

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

Candidate Name	Debra Lekanoff
Position Sought	Representative to the 40 th LD
Campaign Contact Information	Website: https://debralekanoff.com/ Email: votedebralekanoff@gmail.com

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?

Yes	x
No	
Additional Comments	

- 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?

Yes	x
No	
Additional Comments	

- 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?

Yes	x
No	
Additional Comments	

- 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?

Yes	x
No	
Additional Comments	

- 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?

Yes	x
No	
Additional Comments	

- 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?

Yes	x
No	
Additional Comments	

- 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?

Protecting our communities and ensuring their safety is a top priority for our state. We must also ensure that we are allowing those who have made a mistake to reenter our society and succeed. I believe in protecting the most vulnerable and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to work for a better life. This year, I was proud to support policies to increase protections for those affected by gun violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, and harassment; provide more support for law enforcement; and support re-entry for those who have paid their debt to society.

In addition, I successfully passed legislation in the 2020 session that will help make our communities safer for us all. House Bill 2785 requires that two additional private citizens, at least one from a federally recognized tribe, serve on the Criminal Justice Training Commission, which develops and provides training for law enforcement. Communities have been working with law enforcement to improve interactions between police and the communities they serve, and this new law represents a commitment that the collaborative work will continue.

Finally, I look forward to working with our local governments to ensure our first responders have the communication equipment necessary to keep our communities safe during natural disasters and other emergencies. Currently, many of our local law enforcement agencies and fire departments have outdated technologies and upgrading or replacing equipment could cost millions. Cities and counties alone cannot afford this, yet we need to make these investments. I will continue to advocate for the state to take part in securing the emergency communication technologies our cities and counties need to keep us all safe.

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

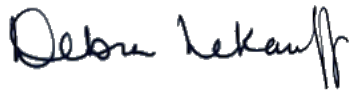
We need to increase officer training and fund diversion programs to decrease the involvement law enforcement has with tasks, such as addressing homelessness and mentally ill people, and we need to make sure other agencies have the resources to address those so that police can continue to focus on protecting communities. In the 2019-2020 session, I was a co-sponsor for many bills that would have provided additional training opportunities for law enforcement officers, including HB 2538, 2539, and 2560. We must continue to have conversations across all levels of government with all stakeholders to create a system that works to protect everyone.

Are there police reform/accountability measures that are not addressed here that you think would be productive to pursue?

I look forward to working with our local governments to ensure our first responders have the communication equipment necessary to keep our communities safe during natural disasters and other emergencies. Currently, many of our local law enforcement agencies and fire departments have outdated technologies and upgrading or replacing equipment could cost millions. Cities and counties alone cannot afford this, yet we need to make these investments. I will continue to advocate for the state to take part in securing the emergency communication technologies our cities and counties need to keep us all safe. When we have efficient first responders, our communities are safer.

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 15th, 2022

Printed Name

Debra Lekanoff