

2024 Pierce County Democrats Endorsement Questionnaire -Pierce County Partisan Offices-

Candidate name: Rosie Ayala

Position sought: Pierce County Council District 4

Date submitted: Feb 28, 2024

Candidate qualities and conduct: The Pierce County Democratic Central Committee endorses and supports qualified Democrats seeking elected office. When deciding whether to recommend endorsement, the Endorsements Committee may consider the candidate's dedication to Democratic Party values and principles, the viability of the campaign, and the candidate's qualifications for office, among other things. Endorsed candidates are discouraged from supporting non-Democratic candidates or from supporting any candidate who doesn't represent Democratic values. Endorsed candidates should distinguish themselves from any Democratic opponents in an objectively fair, informational, and non-confrontational fashion.

By submitting this endorsement questionnaire, I publicly affirm:

- I am a Democrat or will uphold Democratic Party values.
- I will abide by the above principles of conduct.

You may respond N/A (not applicable) if appropriate. Expand or decrease space as needed. Completed forms are not confidential and will be published on-line for the Pierce County Democrat voting membership.

Questions

1. Why are you running for this office?

My desire to run for County Council stems from my experience in the nonprofit world (education access and homeless youth) as well as the time I have spent serving on the Metro Parks Board of Commissioners, Joint Municipal Action Committee, and Tacoma Arts Commission and the challenges faced in those spaces. There is so much wealth of wisdom in community and desire to support one another with available resources. When it comes to government work, such as that of County Council, a big responsibility can be bucketed into two categories – money and rules. As I reflect on the work of the many community members that I've encountered in my career, there are so many money and rules issues that get in the way of progress. Those are sometimes by design and sometimes unintentional.

When it comes to doing direct service work, there is little capacity to think through, what is often a long and involved process to change money and rules. That is completely understandable, the immediate needs of community take time to address due to the unique circumstances of people and this takes significant involvement. I have involved myself in policy creation through my service roles and it's something that is part of my day-job. I personally benefited from services brought forward by government allocations and I cannot imagine where I'd be today if I didn't have the care and commitment of the many programs that supported me throughout my life as I navigated employment issues, education services, and unhoused services.

Having a seat on County Council means that I can continue my service to the public by strengthening human-centered policy to our great County. My priority is to enhance the quality of life for residents of Pierce County. I'm proud to already be serving areas of District 4 in my official and volunteer roles and I KNOW there is so much possibility within the county when it comes to education, housing, safety, and human services. We must build a better infrastructure for ourselves and future generations.

Bold leadership, community mindset, and lived experience gives me the skills to continue on the great work that Pierce County Council has begun and enhance with every passing year. We're better when we're working together on issues surrounding housing affordability, resource access, mental health services, safety, youth programs, and environmental justice. I want to make sure that the rules and funding surrounding our most pressing issues are allocated appropriately and that we take a preventative and proactive position when it comes to quality of life. I want all Pierce County residents to be proud of where they live and I'm ready to work and partner with anyone that is willing to make that happen.

2. How has your professional/personal experience prepared you to hold this position?

Professionally, I have worked in the world of youth outreach within BIPOC communities, first-generation school attendees, health care, houselessness, and college access. No matter what outreach I did, my work eventually settled on establishing an organized representative body to strategically work with the organization I was employed by in order to better improve the conditions of the service that was provided. This required trust and relationship building with youth and parents. Ultimately, within the world of government, I must engage in due diligence when it comes to representation and follow the same practice of involving the public, working together, and having a continuous feedback loop.

As a Park Board Commissioner, I have needed to step into trust-building with the public to mend some hurt relationships. This isn't easy work, but it's work worthwhile. Once trust is established, we can move into co-created solutions to address current issue areas and/or look into future projects. Keeping the public informed of steps along the way has also helped significantly in that patience and trust.

Personally, my lived experiences have taught me a great deal about what it means to engage in creative problem-solving when it comes to policy and budgets. I'm a first-generation born Mexican-American. I had to navigate school while not knowing English. Once I learned the language, I then became an unofficial translator for my parents. The work and strain this puts on a young child is monumental and the consequences of a misstep can be detrimental to the entire family. I grew up on food stamps and WIC programs, as well as all those education enhancement programs dedicated to supporting BIPOC communities in low-income households. At one point, my household was made up of 17 people across three generations. I went through two waves of housing insecurity in my 20's. Needless to say, my history and my experiences significantly impact the way I approach work and think through challenges.

It is important that whoever is elected into any decision-making office has the experience to adequately inform policy and to ensure that those who are furthest from opportunity have the

needed support to make the change they choose. From education, to healthcare, to housing, to workforce, and general services - they're all interconnected and we need to target services in order to see improvement in community.

3. What is the most important policy issue that inspired you to run for this office?

Two things inspired me to run for Pierce County Council:

1. **Job Training and Economic Preparation:** I have spent a large part of my career in the education sector with close ties to all the things that make young people succeed (housing, emotional stability, employment, ect). The consequences of the pandemic have put the transition periods of a young person's life in a vulnerable place. There are college professors who are put in situations where they're spending a lot of time working through some basic social skills (which pre-pandemic, were learned through daily interactions). The same thing is occurring in the workforce space. Simultaneously, there is an unprecedented wave of people who are setting themselves up to retire soon. This will put a strain on housing, medicine, and the economy (considering their positions will need to be replaced). There is a generation of students and professionals that will need to fill in these gaps AND have to work to gain the skills to catch up on the social, educational, and professional requirements of employment. This requires preventative attention. Working with trades, education, and training programs will be critical to help support this transition.
2. **Houselessness/Housing Instability:** My personal experience in this world taught me that sometimes, one simple occurrence can leave a person in a very vulnerable place. I see tackling the housing stability challenge through a two-prong approach, stability services and affordability. A lot of work has already occurred at the County level and the upcoming comprehensive plan (two-decade roadmap for future growth) mustn't sit on a shelf. I look forward to ensuring that we invest in achieving the plan's goals especially when it comes to affordable housing. Simultaneously, we need to invest in coordinated and aligned partnerships in order to provide stability. We have many services that are offered, yet, for someone who is unhoused, it's unclear where to start and how to manage the challenges of a system that, at times, feels like it's not working in tandem. This isn't just County work, this work will require partnerships across organizations.

4. How have you demonstrated Democratic values?

I have two notable demonstrations of democratic values I'd like to highlight:

- Within the education sector - I developed a curriculum that I would run with all the students around civic engagement. The goal of this was to get young people to think of themselves as change-makers and civic leaders. Through this process, I was able to learn how young people didn't see themselves in spaces that impacted them and where they found the most support. We would then culminate this process through a day of advocacy. This sometimes included time in Olympia or formal proposals of budget allocations or rule changes to the programs they were in. Ultimately, the learnings came from the young people working with each other to prioritize, negotiate, exercise values, identify ways in which they were or were not being inclusive, and work across generations to make a difference in their space.
- Within my role as an elected - on the topic of democratic fairness: As an organization, the board is responsible for adopting the mission, vision, and values. What I identified was that the work of

staff in following the mission, vision, and values was disproportionately more easily identifiable than that of the work/actions of the Board. Not too long ago I led a section of our board retreat that focused on how the Board can operationalize Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (JEDIB) from the dias. The intention of this being, how can we as board members hold ourselves and each other accountable for operationalizing the JEDIB value as we work with the public. This is an ongoing conversation and the same is expected of our other organizational values, however, the goal is to make sure that leadership is sharing the work and echoing the values of the organization from a common place of understanding.

5. How can elected officials in the office you are running for best ensure that all workers are treated equitably at work and in contract negotiations?

One of the best ways to ensure all workers are treated equitably is to have a good and ongoing working relationship with our Union/Labor representatives and with those in the County Executive Office. Understanding both is crucial! When it comes to contract negotiations, there should not be anything brought up at that time that hasn't already been addressed before through that good working relationship. Along with this, it's also important to give credit where credit is due. Recognition is a big part of relationship building, but it also lays the foundation to understand the value added of the different people that contribute to making work happen both immediately and generationally.

Secondly, having an organization wide understanding of equitable practices is a must. The County employs many people from different backgrounds and holding equitable treatment of others should be an organizational norm. Depending on individual departments and scopes of work, this can be operationalized in a way that fits the needs of the department and maintains a high standard of treating contracted individuals with dignity and respect.

Lastly, it's important to ensure that there is time being put into shaping work around equitable treatment and contract negotiations. When harm is done, acknowledgement is needed and mending is needed. This takes time in order to be genuine change and sustainable change. Ongoing feedback is necessary.

6. In what way are your policy stances more important than your personal connections with community members?

Though personal connections with community members are valuable for building trust and understanding of top issues as well as content expertise, it is policy that is essential for driving meaningful change and addressing the needs of the public at large. My goal is to champion policies that have a lasting impact because they improve the lives of the public and those that serve the public. My connection with the community will foster a more robust and inclusive policy process. The public must know about the different entry points to inform policy, however, policy is not designed to benefit any one individual or institution.

My value set is rooted in partnerships, community voice, equity, and continuous improvement. They are what have helped me tackle economic development, social equity, education, and public health outcomes in my previous positions and I'm glad to say that with it, I have had the pleasure of watching young children grow into adults and flourish in their careers. By prioritizing sound policy decisions with those values in mind, I'm ensuring sustainable structures for the public and sound stewardship of public funds.

7. What will you do as an elected official to ensure that marginalized groups feel empowered and have a voice in local politics?

As a person of a marginalized group, I can most certainly say this is extremely important. I feel my personal story around being a child of immigrants is shared across many cultures and it has allowed me to build trust with people a bit faster because so much can be unsaid, yet understood. My ability to speak fluent Spanish as I'm going through my campaign has already brought forward people who have identified as not wanting to engage in local politics because they don't feel heard (both technically and culturally). Regardless of my own story, what is important is that folks of marginalized groups feel empowered to have a voice—we cannot do that without the support of cultural ambassadors. The topic of cultural ambassadors is something that I have supported in my work with Metro Parks. We have a shared FTE between us and the Pierce County Health Department. Within this effort, we've noticed a significant increase in participation for community feedback groups and listening sessions. It works! This is something I'd love to make sure is shared with many municipalities so as to make sure that marginalized groups have a better relationship with all government types.

8. Share an example of what you have done to make sure all voices are at the table.

Within my Commissioner role at Metro Parks, we've gone through a few series of strategic planning when it comes to programming. What's typically used when it comes to community voice is a combination of the quarterly event listening sessions, online participation, and public comments. Throughout my involvement, I have surfaced the question of "where do the comments come from" – meaning, are the people that will be most impacted by a decision providing comments on a topic? Also, what work is being done to outreach to those who don't attend or use the platforms where public involvement is typically taken? Sometimes, understanding why someone doesn't do something is just as important as understanding why they do. Those two questions have supported efforts to engage the cultural ambassador work that I previously mentioned. Additionally, we more heavily emphasize zip code representation when it comes to items impacting particular neighborhoods. When it comes to programming, there is greater emphasis on neighborhood region and service area needs as opposed to an aggregate of all comments. When we see that there isn't statistically valid data for those that will be mostly impacted by a decision, we then target efforts.

9. What are the most important issues for the constituency you would represent if elected?

- Affordable Housing/Houselessness/Housing Insecurities (a partnership with cities of District 4) – this will be a combined effort between all council members considering unincorporated spaces don't have a city council for support. The first wave of tax dollars to support affordable housing is in the works and it's important that as time continues on, these dollars are spent wisely and that funding that supports tangential services to affordable housing are not removed.
- Public Safety – the sense of safety is different depending on who you speak to. I had a conversation with a mother not too long ago that shared with me that their biggest safety concern was walking their child to school because there were no sidewalks available during a part of their walk that required them to be near a popular road where people were not driving under the speed limit. The conversation around safety needs more work. This mother's concern is a public safety issue, however, what's often understood is violent crime—which is also a public safety concern. Violent crime requires a different set of people at the table than addressing sidewalks and speedy drivers.

10. What are some of the environmental impacts of your office and what steps will you take to ensure these impacts are sustainable?

Pierce County has been working on its 2030 goal of reducing greenhouse gasses. This goal includes operational emission reduction. An annual assessment of this progress is necessary and something I'd love to make sure occurs. Along with this, there are also the intersectional impacts on health and what that looks like from an equity standpoint. This means that, though there is a goal in mind, we must disaggregate the impact of this goal and ensure that aggregated success isn't celebrated if it comes at the cost of harming communities. This work will require content experts and ensure adequate data collection for targeted interventions.

Secondly, the risk of urban fires is something that impacts our more forested areas of the county. This will include cooperation with other council members that have dense greenery in their district and the other agencies that focus on this. For example, this is something that Metro Parks has been focusing on considering their oversight of places like Point Defiance and Swan Creek. The Joint Municipal Action Committee (JMAC) space is one opportunity in which Pierce County, the City, and Metro Parks can come together to share learnings and take to other municipalities. This would be a point of interest for other councilmembers and something I look forward to partnering on in order to better serve our natural spaces.

11. What is your definition of social justice and how can your position ensure social justice for your constituency?

For me, social justice is about centering the people that are most impacted by an issue so that decision-making spaces are guided with those in mind. It's elevating the perspective and experiences of those with intersectional understandings. The concept of intersectionality is particularly crucial when it comes to social justice work. My commitment to this role in office is to go beyond the nature of identity and step into the challenging and complex work of sustainable social change. This will require work to undo long-standing rules and structures because they are either intentionally or unintentionally exclusionary. Social justice is also, decentering myself. I will not be the right person all the time, but I know that with relationship building and trust, I can

find the right person—to help build platforms and strengthen justice space. Within the same concept of decentering myself, I know that my time in office will be limited by terms. I intend to step into this role, fully understanding that a big part of my responsibility is to make it easier for the person that follows to continue the work of social justice in the government space.

12. What do you feel is the greatest budget challenge faced by the office you are seeking?

One of the biggest monetary challenges is what it will take to tackle the housing instability issue that is faced in the county. Not only does this address people who are unhoused or using shelters, but I also include people who are living paycheck-to-paycheck and are one unfortunate circumstance from losing their living space. We have mechanisms such as point-in-time counts which helps estimate need, however, the counts underestimate the reality or gravity of the situation. It's the best tool available at the moment AND it doesn't account for the complexity and vulnerability of housing.

Working towards improvement in this area will take a lot of coordination and collaboration. District 4 works with three city governments and those city governments have some responsibility in tackling the housing issue. That said, the role of the District 4 representative will be a combination of working with city councils as well as support the work of the county as a whole considering the transient nature of those who are experiencing housing insecurities (seeking services, being priced out of homes, ect).

13. Why should the Pierce County Democrats support you for this position?

As a candidate for District 4's Pierce County Council, my values, experience, and vision align closely to that of Pierce County Democrats. I commit to advancing progressive policies and projects that have, over the course of the last eight years, been vetoed. I have a track record of advancing the values of the democratic party through my formal role as an elected as well as my employment. This includes being vocal about the need to surface marginalized communities in policy considerations. I also have a collaborative leadership style, which I believe is critical considering the many entities within Pierce County when it comes to resources as well as demographics and the need to advance progressive policy. Lastly, I have the support and endorsement of sitting County Councilmembers, members from City Council in all three cities that District 4 covers, School Board Directors' support, community leaders support and many more. I am approaching this work having served as an elected and having shared work and space with other elected colleagues. I am ready to continue serving my community and ensuring Pierce County is the best it can be.

14. Finally, any additional comments you would like to share with the Committee:

Thank you very much for your time and consideration! I look forward to your response. Please feel free to reach out to me with anything that you feel requires additional explanation.