



Michelle Bennett Questionnaire 2026

State Representative, 5th LD, Position 1

What are your top three priorities to achieve in your term?

My top three priorities are public safety, affordability, and accountable government. First, I want Washington families to feel safe in their homes, schools, businesses, and public spaces. That means supporting law enforcement, behavioral health response, prosecutors, public defenders, and treatment capacity so the system works from first call through resolution. Second, affordability must be central to every decision. Families and small businesses are being squeezed by taxes, fees, housing costs, energy costs, and rising insurance. I will oppose broad-based tax increases that make Washington harder to afford and will push for regulatory and permitting reforms that reduce unnecessary costs. Third, I will focus on accountable, practical government. The state should measure whether programs are working before expanding them, prioritize core services, and respect local control, while removing state-created barriers that prevent housing, infrastructure, and economic opportunity.

What policy changes will you pursue to ensure mobility for all road users and reduce car dependence?

Mobility policy has to reflect how people actually live in the 5th District. Many residents depend on cars because transit service is limited, job centers are spread out, and rural and suburban communities do not have Seattle-level density. Reducing car dependence should mean adding realistic choices, not punishing people who still need to drive. Light rail has yet to come to Issaquah. I would support investments that make roads safer for all users, including better shoulder treatments, safer crossings near schools and town centers, protected pedestrian



routes where appropriate, and practical bike and trail connections. I would also support transit improvements that are reliable and useful, especially park-and-ride access, east-west connections, and service that helps workers, students, seniors, and people with disabilities reach jobs, medical care, and schools. The state should coordinate transportation, housing, and land-use decisions so growth is matched with infrastructure. Mobility succeeds when families have more safe, affordable options without making daily life harder for the people who cannot simply give up a car.

What will you do to address our homelessness crisis and to fund deeply affordable housing?

Homelessness requires both compassion and accountability. Washington needs more shelter, behavioral health treatment, addiction recovery, and step-down housing, but we also need clear expectations and better coordination so people do not remain trapped in encampments or cycle through emergency systems. For deeply affordable housing, I would prioritize faster permitting, lower construction costs, reuse of appropriate public land, and partnerships with nonprofit, faith-based, and local providers that can deliver housing efficiently. State dollars should be tied to measurable outcomes: units delivered, people housed, treatment accessed, and long-term stability achieved. I am cautious about simply creating new taxes without first fixing the cost drivers that make housing so expensive to build. Every month added by permitting delays, litigation risk, code complexity, or utility constraints increases the final cost. We need to stretch existing housing dollars farther, remove barriers to production, and focus limited public subsidy on people with the greatest need, including seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, families with children, and those leaving homelessness.



Which reforms to zoning, building codes, permitting, and the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) are needed and how far should state preemption go to increase housing production?

Washington needs more housing, but state preemption should be targeted and respectful of infrastructure realities. I support reforms that make permitting faster, more predictable, and less expensive, especially for infill housing, accessory dwelling units, missing-middle housing where infrastructure exists, and projects near transit and job centers. SEPA should protect the environment, not serve as a duplicative process to delay housing that already complies with comprehensive plans, zoning, and environmental standards. The state should reduce duplicative review, create clearer timelines, and require agencies to coordinate earlier on utilities, roads, schools, stormwater, and fire access. Building code reforms should focus on safety while avoiding unnecessary cost escalation. Energy efficiency matters, but mandates should be evaluated for affordability, feasibility, and grid capacity, now and into the foreseeable future. Preemption should go far enough to remove artificial barriers to housing production, but not so far that Olympia ignores local geography, rural areas, wildfire risk, water capacity, sewer constraints, school capacity, or transportation impacts. Housing policy has to work on the ground, not just on paper. Each municipality is unique, and local government typically understand constraints better than Olympia has the ability to.

Do you think the state's Vision Zero goal to eliminate traffic deaths by 2030 is achievable and what steps will you take to support the goal, especially in light of pedestrian deaths increasing in many areas of the state?

The goal of eliminating traffic deaths is the right moral standard, even if reaching zero by 2030 and beyond is statistically not likely. But rapid innovations in technology may bring forward technologies not available today for us to utilize



tomorrow. Government should not accept preventable deaths as the cost of mobility. I would focus on practical safety improvements that reduce the most serious injuries: safer crossings, better lighting, traffic calming where warranted, safer school routes, improved shoulders and sidewalks, and data-driven fixes at high-collision corridors. In suburban and rural districts, pedestrian safety often depends on basic infrastructure that dense cities may take for granted: shoulders, lighting, crosswalk visibility, safe bus stops, and enforcement of dangerous driving behavior. Complete streets is one element in incorporated areas that can be helpful in this regard. I also support stronger coordination between state transportation agencies, cities, counties, law enforcement, schools, and transit agencies. Safety cannot be separated from behavior, design, and accountability. We should address impaired driving, excessive speed, distracted driving, and repeat dangerous conduct while also designing roads that reduce the likelihood that one mistake becomes fatal.

Washington State has made progress on making its tax code fairer to the working class, but it still ranks as the second most regressive tax code in the country behind only Florida. Are there additional progressive revenue options you support and would fight to pass at the state legislature?

I do not support broad new tax increases or expansion of Washington's income tax structure. Families and small businesses are already facing high costs for housing, energy, transportation, groceries, insurance, and childcare. The state should not treat affordability concerns as a reason to layer on more taxes that ultimately flow back to consumers, workers, and local employers. I do support reviewing the tax code for fairness, transparency, and competitiveness. That includes scrutinizing tax preferences to ensure they produce a public benefit, improving accountability for state spending, and making sure existing revenues are used effectively before asking taxpayers for more. A fairer tax system should also include cost control. If state policy drives up housing, fuel, electricity, permitting, and compliance costs,



working families pay those costs regardless of whether they appear as a tax bill. My priority would be affordability, discipline, and transparency rather than creating new revenue streams without first addressing spending and cost drivers.

What community safety investments should the legislature prioritize? (e.g. police departments, co-responders, addiction or mental health treatment programs, jails and prisons, education, public defenders, prosecutors)

Community safety requires a complete system. Based on my law enforcement background, I believe the Legislature should invest in recruitment, retention, training, and staffing for police departments, but that cannot stand alone. Officers are often asked to respond to behavioral health, addiction, homelessness, and family crisis calls that require more tools than a patrol response. I support co-responder programs, crisis stabilization, addiction treatment, mental health treatment, and diversion where it is appropriate and accountable. At the same time, Washington must have functioning prosecutors, public defenders, courts, and jail capacity so that serious and repeat offenses are addressed. A system that cannot respond consistently loses public trust and fails victims, defendants, officers, and communities. Prevention also matters. Education, youth programs, domestic violence response, reentry support, and treatment access can reduce crime before it occurs. The priority should be a balanced model: prevention where possible, treatment where needed, accountability where required, and enough staffing across the system to make those promises real.

The proliferation of AI and big data is straining power grids and threatens to make electricity prices unaffordable and exacerbate the climate crisis. What policy solutions would you pursue to this problem?



Washington needs an energy strategy that is clean, reliable, and affordable. AI and data centers create real demand on the grid, and the state should not allow that demand to push electricity prices beyond what families and small businesses can afford. That being said, recent applications within the 5th Legislative District have highlighted the lack of information in the public and among elected officials relative to battery energy storage facilities. These need to be studied as to local impacts and environmental ones. I would support stronger long-range planning for load growth, transmission capacity, and firm power. Large energy users should be expected to pay their fair share of infrastructure costs and should not shift those costs onto residential ratepayers. Utilities and regulators should have clear tools to evaluate whether new large-load projects have adequate power, transmission, and cost allocation plans. At the same time, Washington should not drive away technology jobs through unpredictable policy. We need permitting certainty for new generation and transmission, realistic timelines, and an all-of-the-above approach that includes hydropower, nuclear innovation, storage, conservation, and other reliable low-carbon resources. Climate policy fails if it makes energy unaffordable or unreliable. The goal should be cleaner power without sacrificing affordability or grid stability.

Do you support universal healthcare in Washington State?

I support the goal of every Washingtonian having access to affordable, high-quality health care. I do not support moving Washington into a state-run universal health care system that eliminates choice, destabilizes existing coverage, or creates unsustainable tax obligations. Health care reform should focus on affordability, access, workforce capacity, and transparency. Washington needs more primary care, behavioral health providers, substance-use treatment capacity, rural and community-based care, and better access for seniors, working families, and people with disabilities. We also need to reduce administrative burdens that drive providers



out of practice and make care harder to access. I would support targeted reforms that lower premiums, increase provider availability, improve price transparency, expand mental health access, and protect patients from surprise costs. The test should be whether people can actually get care when they need it, close to home, at a price they can afford, without forcing families into a one-size-fits-all system.

To what extent should automated enforcement be used for public safety, and in what areas or contexts?

Automated enforcement can be appropriate in limited, safety-focused contexts, but it must be transparent, accountable, and not used primarily as a revenue tool. I would consider it for clearly documented high-risk locations such as school zones, work zones, red-light intersections with crash histories, and areas with repeated dangerous speeding or pedestrian injuries. Any program should include clear signage, public reporting, privacy protections, due process, and regular review to determine whether crashes and injuries are actually declining. Revenue should be dedicated to safety improvements, not general government spending. I am cautious about broad expansion. Automated enforcement should not replace officer discretion, become a substitute for road design improvements, or disproportionately burden people who are already struggling financially. The priority should be preventing dangerous conduct and saving lives, not issuing as many tickets as possible.

Did you use a generative artificial intelligence (AI) platform to craft some or all of your responses? What was the extent of your use?

Yes. Generative AI was used as an editing tool for spelling, grammar, and word counts. AI was not used to invent policy positions or personal experience, given the extent of my time in law enforcement.