

ACLU of Hawai'i Candidate Questionnaire
Mayor, City & County of Honolulu

Instructions

You are receiving this questionnaire because you are a candidate for Mayor of the City and County of Honolulu in the 2020 general election. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information on candidates' positions on important civil rights and civil liberties issues that affect the lives of O'ahu residents. The intent of this questionnaire is for the sole purpose of producing and disseminating informational or educational communications and is not intended to influence the outcome of an election, question, or issue on a ballot. This questionnaire was sent to every candidate running for Mayor of the City and County of Honolulu in the 2020 general election. By responding to this questionnaire, you give permission for your responses to be made available to the public. Responses will be published on ACLU of Hawaii's website, acluhi.org, sometime after September 28, 2020. Your responses will be published exactly as you write them and while formatting of the questionnaire may change when published to the website or posted on social media, the substance of both the questions and your responses will not be altered in any way except with regard to the word limit, explained below. Candidates will *not* have the opportunity to make changes to their responses once submitted.

Candidates must provide a response to each question by selecting YES or NO. Candidates then have the option to elaborate on their position in the text box below each question, with a limit of **150 words** per response. If any response is longer than 150 words, we will only publish the first 150 words of the response. The questionnaire will close at 11:59 p.m. on September 28, 2020. No responses will be recorded after September 28. In publishing the results of this questionnaire, the ACLU of Hawai'i will note if a candidate did not respond to the questionnaire.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Hawai'i is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. We do not support or oppose candidates for elected office. The mission of the ACLU of Hawai'i is to protect the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the U.S. and state constitutions.

Candidate Information

Name: Rick Blangiardi

Questions

1. The O'ahu Community Correctional Center is now the largest single cluster of COVID-19 cases in the state. Do you agree that some people should be released from Hawaii's jails and prisons in order to alleviate overcrowding and prevent the continued spread of COVID-19 in our correctional facilities and throughout the community?

YES, as explained below.

RESPONSE TO QUESTION ONE

I oppose “blanket or wholesale release.” The State has a responsibility to maintain good public health and safety in our jail/prison facilities for the protection of both inmates and staff. It is my understanding that the OCCC houses pretrial detainees, including those who are charged with non-violent misdemeanor offenses and could be out on bail but for their financial incapacity. Under our American justice system, pretrial detainees are innocent until proven guilty. As such, given unsafe conditions, the Court system should apply due process and give consideration for inmates’ release. I understand the concerns of the Prosecutors and the Honolulu Police Department; however, I also believe that to knowingly keep inmates in an unsafe environment, especially those charged with non-violent low level crimes and those who have almost served out their complete sentences, may constitute cruel and unusual punishment. I believe we can and should do better.

2. Do you believe that systemic racism exists in Hawai'i ?

YES, as explained below.

RESPONSE TO QUESTION TWO

If defined as “the systems in place that create and maintain racial inequality in nearly every facet of life for people of color,” data indicates systemic racism exists in Hawaii. For example, I am aware of data indicating Hawaii's Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) community is disproportionately represented in Honolulu's houseless population. I am also aware that the Aloha United Way ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) reports show a statistically disproportionate share of NHPI among our ALICE and below (federal poverty level) populations. Further, Hawaii's COFA community does not share the same medical, housing, and/or education opportunities as other groups in Hawai'i. These are only a few examples. Everyone must do their part to eliminate the systemic oppression confronting these communities.

3. Do you support reducing the budget of the Honolulu Police Department and reinvesting the money in community-based supports and services, such as mental health care, housing, and substance use treatment, which may reduce the need for police intervention?

NO, as explained below.

RESPONSE TO QUESTION THREE

As a matter of full disclosure, I received SHOPO's endorsement, but my response is personal and not influenced by SHOPO. While I do not believe HPD's budget should be reduced, I also support community-based initiatives. In other words, I do not believe this is a zero-sum situation. I believe the community needs law enforcement and it also needs to fund initiatives designed to reduce the need for police intervention. Honolulu is losing police officers and the Chief of Police has stated that the department may increasingly look to recruit from outside the state. My preference is that given Hawaii's unique culture, we should, to the fullest extent possible, recruit from within our community first. Cutting HPD's budget may have the unintended effect of reducing our department's competitiveness and losing officers who leave the islands for better paying jobs elsewhere.

4. Do you support amending the Charter of the City and County of Honolulu to grant greater authority to the Honolulu Police Commission in changing the Honolulu Police Department's policies and determining whether/how individual officers are disciplined for misconduct?

NO, as explained below.

RESPONSE TO QUESTION FOUR

My wife served on the Honolulu Police Commission and, per Honolulu's existing Charter, I have an understanding of their role. In general, I support a greater discussion with the community regarding the appropriate role of the Honolulu Police Commission in determining whether and/or how individual officers are disciplined. I view the Commission as the public's civilian representatives who look out for the interest of the people and the people have expressed a desire for increased police accountability and the elimination of misconduct. However, the Commission's role must be rightly balanced against efficient and effective police operations, good order, and respect for intra-departmental lines of authority. As such, I support a fuller discussion with the community at large that will ultimately inform the City whether a proposed Charter amendment is necessary, appropriate, and/or in the best interest of public safety.

5. Best practices issued by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) advise against taking enforcement actions against houseless individuals and encampments during the COVID-19 pandemic, warning that doing so increases the risk of community spread and may break connections between outreach workers and houseless clients. Will you comply with

CDC guidance by ending the use of “sweeps” against houseless individuals and encampments during the COVID-19 pandemic?

YES, as explained below.

RESPONSE TO QUESTION FIVE

As a general premise, as Mayor, I intend to adhere to the science-based recommendations and guidelines of the CDC during a pandemic. Further, I also generally disfavor the so-called “compassionate disruption” approach which only moves the houseless in circles to other neighborhoods and parks and then back again. It is not a permanent solution.

6. Will you permanently end the use of “sweeps” against houseless individuals and encampments, and reinvest the savings in community services such as mental health outreach and housing?

YES, as explained below.

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SIX

We must take meaningful steps to solve our houseless issues by making a long-term concerted commitment to strategies and solutions that address the many reasons our people are on the streets. There is no one solution to the houseless and, as noted above, I disfavor the current policy of “compassionate disruption” as it only moves the houseless in circles to other neighborhoods and parks and then back again. It is not a permanent solution. Having said that, I do recognize that it may be necessary, from time to time, to combat public health hazards, such as human waste, discarded needles, blockage of public access ways, and unsanitary refuse; however, I will do my best to accomplish this through the provision of services combined with alternative housing options.

7. The Portland, Oregon City Council unanimously passed a ban on government and corporate use of facial recognition technology. Do you support a similar ban for the City and County of Honolulu?

NO, as explained below.

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SEVEN

I am aware that Oregon passed a facial recognition technology ban this month that has broad applications in that it extends to "private entities in places of public accommodation" as well as local government. Whether there is need for such a broad ban on public facial recognition technology in Hawai'i is an issue which requires serious discussion and input from the community. For example, I believe the state is currently installing facial imaging technology at the airports, reportedly addressing state mandated privacy protections. Issues raised include constitutional privacy rights, faulty technology, bias, and the potential for misuse. Any such proposed ban in the City and County of Honolulu would require Council action which would generate robust community input and discussion. It would also require that the State not preempt the counties from legislating in this area.