

# 2023 Denver Municipal Candidate Questionnaire on Public Safety & Policing



## TIM HOFFMAN

*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?**

*Public safety enables each individual to live and grow in our community through a freedom from fear. This means a guarantee of basic rights and protections that ensures their physical safety and wellbeing as well as their mental health, economic security, and access to other basic human needs.*

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?**

*Public health and safety require a proactive effort to assist and help people across our community. This means bolstering access to preventative care and attacking root causes of much of the suffering that people endure.*

*Secure housing for all Denverites, environmental mitigation and improvement, especially in historically marginalized neighborhoods that face the brunt of environmental degradation, and ample treatment providers and resources that can address mental health concerns and addiction in their early stages. It also requires law enforcement that can target and hold accountable the small number of people who pose ongoing safety threats to our community.*

*Funding shortages will always require a balancing of all of these interests. We also have historically Black and Latino neighborhoods that have been underinvested, both from an economic standpoint and as it relates to the lived environment and infrastructure.*

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

*They are inextricably linked. I saw every single day in my role as a prosecutor people coming into my courtroom who were struggling with mental health issues, addiction, financial insecurity, and housing instability. These often serve as root causes of much criminal behavior in Denver. If we don't adequately invest in the public health system, we will end up paying for it on the backend through the criminal justice system. That is a moral tragedy and is also significantly more expensive and less effective than up-front investments.*

**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?**

*We should consider decriminalizing certain traffic offenses that have little impact on the traffic safety. I am supportive of recent steps taken to decriminalize sex workers who are often victims of human trafficking.*

## **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 am always open to ways of saving taxpayer money. That being said, the best way to prevent this burden from falling on Denverites is to make sure that such settlements do not come about in the first place because officers are not acting in a manner that necessitates such pay-outs. There is no single way of making this happen but focusing our efforts on training and recruiting good candidates for these positions should be prioritized.*

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

*I have seen firsthand the role that body worn cameras have in cutting through competing narratives of police interactions and revealing exactly what happened. It is important to note that these videos will never be able to tell the whole story, given that they do not catch every angle and are not recording at all times, but they are extremely helpful in illuminating police interactions as they played out in real-time. I have seen this benefit an investigation and the officers when it has confirmed their reports and accounting of an event. I have also seen them exonerate individuals who were wrongly-charged, both through a refusal of charges being filed or by a judge or jury, when the videos confirm the story of the individual and/or contradict the narrative from the police.*

## **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?**

*We need to make sure that the growth needed here in Denver is spread across the city. Too often, we target development in historically marginalized communities and neighborhoods. Broad-based zoning reform that is not confined to certain areas of the city will help ensure equitable distribution of new development. The city should also assist people at risk of displacement with financing and supports needed to purchase homes or weather difficult periods. This would also mean bolstering the community land trust programs we currently have, expanding them, and having the city aggressively look to purchase properties itself to both rent and sell at affordable rates.*

**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 must fund programs and strategies that we know work. Providing those experiencing homelessness with 1) housing and 2) individualized treatments and supports to stabilize them in our community should be prioritized. City Council also has an oversight function to make sure that HOST and other entities are allocating city dollars where they are most effective will also be a focus of mine. We need to view the solution as a continuum of care that includes safe outdoor sites, tiny home villages, and converted motel and apartment complexes with services and navigators embedded in those locations.*

**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 am supportive of reducing unnecessary contacts between law enforcement and citizens and believe police should be targeted and focused on individuals who pose a threat to community safety.*

## **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?**

*Yes, I am supportive of long-term treatment options and believe we need to boost the overall number of available spaces for people seeking help. I am also supportive of de-emphasizing a law enforcement response to low level drug possession and drug paraphernalia cases. Those situations often require a public health, not public safety response. City Council has already approved a safe consumption site within Denver and but we are prohibited from opening such a facility due to state law. Reducing the number of overdose deaths in our city, which is in the hundreds each year, requires an all-of-the-above type approach.*

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 a huge supporter of these programs and believe that they should be expanded. Not every call for assistance requires a police officer to respond. These programs deserve dedicated funding streams and should be prioritized in the annual budget.*

## 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?**

*Yes, I believe to OIM should have subpoena power to carry out its important functions.*

**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?**

*Denverites should have an active and ongoing oversight function of DPD and DSD. These organizations and the men and women who work within them ultimately work for and on behalf of our entire community. Ensuring that people across our city feel that our public safety departments are listening to their concerns and are responsive to them is an important factor in whether these organizations can carry out their roles effectively. The OIM and COB arose out of collaboration with various community groups who were insisting on improvements to the system at that time. I will regularly engage with Denverites across our city to ensure an ongoing conversation about improvements and changes and will bring these requests with me into the City and County Building.*

## 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.**

*I have resolved numerous cases throughout a restorative justice system and am a big believer in the power this model has to benefit the victim, perpetrator, and community at large. Making sure the victim is the driving force behind his or her desire to participate, or not, is paramount to the success of this model. Especially as it relates to victims of sexual assault or domestic violence, the potential for additional harm and/or re-entry into a cycle of domestic violence is always a concern when it comes to further contact with the perpetrator.*

**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.**

*Intimate partner violence and sex assaults are among the most serious crimes committed and I have seen firsthand how difficult these cases are to investigate and prosecute. There are dedicated units of detectives assigned to investigate these crimes and we should continue to support their work. I would like to see more training and information given to patrol officers as it relates to the initial stages of these investigations, to include bias-motivated crime investigation focus. Patrol officers are very often the first one the scene responding to these calls and those initial contacts with victims and witnesses are crucial to the overall investigation. Making sure that these officers are culturally competent as it relates to marginalized communities helps establish the trust necessary to pursue these difficult cases.*

**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.**

*We should focus more preventative resources with Denver Human Services. With crimes taking place within the home, there are often warning signs and escalations over a period of weeks, months, and sometimes years. Providing families with resources to be aware of some of these concerning behaviors as well as options for counseling and other supports has the potential to prevent an escalation into criminal conduct.*