**

**While I have met with a majority of the existing city council, I do not have a long standing relationship with Denver City Council**

**D. If you were elected as Denver's next mayor, what would accountability for bad behavior in DPD look like? Who should decide officer discipline? If status quo, give examples of situations where justice was achieved.**

*As Mayor, I will hold Denver police officers accountable, accountable for both enforcing our current laws and for their conduct.*

**E. Who/what process should determine the size of the Department of Public Safety's annual budget?**

*The Mayor should determine the size of the Department of Public Safety budget in order to ensure the safety of Denver's citizens.*

**F. What is your history of working on justice transformation or public health and safety initiatives?**

**G. What are your plans regarding the Department of Public Safety's current leadership if you are elected as Denver's next mayor?**

**H. If elected as Denver's next mayor, what would be your top 5 public health and safety priorities to accomplish in your first 100 days?**

*As Mayor, my top three priorities will be reducing crime, homelessness, and the cost of housing in our city.*

The Task Force has prioritized establishing The Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) to implement many of our recommendations. Several cities across the nation have created similar offices. The ONS would exist outside of the Department of Safety but embed community-based safety solutions into the fabric of the city's government. It would also create a hub and infrastructure for nonpunitive and preventative approaches to public safety.

**I. If you are elected as Denver's next mayor, would you work with the Denver Reimagining Policing and Public Safety Taskforce to create a successful and responsive ONS?**

*No*

**J. How would you ensure accountability for oversight of undercover programs involving confidential informants that involve children's, drugs, or anti-gang programs?**

*As Mayor, I will increase funding for our police department to ensure we have sufficient personnel and training to handle these programs.*