

2023 Denver Municipal Candidate Questionnaire on Public Safety & Policing



SARAH PARADY

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 City Council At Large*



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?

I agree wholeheartedly.

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?

I would like us to get serious about moving public safety functions (responses to health emergencies, responses to homelessness, traffic enforcement, gun violence interruption, etc.) out of the police department and under community supervision as the only real path to building trust in government as a provider of safety. Any vision of public safety that relies on continuing to increase police budgets as we have for decades is doomed to fail and to cause more harm in the form of police violence.

The factors that have prevented us from taking this path to date include racism, sensational news reporting about crime, the power of police unions, and lack of courage from elected leaders.

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

Both public health programs and public safety programs only work if they correctly identify the root causes of failures of public health and safety – trauma, racism, economic insecurity, and so on – and if they rely on evidence.

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?

Very. I have read the report and relied on it to understand how to govern in a way that would create true public safety in Denver.

5) What behaviors or activities are currently criminalized in Denver that you view as outdated and harmful?

Crimes of poverty such as blocking rights of way, public urination, breaking park rules, etc. Criminalization of addiction. Duplication of crimes that are also prohibited under state law.

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?

Paying for police brutality settlements through an insurance policy paid for from DPD's own budget, rather than from general funds, makes the most sense to me, because an insurer would have strong reason to push DPD to make meaningful changes to prevent future civil rights violations and the liability that flows from them.

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

The murder of Tyré Nichols showed how limited body cameras are as a solution to police violence.

As an attorney representing victims of excessive force by policy, I have reviewed bodycam footage, and it is often limited in ways that make it less of a true record than might be expected (i.e., some cameras go unactivated or a camera is only activated long after an interaction begins). In addition, current public records laws applicable to police agencies often prevent families and the public from seeing footage for long periods of time. I pushed hard for bar associations in Colorado to support the law requiring police to wear body cams and record interactions, and certainly believe that should continue to be required, but more is needed.

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?

To create more housing without displacing people living in the least-expensive neighborhoods in the city, we need to do several things at once: First, create protections for tenants (rent stabilization if state law changes, a right to counsel in evictions); second, pass a community land trust enabling ordinance that would clear the way for communities to create CLTs and transfer unutilized city property within the bounds of such a body to the trust; third, begin an apartment acquisition fund and give the city a right of first refusal to buy multiunit buildings on the market; fourth, upzone the entire city to allow duplexes, triplexes, and ADUs, and upzone some main corridors further, to spread density more evenly; fifth, find new revenue streams for the city to build and own social housing where all renters pay 30% of income as rent, with preferences for people whose families were previously redlined or displaced.

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

City Council should doggedly seek revenue to fund housing first programs and behavioral health and other supportive services, which are the proven path to ending homelessness; should end the urban camping ban and the senseless policy of sweeping people to nowhere; should end contracts with service providers that discriminate; should rezone to make more areas of the city available for SOS sites, shelters, and supportive housing; and should create funds to acquire existing affordable housing and hotels.

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?

Absolutely; these are core parts of my platform. I do not believe in using public money to drive people further into homelessness and poverty, and I know that people of color and people with disabilities (in particular) are placed at grave risk in encounters with armed police.

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?

Absolutely; these are parts of my platform. In terms of access to long-term treatment, I believe our city budget needs to shift drastically to meeting basic needs and that Council is responsible for securing necessary revenue, by sending taxes to the ballot if necessary and ensuring that the City is lobbying and applying for all available state and federal funds. In terms of drug arrests, I understand the decades of evidence that the war on drugs has been an abject failure and am very interested in reforming the municipal criminal code. In terms of harm reduction and safe use sites, I am strongly supportive – because the evidence is so clear – and would seek an exemption from the Attorney General's Office to allow Denver to open a site (or sites).

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 am strongly supportive of alternate responder programs and would shift existing police funds to support alternate responders within agencies other than DPD.

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?

Absolutely! There is absolutely no meaningful way to investigate police violence without subpoena power over both documents and witnesses. I have seen this firsthand from conducting discovery after filing suit in excessive force cases.

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 should be structured to ensure that officers/deputies who repeatedly act dangerously can be removed from the force and that the public has full information. I would also like to see the Independent Monitor be involved in a "zero budget" process for DPD and DSD (where Council would set a starting-from-zero public safety budget, and the IOM would track the city budget each year to ensure it continually moves closer to the "zero budget").

I am very happy to be vocal about empowering the IOM to give meaningful oversight.

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.

Of course. One of my principles as an attorney representing victims of sexual violence is that it is always my client's choice whether to go to police; for many (especially the communities mentioned in the question), contact with police and carceral systems is traumatizing – but within our current systems, there is no other way to seek accountability, so the choice can be excruciating.

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.

I do not think we budget sufficiently to reduce sexual or domestic violence. I would prefer to see funding added to programs outside police, including far better supports for those needing to escape abusers or heal and recover from abuse or assault and far better prevention programs. In addition, such programs need to be scrutinized to make sure they are competent to serve Black, brown, disabled, and LGBTQ people.

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.

Prevention programs that educate children on body safety and secret-keeping are shown to be effective ways to keep those children safe from some forms of sexual violence (rooted in “grooming” and manipulation) throughout their lives, as are bystander intervention training programs. Because sexual violence and domestic violence are crimes of power and more commonly experienced by people who are marginalized, programs that truly invest in economic security are sexual violence prevention programs.