

Continued from Page 9

10. The county's Racial and Ethnic Disparities Report reveals that black people are 320 percent more likely than whites to be prosecuted for a crime, 500 percent more likely to spend time in jail, and 600 percent more likely to be sentenced to prison. What will you do to help correct that? (150 words or less)

MARISHA CHILDS

My answer would be very similar to the answer I provided in response to Questions 7 and 8. Better training of law enforcement officers, the District Attorney's office, mental health providers and jail personnel would be a great start.

SHARON MEIERAN

As a member of the Community Oversight Advisory Board that oversees the Department of Justice Settlement Agreement regarding Portland Police Bureau's use of force against people in mental health crisis, our discussion has necessarily broadened to include addressing issues of racial disparity. Our first step must be to openly acknowledge the degree to which this disparity exists in our county. Next, we need to engage with people and groups directly affected to identify the underlying issues and create a plan and path forward.

MEL RADER

The recent Racial and Ethnic Diversity Report showed that disparities deepen at each step of the criminal justice system. It's clear that we need a suite of strategies to reduce this web of disparities, and we need to affect both programs and policies.

Key approaches must include:

- Training police, prosecutors, parole officers, judges and other criminal justice system personnel to reduce racial biases.
- Encouraging prosecutors to prioritize violent crimes.
- Seeking options to divert nonviolent offenders and people with mental health histories into programs that address their needs.
- Limiting pretrial detention to those who are a threat to public safety.

We must also collaborate with a broad range of community groups to ensure transparency and accountability. Local organizations are aware of how systemic barriers affect communities, and it's critical that those advocates keep the county on track for measurable changes.

BRIAN WILSON

I've always been a believer in schools, not jails. By taking a broad approach, enlisting the help of partners in the black community, recruiting/retaining more district attorneys, law enforcement officers, teachers, etc., we can address the situation with the sensitivity that comes from shared experiences. Better education. Better opportunities.

ERIC ZIMMERMAN

We need to build better relations between law enforcement and our African-American communities. Everyone should have a shared interest in ensuring fair and just treatment of all our residents, regardless of race, as well as effective community policing that can reduce crime and strengthen neighborhoods. I have strong relationships in both the African-American community and law enforcement. And I think it will take a leader that can credibly work with all stakeholders if we are going to reduce racial disparities in arrests and incarceration.

11. What is one thing you will do to better serve people experiencing mental health crises? (150 words or less)

MARISHA CHILDS

We need to provide more supportive living environments. The stigma attached to mental illness needs to be removed, and it needs to be considered on par with physical illness such as cancer and heart disease. Mental health issues need to be addressed earlier; children need to have services such as more social workers in the school. I am looking for a paradigm shift in the way mental health services are delivered. It's not always possible for people with mental health crises to come to a clinic; social workers and other care providers need to be able to meet the people suffering mental health crises where they are (tents, the library, the trail, etc.). I also want to continue to work on law enforcement training, so that those first responders have at least some basic skills on appropriately and effectively interacting with people in the midst of a mental health crisis. "Mental health" should be an option when a person in distress calls 911 for help.

SHARON MEIERAN

As an ER doctor, I see on a daily basis how we fail people facing mental health crises. We need better coordination of care and services to keep people out of crisis in the first place. However, despite our best efforts, crises will occur. Taking people to jail or boarding them in an ER is unacceptable. I will ensure that peers and people with lived experience inform every aspect of how we approach issues of mental health care. We are trying a new model with the Unity Behavioral Health Center. As an advisory board member, I

am listening and aware of concerns expressed. But I see the potential for a paradigm shift in how we treat people with mental health crisis if we do things right. I will continue to engage people with lived experience as this new project unfolds so that we are truly meeting the needs of the community.

MEL RADER

I will advocate to fund a system of peer-support counselors. We need community health workers and peer support counselors working with diverse communities to promote the social support systems that are necessary to promote mental well-being.

This will provide a first point of contact that can monitor and support people at risk or experiencing mental illness, and they can help people navigate the health care system when more acute care is needed. But perhaps more critically, community health workers can support a management plan that prevents individuals from having a crisis in the first place.

The Community Capacitation Center can help with training and building relationships with community organizations to host and support this workforce. We should also partner closely with health systems to provide coordinated approach to community health, and we should support a continuum of care from community and social supports all the way to acute care in a crisis.

BRIAN WILSON

Hooray for Unity Center – but with no net adds to the number of beds, we're going to have to provide an incentive for



Nicky Kriara, a local artist, gave this painting to Eric Zimmerman. "This is my favorite thing about Multnomah County because I, like so many others, found my best friend at Multnomah County Animal Service as a rescue, second chance pet," Zimmerman said.

the CCOs to invest more. We also need to build housing that will be supportive of those exiting Unity or shelters, so we're not pushing them back into the environment that likely triggers their illness to begin with. We've also got to start following best practices from other communities who make effective use of robust information systems to track and immediately notify all service providers of a consumer's status.

ERIC ZIMMERMAN

Increasing the capacity of the Unity Behavioral Health Center is critical. Investing in peer care and mentoring is an important ongoing step we must give to clients experiencing crisis to reduce visits to the ER. These are both programs I want to champion at the county.

12. As the community faces a housing crisis and growing economic and racial disparities, services aren't going to cut it. Give an example of one thing you will do to prevent this opportunity gap from widening.

MARISHA CHILDS

I am not really sure that I understand this question. "Services" is such a broad topic; I don't know if the question refers to working with landowners to allow homeless to use vacant spaces at least temporarily. Part of this is working with community partners (NAYA, Urban League, Jade/APANO, PCRI, etc.) to come up with creative solutions and communities of support, even if this may not technically be "services."

SHARON MEIERAN

First and foremost, I will listen. I will engage community leaders, private business leaders, nonprofit and advocacy groups, local elected officials and people most affected by these issues. I take a holistic approach to all the work that I do, and this will be especially the case at the county, where all the services provided are so integrally related. I recognize that people can't take care of their mental or physical illness or find or keep a job if they don't have a roof over their head. Working in the ER, I see interconnections, and where our failure to intervene at multiple points, in different areas, leads to people being seen in the most expensive and least effective place to deal with their underlying problems. People need housing, and they need services, but

neither is sufficient without the other. I will ensure that we focus not only on single issues, but on the whole picture, so that all people can live safely and with dignity.

MEL RADER

Quality preschool is one of the best investments we can make in our children's future.

Multnomah County should commit to the future of our children by establishing affordable preschool and by expanding employment-related day-care programs to more families.

In addition to supporting parents in the workforce, universal preschool has a significant return on investment for our economy. The earlier we invest in children, the lower our future costs will be for jails and prisons, health care and behavioral health services. Rates of return range per study up to \$711 for every \$1 invested, and the evidence is so strong that we can't afford to delay.

Expanding affordable child care is integral for young working parents to become more competitive in the workforce, and this is especially true for women of color; African-American women earn 64 cents, and Latina women earn 56 cents for every dollar earned by a white non-Hispanic man. Expanded affordable

child care would better allow all parents to provide for their families and therefore minimize the opportunity gap that affects families who couldn't otherwise afford quality child care.

BRIAN WILSON

There's really only one answer to this: more housing of all different levels of affordability, near good schools and in environmentally safe neighborhoods. We need to make an investment in this, building partnerships with organizations like APANO and NAYA to meet the specific cultural needs of those communities most impacted, and more.

ERIC ZIMMERMAN

We need a shared commitment by government, advocates and business to creating middle-wage jobs. There are tons of opportunities in this community for professionals and others with a particular skill set. But the growing disparity between haves and have-nots is driven by the loss of decent jobs that can support a family that do not require an advanced degree. Adding those jobs will take an intentional commitment and hard work, and we must commit to ensure good wages and benefits in those jobs. But they are the only way we are going to stop those disparities from overwhelming us.