

## **Nonprofit partners Forum 5.25.22 Questions. Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson Responses**

### **1. Outline at least one priority you plan to accomplish during your first term that will benefit Santa Cruz County's low-income residents.**

Homelessness and behavioral health challenges have had significant impacts in our community causing individual and community suffering. As a Supervisor, I will take a regional approach to bring attention and ultimately resources to the growing challenges. One of the first steps is to move people out of unmanaged encampments and into safe transitional shelters/bridge housing with supportive services that are located throughout the County. The other is unmet mental health and substance abuse needs. We need to examine our existing resources and programs, what outcomes they are producing, and where there are remaining gaps. Additionally, nearly a third of our last homeless count were youth and young adults under the age of 24, many having exited the child welfare system. We have started some of this work, but there is much more we can do to prevent our youth from ending up chronically homeless.

### **2. Growing income inequality is placing a burden on the services that form Santa Cruz County's social "safety net?" How do you plan to strengthen those services to keep more families and individuals from "falling through the cracks" if elected?**

I've worked extensively with safety net service providers in our community, mainly in supporting their efforts to secure additional funding for their programs and services. In order to support the safety net services, we must support the service providers. I understand the challenges of these providers intimately and will support their work as a Supervisor through resource allocation and contracts. I will also look at re-allocation of existing resources where possible. Santa Cruz County is often left out of regional or statewide efforts due to our small size. This impacts our service providers and safety net services. However, when we articulate our needs clearly and demonstrate our past successes, we are noticed and supported. I have the experience, the skills and the state-wide relationships to access state and federal resources to ensure that our community is not left out of state-wide or regional opportunities that will strengthen our safety net services.

### **3. What will you do to promote and execute the development of Santa Cruz County's Local Playbook for California's Master Plan for Aging?**

The CAO's office and Human Services Department have committed to identifying at least two priorities to implement the State's 10-year Master Plan for Aging (MPA) and promote age-friendly community principles by June 2023. I will meet with

Department staff and key community based partners to assess what work has been completed to date. If we have not yet begun a comprehensive community engagement process, I will work with County departments and key partners to develop and initiate this process. The State's 5 goal areas are: Housing for all Stages and Ages; Health Reimagined; Inclusion & Equity not Isolation; Caregiving that Works; Affordable Aging. We will need to assess these goals against our community data that show where our greatest needs and opportunities are. We will also need to watch how the State is investing in the MPA. The Governor's May revise includes an additional \$13.5 million for implementation of the MPA, including outreach campaign for residents and families residential facilities and funds to support individuals transitioning from nursing homes to independent living. Keeping track of the Governor's budget and investments will help our internal process as we look ahead to securing resources.

**4. Community needs always seem to be competing for funding with one another. Organizations that serve various populations can often be caught in the middle. What will be your funding priorities and do you see anyways that funding might be expanded across vulnerable groups and needs?**

It's important to recognize that there is increased need alongside diminishing resources, putting community based organizations in a position to compete for limited funds. We, as a community, must work to increase opportunities for collaboration and efficiency. We can create funding opportunities to encourage shared infrastructure, reduce duplication of efforts, and collaborate in both programming and fundraising to address this challenge. We can create multi-organizational funding opportunities that support these types of collaborative efforts and support opportunities such as the non-profit shared space in Watsonville currently being considered and explored. Any funding priorities will be developed in partnership with community based organizations who are doing the work and driven by local needs data.

**5. Housing and transportation are frequently cited as two of Santa Cruz County's biggest challenges. The relationship between the two is obvious – communities that lack affordable housing contribute to traffic congestion by forcing more of their workforce to commute in. How will you address these two important challenges for Santa Cruz County?**

We have an opportunity to plan differently as we revise our County's Housing Element, work to preserve our right of way along the rail corridor, and modernize our Metro bus system. I currently sit on our County's Metro Board and am an alternate for the Regional Transportation Commission. We can pursue a new model that encourages housing, safety and environmental sustainability. There are other communities in California that have demonstrated that this is possible. The time is ripe to plan differently, but we must coordinate across these systems and partners. As we develop our Housing Element, we can consider

best practice policies that impact housing and transportation. For example- Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing through policy direction that prioritizes rezoning in high resource, historically exclusionary neighborhoods; considering special fast-tracking for 100 percent affordable projects, in particular those along transit and urban corridors; and considering reducing other barriers to housing such reducing parking minimums and delaying the collection of impact fees. These are some tactics that have produced walkable inclusive communities in other localities.

**6. Nonprofit wages have reached a critical low. Many full-time non-profit employees, including those who have lived here for decades while serving their community, must now depend on public assistance themselves in order to survive. What will you do to address the wage and retention crisis that is affecting the nonprofit agencies contracted by the county to provide services so that our community's nonprofits can continue to recruit and retain staffing to operate our services?**

This is a challenge across the State and certainly here in Santa Cruz County. I will work with my colleagues and leverage state and federal relationships to ensure that Santa Cruz County receives Federal and State earmarks and that we increase resources coming into our community. I will also work with my Supervisor colleagues and support allocation of resources to nonprofits for service provision. CORE grants is one way that the County currently does this. I would look for opportunities to expand these resources (i.e. increasing Federal and State resources). We must also think holistically-what are other life costs that impact nonprofit employees and how can we reduce these burdens? This can include food insecurity, childcare, healthcare, utilities. As a Supervisor, I will look to all avenues to reduce these burdens so that individuals can choose to continue to work in the nonprofit field as I myself had for many years.

**7. Nonprofit organizations are funded by many sources bringing in massive financial resources to the county and making up the 4<sup>th</sup> largest sector in the state and a primary employer. Yet nonprofits do not always have a seat at the table equivalent to county departments. Given their willingness to step up as first responders in times of crises, what role do you think they need to play in relation to the Board and how would you make this happen.**

Nonprofits are the boots on the ground in this community who bring in unique perspectives. I've witnessed what is possible through my youth homelessness work when nonprofits, county and city agencies engage in deep partnership-we work to accomplish the results we seek and we do it effectively. I would work to

increase nonprofit voice and representation through direct engagement on all issues that impact the social determinants of health. I would also work to increase nonprofit leader representation on county commissions, who are in place to provide subject matter guidance on issues. Finally, I would continue to serve on nonprofit boards as I do now to make sure that I am connected and understand the challenges and opportunities of nonprofit organizations ( I currently serving on the Community Health Trust of the Pajaro Valley, Community Action Board, Dignity Health Community Grants Committee, Central California Alliance for Health).