

# ACLU People Power Washington

## 2022 Policing and Public Safety Candidate Questionnaire – State Legislature



[People Power Washington – Police Accountability](#) strives to bring just and equitable public safety to our local communities through relationship building, education and policy reform. We champion policies that divest from police and reinvest in community-based solutions and alternate crisis response, decriminalize non-serious offenses, and implement accountability and enforceable standards for police officers and agencies. Our vision is for public safety in Washington to be community-driven and to meet the needs of all people equitably.

Our group’s work advocating for police accountability in our local communities has made us well aware of the important role our local government and elected officials play in driving policy around this issue. Appreciating the impact the Washington State Legislature has on our day-to-day lives, our hope is to empower voters with a non-partisan resource to understand how to vote their values through a lens of police reform and re-imagining of public safety.

### Candidate Information

<b>Candidate Name</b>	Sharon Tomiko Santos
<b>Position Sought</b>	State Representative, 37 <sup>th</sup> Legislative District, Position 1
<b>Campaign Contact Information</b>	Website: <a href="https://friendsofsantos.nationbuilder.com">https://friendsofsantos.nationbuilder.com</a> Email: <a href="mailto:info@FriendsofSantos.com">info@FriendsofSantos.com</a>

## Part I – Yes/No Questions

**1. Do you support prohibiting traffic stops by armed law enforcement officers for low-level, non-moving violations such as vehicle registration violations and equipment failure?**

<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>No</b>	
<b>Additional Comments</b>	

- Traffic stops are one of the most common ways members of the general public interact with police. For decades, there have been significant racial disparities in traffic stops, particularly for low-level violations, unjustified by the crime-fighting value. This undermines community trust, fairness, and wastes law enforcement resources.
- While there’s a perception that traffic stops are dangerous for police, the reality is that they are far more dangerous for those being stopped, especially if they are people of color.
- As a result, Seattle and other jurisdictions, including Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and the State of Virginia, have restricted or banned traffic stops for low-level traffic violations.

**2. Do you support establishing an Independent Prosecutor for cases of criminal conduct arising from police killings?**

<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>No</b>	
<b>Additional Comments</b>	

- Police investigating themselves present an inherent conflict of interest. County Prosecutors work closely with law enforcement and rely on law enforcement for gathering evidence, interviewing witnesses, and providing defense to law enforcement.
- Prosecutors, exercising prosecutorial discretion, often fail to file criminal charges even when unarmed citizens are killed at the hands of law enforcement.

**3. Do you support a state law that would remove obstacles, like qualified immunity, when suing police officers for violating a person’s civil rights?**

<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>No</b>	
<b>Additional Comments</b>	

- Today when someone’s constitutional rights have been violated or they are seriously injured or killed by the police, victims or victims’ families can only sue police or the department under federal law 42 USC 1983.
- This federal law includes the legal principle of qualified immunity, which protects government officials performing discretionary immunity from civil suits unless the plaintiff shows that the official violated "clearly established statutory or constitutional rights of which a reasonable person would have known."
- In essence, there are little to no consequences for when law enforcement commits the above actions.
- State legislation could give individuals a legal remedy under state law that does not currently exist.

**4. Do you support a state law that would authorize the Attorney General’s (AG’s) Civil Rights Division to investigate a law enforcement department where there are patterns of misconduct?**

<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>No</b>	
<b>Additional Comments</b>	

- Today, in order to hold a law enforcement department accountable for patterns and practices of misconduct such as discriminatory policing, the US Department of Justice is the only entity that can investigate the department and bring a lawsuit or consent decree to effect change.
- State legislation could authorize the AG’s Civil Rights Division to investigate systemic practices that deprive individuals of rights protected by the Washington Constitution, to address the most harmful practices in a department and ensure a minimum quality of policing across Washington.

**5. Do you support strengthening law enforcement accountability by establishing statewide protocols for complaints, investigations, discipline, and disciplinary appeals for serious misconduct?**

<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>No</b>	
<b>Additional Comments</b>	

- Holding officers accountable through termination or suspension for serious misconduct at the department-level is important for maintaining public trust and confidence in law enforcement.
- Currently, procedures for administrative accountability are determined separately for each police department or sheriff's office across the state resulting in inconsistencies and lack of public trust.

**6. Do you support ending long term solitary confinement?**

<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>No</b>	
<b>Additional Comments</b>	

- The UN Mandela Rules define long term solitary confinement as torture.
- Human beings have a basic biological need to establish and maintain contact with others. The deprivation of human contact causes severe psychological consequences including depression, anxiety, paranoia, PTSD, psychosis, self-harm and even suicide, which interfere with rehabilitation of incarcerated people.
- The use of solitary confinement does not reduce violence or staff assaults in prisons.

## Part II – Free Response Questions

What is your idea of public safety? What are tangible ways to measure progress toward this goal?

In my idealized vision, public safety is achieved through both individual and collective efforts to ensure that persons and property are respected by all and that just laws are applied and enforced justly. Of course, this overly-simplistic statement requires seismic changes in our societal attitudes and behaviors as well as a transformation of government policies, practices, and training. As a pragmatist, I believe incremental progress toward this vision can be achieved only by a myriad of much smaller and discrete goals or objectives.

To this end, I consider one essential goal in my big vision the transformation of our local law enforcement agency to eradicate the “us versus them” mindset on the part of the commissioned police officers AND on the part of the communities which are policed. In particular, I would focus on recruitment and retention strategies to attract a more diverse and locally resident police force so that communities – especially those communities with historical reasons to be skeptical of the police - will be able to recognize their neighbors and their family members among those enforcing our laws. To the extent that housing is unaffordable for police officers, I would encourage the employing jurisdiction to build public housing for these public servants. Another measurable strategy is to establish some type of long-term relationship-building practice or endeavor between the police agency and those communities with which no deep relationship exists. The point of these ideas is to create community **with** law enforcement in an effort to promote common cause and common identity.

In addition, we must continue to support ongoing training for our police officers to reinforce their roles as civilian peace officers rather than as municipal militia. Critical to this endeavor is the need to remove qualified immunity for the police. As long as law enforcement personnel receive special treatment for wrongful actions, they cannot be “in community” with those being policed because they are “above the law.”

What would you do, as a state legislator, to further your idea of public safety?

Given my committee assignments, I can be most effective in furthering my ideas by facilitating policy discussions on the Capital Budget committee about the feasibility and value of public-owned housing for teachers, first responders, transit operators, and other public servants who perform essential work. I am also committed to furthering my work to embed work-integrated learning as a core feature of K-12 education, whereby students are engaged in career exploration and work-based experiences in order to apply their academic lessons. Most general purpose governments are well-suited to serving as full partners in this strategy because these workplaces include multiple types of occupations, from accountants to scientists as well as first responders. Finally, I will continue to support and advocate for better policies and practices of police accountability throughout the state as well as for additional gun control measures.

Are there police reform/accountability measures that are not addressed here that you think would

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be productive to pursue?

While not addressing the more common elements police reform or police accountability, I do think that we should consider re-thinking what a modern law enforcement or police agency should look like in light of the complex conditions of our society and the needs of our communities. Personally, I would like to envision an authority comprised primarily of a corps of community service officers to work with and to assist our public health teams, public housing navigators, and our many non-profit human service providers in reaching residents needing essential services and in helping to redirect people in crisis away from harmful or criminal activities as well as to provide services such as traffic and crowd control. I think that the conventional security aspect should be, in comparison, a less prominent feature of our police agencies.

**I affirm that all the information provided in response to this questionnaire is true, complete, and correct to the best of my ability, and that no relevant matter has been omitted.**

Signature



Date: June 27, 2022

Printed Name

Sharon Tomiko Santos