



Candidate Name: James Suh

Office Sought: 45th Ward Alderman

Ward: 45

Campaign Committee Name: Friends of James Suh

Campaign Website: <https://suhfor45.com>

Campaign Finance

- 1. Running a political campaign is expensive, and candidates without deep pockets or wealthy connections often can't afford to compete. Would you support a public campaign financing program for Chicago city elections, such as a small donor matching or voucher "Democracy Dollars" program? Would you include the new elected school board and Police District Council in a public financing program?**

Yes. A public funding option would open the door to a broader range of candidates, gives the community a greater voice in their representation, and would allow candidates to spend more time working with constituents instead of fundraising.

- 2. Currently, entities doing (or seeking to do) business with the City are limited to contributing \$1,500 to City officials' campaigns. But the limitation [does not extend to officers](#) or other high-level employees of those entities, who can still contribute thousands to officials making decisions about contracts with their companies. Would you support eliminating this loophole, as [cities like New York](#) have?**

Absolutely, this loophole should be eliminated.

- 3. Would you support reducing the City's campaign contribution limit from lobbyists and city vendors from \$1500 to \$750 or another number? Feel free to explain.**



Yes, the limit should be lowered significantly. To restore public trust in government, we need to eliminate opportunities for improprieties or even the appearance of such.

- 4. Do you support any other campaign finance or other reforms that could make the system more transparent and ethical, and make it easier for people of diverse backgrounds to run for office?**

I'd like to see greater transparency in 501c4 reporting requirements to shine a light on so-called "dark money" and more restrictions on independent expenditure committees which can have a significant impact on elections.

Elections

- 1. Ranked-choice voting (RCV) has been adopted around the country as a way of eliminating low-turnout primaries and making elections more democratic. Do you support the adoption of ranked choice voting (RCV) for Chicago's mayoral elections?**

[Click here for more information about ranked-choice voting.](#)

I support adopting ranked choice voting. It would save the city millions on running a second election and would better reflect the people's true preferences. In today's system, too many voters cast a tactical vote, often based on uncertain polling information, for a candidate who is not their top choice but who they think is most likely to make it into and win a runoff. RCV let's voters make authentic choices based on values and policy, and would be more likely to have better outcomes.

- 2. Do you support the adoption of ranked choice voting (RCV) for aldermanic and other city offices?**

[Click here for more information about ranked-choice voting.](#)

Yes, for all the reasons stated above. And if we're going to switch to RCV it should be used consistently for all city positions to reduce voter confusion.



3. The petition gathering and challenge process can make it hard for some good candidates to make it onto the ballot. Would you support state-level efforts to reform the system and, if so, what would you propose?

I believe there should be some threshold of demonstrated support and organization that candidates should have to overcome to get on the ballot, and it's important to have some process to address fraud and bad actors. But Chicago also has a history of bad faith objections to cast a shadow over candidates, while costing them time and money.

A few reforms I'd support include allowing voters to sign for multiple aldermanic candidates. Limiting voters to sign for one candidate makes it almost a de facto vote and goes against the spirit of broadening options on the ballot. That rule generally favors incumbents who can organize and essentially lock up a percentage of voters early, making it even more difficult for challengers. At the state level, the threshold for independent, third-party candidates is too high, making it very difficult for unaffiliated candidates to get on the ballot. The objection process should be streamlined to limit objections to clear fraud, not minor technicalities, and reduce the amount of time campaigns are in limbo waiting for a determination. Digital signatures would simplify the overall process and might reduce opportunities for frivolous objections.

4. Proposals to reform the petition process include allowing [digital on-site signatures](#) (e.g. [HB 4966](#)), [online signatures](#), or instituting a maximum number of signatures per office. What are your thoughts on these ideas?

I support digital signatures. Online signatures would be interesting, with proper validation, but perhaps should not account for more than some specified percentage of overall signatures. There's something to be said for meeting voters where they are, and having real conversations, that you lose with online signatures.

General

1. Have you had any past experience with good governance and reform efforts? If so, we're eager to hear about it.



Examples of good governance and reform efforts: government transparency and accessibility, ethics, voting and elections, campaign finance.

While not directly involved with the advocacy work, I worked in IT at the Joyce Foundation, supporting their mission and work. The Foundation's advocacy includes campaign finance reform, fair representation, and voting rights.

Over a year ago, I filed a civil rights lawsuit against Alderman Jim Gardiner after I learned he had abused the authority of his office to obtain and leak old court records, dating back to when I was in high school, to try to damage my reputation. I believe strongly in ethical, transparent leadership and when abused, holding those in power accountable.

- 2. Would you support an effort to reduce the size of the Chicago City Council? If so, what is your ideal number of wards/alderpeople? If not, please explain.**

Before reducing the size of City Council, there are other structural changes to how city business is done that would have to come first. Providing top notch constituent services is important, and many ward offices are already stretched thin. Ward budgets would have to be increased relative to the reduction in wards. The delivery of quality and timely city services citywide would have to be improved so residents could rely more on 311 and less on calling the ward office to get a new garbage can or replace a street light. With fewer aldermen also comes the risks associated with consolidated power and opportunities and impact of abuses of authority.

- 3. Recent news reports assert that some Chicago City Council committees [rarely meet](#) and may function more as remnants of a [patronage system](#) than as effective governing bodies. In your opinion, should the number of committees be reduced from nineteen? Are there any other reforms to the committee system you would propose?**

I don't know what the right number of committees is, but they should only exist to get work done for the people of Chicago. Committees that aren't meeting, which only exist for the mayor to dole out chairmanships or jobs, shouldn't exist or need



better leadership. One change I would like to see is an independent City Council who selects their own committee chairs, as they are supposed to, instead of deferring to the mayor.

- 4. Do you believe that Chicago's mayor and city council must do more to limit "aldermanic prerogative"? Why or why not? If so, what steps do you think should be taken to limit it?**

It's complicated. As the ward's representative, aldermanic prerogative can be employed positively, to better the community, but I've also personally witnessed occasions where it has been abused. We saw that in the 45th ward, where a project otherwise beneficial to the community and local economy was stalled by the incumbent for purely political reasons. I think aldermanic input should be considered, along with many other factors such as public support, and benefit to the community and city, but that privilege should not be the final say it often is today.

Ethics

- 1. How will you work to ensure city leaders elevate the needs of the public over personal or special interests?**

I will continue to advocate for greater transparency, and will be supportive of any reform efforts that strengthen the penalties for ethical violations and empower the Board of Ethics and the Office of the Inspector General to effectively enforce the City's Code of Ethics.

- 2. Should candidates for mayor have to disclose their tax returns for the past two years?**

Greater transparency is always to the public's benefit. Disclosing tax returns helps to identify potential conflicts of interest.

- 3. Do you believe the Chicago City Council should become more independent of the mayor? If so, please explain the specific changes you'd like to see.**



Absolutely. I would like to see enforcement of Rule 36, so City Council is not beholden to the mayor, by selecting committee chairs themselves. City Council should also have their own independent legal counsel.