Black Lives Matter B-town 2024 Primary Questionnaire

Please copy and paste in your OWN document and please complete all questions. Then send back to blacklivesmatterbtown@gmail.com by ***April 10th 2024 5pm.*** *You have one full week to reply.*
IF you are a County Commissioner or County Council candidate there are specific questions for you at the end.

We ask that you think that through carefully and see why they all might apply to the position you are seeking. Bare minimum we want your personal and or political opinion on each question. Do NOT repeat answers from your previous questionnaires. Write in your OWN words do not quote from books, articles or other media.

1. How do you define "anti-racism"? Please try to use your own words and do not quote from a book or online resources. Additionally, how as an elected official would you apply anti-racism? How do you define "privilege"? How has privilege impacted decisions you have made as an elected official, or if you are running for the first time, as an engaged community member? Give specific examples in either your current policies as a seated official or in your candidate platform.

Answer: *Anti-racism is the intentional effort to recognize, confront, and dismantle racism in all of it's forms. Anti-racism recognizes that so-called "colorblind" approaches to equity are deficient because they fail to account for implicit bias, intentionally coded language, disparate outcomes, and the effects of many, many generations of harmful racist policies and practices. As a state representative, I would apply anti-racism by paying attention to not only the explicit language of proposed legislation and policy, but also the ways in which that legislation would either benefit or harm historically marginalized communities.*

Privilege is unearned social advantage granted to certain groups of people on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and other such factors. As a cisgender, heterosexual, white man, I am aware that I have a great deal of privilege. My goal is to use both my candidacy, and my office if elected, to leverage my privilege on behalf of others. I will do this by supporting legislation that promotes holistic justice, equity, and inclusivity as well as opposing harmful legislation that further disenfranchises minoritized people. A few specific legislative goals I would champion are: more accessible and affordable housing, more equitable school funding formulas, the decriminalization of marijuana and other drugs, and a repeal of anti-LBGTQ+ and anti-choice laws.

2. How do you understand Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) measures and/or Affirmative Action? Be specific about your understanding of these concepts. Do you agree or disagree with their implementation in workplace environments (including political ones)? Given the conservative backlash against these initiatives do you believe these are crucial elements of the Democrat party and/or Liberal or Progressive ideals? Why or why not? Have you seen a benefit to these initiatives personally if so, when and where?

Answer*: Similar to anti-racism in general, DEI and Affirmative Action are intentional efforts to correct the effects of generations of discrimination and bias and to promote diversity as an intrinsic good. I support these concepts for two reasons. First, I believe that diversity genuinely*

benefits everyone. Diverse cultures, viewpoints, and experiences make us all better and stronger. In order to maximize those benefits, those diverse viewpoints and experiences must have representation at all levels of our society. Second, I support these concepts because I believe that harm must be repaired. The harmful effects of generational discrimination will not be repaired by colorblind, gender blind, or any other kind of so-called "blind" policy. Because of that, I do believe these concepts are crucial elements of a progressive policy platform.

Having said that, I recognize that there is debate among experts about the most effective way to implement these concepts. Recognizing the limits of my own knowledge, I would seek input from experts before either crafting or voting on legislation that dealt with the specific implementation of these measures. In fact, I'd welcome the opportunity to sit down with members of your council and hear your thoughts about how this could be best addressed at the state level.

3. Since the 2020 surge of support for the BLM movement there has been an extensive backlash/whitelash against the Movement. We see it clearly in the media and politics locally and nationally. Are you as a candidate or a current elected official a supporter of the BLM Movement and its messaging and goals? Do you know what those goals are? If so please articulate them in your own words? Give specific examples of how you support the BLM movement in your policy work or in your candidate platform.

Answer: *Yes, I am a supporter of Black Lives Matter. I have a couple of stories that I wouldn't normally share because I don't think it's appropriate to center myself, but they do at least highlight my intent to be an ally and supporter.*

First, when I look back at my trajectory over time, I can point to the murder of Michael Brown as one of the pivotal moments in my transformation. That event was one of my first "wake-up calls" to the reality of systemic racism in the criminal justice system, and it led me to study the issue more deeply. I read books like The New Jim Crow and The Color of Law and The Color of Compromise and watched documentaries like 13th, just to name a few, and started talking about those issues on social media and in my churches. The more I learned, the more I shared publicly, and the more pushback I received, which began to open my eyes to the pervasiveness of bias around me.

Several years later, in 2019, I was deployed overseas, and I was in the middle-east in 2020 when George Floyd was murdered. As you might imagine, military environments tend to skew politically conservative, and I was troubled by some of what I was seeing and hearing from other military members who were also deployed to that base, not least because I had Black Soldiers under my care who were deeply affected both by Floyd's murder and the responses they were seeing back home as well as on deployment. In response, I obtained some stencils and spray-painted "Black Lives Matter" on a t-shirt that I wore around base when I wasn't in uniform. On several occasions I was pulled aside by Black Soldiers, many of whom I had never met, who told me how much they appreciated such a simple gesture in that environment. While over there, I helped to facilitate discussion groups to educate Soldiers about the reality of systemic racism in the justice system. At one point, I was reprimanded by a senior leader for being "too political" and another white Soldier filed a complaint against me because he believed I was engaging in "reverse racism." I don't share these stories for sympathy; I am well aware

that my experiences of minor discomfort trying to be an ally cannot be compared with the experience of actually enduring racism as a person of color. I share these stories simply to illustrate that I have endeavored to leverage my privilege as an ally and bring awareness to the reality of the pervasiveness of systemic and structural racism within my spheres of influence. In fact, it was my own growing awareness of those issues that led me to take this next step in running for office. As I often say in my speeches, I woke up to the reality that charity doesn't fix what policy creates, and this is my attempt to make meaningful change at the level of public policy to dismantle the systems of injustice and inequality that have resulted in such disparate outcomes for people of color, people in poverty, and people from other historically marginalized communities.

4. To the best of your knowledge, describe why people of color are disproportionately targeted and arrested by the criminal justice system. What ideas do you have to make the justice system more equitable and impartial? What concerns do you have about the militarization of our police force?

***Answer**: Historical analysis shows that the racial disparities in the criminal justice system are the result of intentional efforts to disenfranchise people of color. Over time, the explicitly racist justifications were replaced with increasingly coded language, but the ongoing disparities betray the underlying racial discrimination. One simple way to begin would be by decriminalizing drugs and other non-violent offenses. Another strategy that has proven effective is the use of social services in lieu of law enforcement. I support this broadly, but especially in schools as a way to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. I would also support legislation to end cash bail and allow incarcerated persons the right to vote.*

I strongly oppose the militarization of our police force as it reinforces a dangerous "us vs them" mindset and promotes escalation instead of de-escalation, which leads to greater harm in general, and disproportionately to people of color.

5. What does Restorative Justice look like to you? Given the amazing response from our community against the new jail, what programs focused on Restorative Justice do you support or would you support as an elected official to lower the number of community members who are incarcerated? How would these ideas be implemented? Give as many details as you can.

***Answer**: To me, restorative justice looks like a communally and relationally focused practice wherein offenders take ownership of the harm they have done and attempt, as much as possible, to make whole those who were harmed. In contrast to a merely penal system, restorative justice seeks to restore both the victim and the offender, and, when possible, the relational bond between them. I would support legislation that prioritizes restorative justice options for all non-violent offenses, especially for first-time offenders, as well as legislation that incentivizes restorative justice as an option even for violent offenses. In the end, restorative justice practices are better for offenders, victims, and society at large.*

Like DEI/Affirmative Action above, I recognize the limitations of my own knowledge when it comes to specific programs and implementation. This is another area that I would need to bring in people with more knowledge and experience. I would likewise welcome the opportunity to discuss this with members of your council to learn more about your hopes and vision.

6. Describe a society in which there are no prisons or jails. How does that justice system differ from ours? What other aspects of culture would be different in a society without the carceral state? How would this change or eliminate policing? Would you support this type of society?

***Answer**: A society in which there are no prisons or jails is a society that prioritizes addressing the root causes of crime, most notably poverty, mental illness, and a lack of social connection. Such a society would invest heavily in public education, social safety nets, and public health. Public safety would look like a safety force comprised primarily of social workers and other mental health professionals, and a lot fewer armed police officers. The justice system would look a lot more like substance abuse treatment and counseling, job training, conflict mediation, and actual rehabilitation (to include the kind of restorative justice mentioned above). I would absolutely support this type of society.*

7. Given the American legacy of slavery, tyranny, and discrimination against Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color; do you believe that White Supremacy exists within US society today? If so, please give as many examples as you think are necessary to elucidate that belief, and if NOT please tell us why. Name a specific issue/s in our community relating to White Supremacy and how you have or would respond to it.

***Answer:** Yes, White Supremacy absolutely exists within US society today, and it has become increasingly more explicit over the last 8+ years. Extreme examples include such events as the Charlottesville "Unite the Right" event and the presence of violent extremist groups demonstrating across the country, all the way to the recent interruption of a Bloomington City Council meeting by neo-Nazi's and white supremacists. But White Supremacy goes beyond these extreme, explicit examples. For example, it can be found in the way traditionally white cultural norms are assumed to be normative for everyone. Different manifestations of White Supremacy require different kinds of responses. Outright manifestations of it like the ones mentioned above must be unequivocally condemned. Beyond that, education is an invaluable tool for combatting the more subtle expressions of White Supremacy. This is precisely why I would oppose legislation that prevents educators at every level from teaching students about the ways White Supremacy has been interwoven into the very fabric of our systems and structures, and I would support legislation that requires students to be taught that history at age-appropriate levels.*

8. Given that 44 Million people are food-insecure in the US and given that the rate for Monroe County is 12.2% (over 17,000 residents), what plans or ideas do you have for food justice in our community? Do you support community based food programs that bring locally grown nutrient dense food to those in need? If so please detail those programs here.

**Statistics from Feeding America Org 2021*
https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/food-insecurity

Answer: *Addressing food insecurity in our state will require a multi-pronged approach. At the state-level, I would support legislation that removes as much means-testing and asset-testing as possible from assistance programs. I would also support increasing state subsidies for food banks as well as community-based food programs. I would support some sort of state subsidy or tax incentive to build grocery stores in identified food deserts.*

9. Bloomington/Monroe County finds itself in an affordable housing crisis. How will you ensure more affordable housing? Do you support density housing with priority given to people of color, people making under $30,000 a year, families with dependents, and disabled people? What is your definition of "affordable" housing? Specifically, please discuss non-student housing.

Answer:*The standard definition of affordable housing as housing that costs less than 30% of an occupant's income. While I think that's a helpful benchmark, that's utterly unrealistic given our current minimum wage and cost of living. At minimum, a person working full-time at minimum wage should be able to afford safe, livable housing. We are nowhere close to that. Affordable housing, like food insecurity, requires a multi-prong approach. First, we need to build more housing. We need an increased supply of both affordable density housing as well as affordable "starter" homes. I would support either some sort of subsidy or tax incentive for developers who commit to building housing developments under a certain price-point, with protections built in to prioritize the groups listed in the question above and to guard against outside investment firms buying up the properties and pricing out local renters and buyers, as they've been doing in Monroe County. I'd also support measures that incentivize multi-occupancy buildings to operate at full-capacity and that offer rent on a sliding scale proportional to income. Additionally, I would support a tenant's bill of rights to protect against predatory landlording practices. Finally, I'd support an increase to the minimum wage so that more of the current housing supply would be accessible to more people.*