

## Dane County Democratic Party Candidate Questionnaire

Jael Currie

Madison Common Council Alder, District 16

[www.currieforcitycouncil.com](http://www.currieforcitycouncil.com)

### **Professional Experience:**

10 years working in the human/social services field. Currently serve as the Housing Director for YWCA Madison.

### **Political/Service Experience:**

2020 New Leaders Council Fellow, Chair and Board Member of Dane County Homeless Services Consortium, Guest Lecturer @ UW-Madison School of Social Work

### **Why Are You Running In This Election?**

Social policy and local politics impact my everyday work heavily. While I planned to focus my career on serving people/micro systems, the need to expand my knowledge of local government/macro systems has fueled my personal passion for activism and advocacy. I've come to a crucial junction in my career where I can no longer stay silent about system failures and the plethora of inequities that come as a result. I wholeheartedly believe it is my ethical duty to serve.

I am running to bring the concerns of ordinary people to Madison's Common Council. I am also running to serve with a collective goal of co-creating this community to truly be a place where every resident feels safe, heard, and can thrive.

### **What Are The Three Most Important Issues In Your Race?**

1. Public safety/emergency medical services
2. Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating effects
3. Rebuilding connections, trust, and responsiveness between the D16 Alder and residents, as well as the overall Council

### **What Are The Largest Environmental Concerns You Aim To Deal With In Office?**

Reducing PFAs chemicals and other harmful detriments in our waterways. We must do all we can to eliminate the lack of clean and accessible drinking water for our residents.

### **How Will You Use Your Position To Create More Equitable Opportunities And Help Those Living In Poverty?**

If elected, I will have the opportunity to introduce resolution/legislation into effect that addresses the deep inequities those living in poverty face. I will continue to bring forward perspectives and observations I've gained as a social service provider in our community for a decade. As a former teen mom who received public benefits to get by, I can speak to the power of resilience but also the deep opportunity and access gaps that exist in Madison. While I have lived experience from different personal perspectives, I no longer live in poverty and recognize this equips me with a degree of privilege and power. I want to use the privilege, privilege, and platforms I now have to serve my community on a larger scale.

### **How Do We Address Racial Inequality?**

I will say acknowledgement of the deep racial disparities we have, dialogue about them, and motivation to do better has increased throughout my life as a Madisonian. We must now translate these introductory features into concrete and actionable steps. The first

of these would be authentically engaging individuals, families and communities that have been impacted by racial inequities and oppression and increase access and opportunities to be part of leadership and/or decision making entities. I agree with Ayana Pressley's assertion that the people closest to the pain should be closest to the power. Right now our city is facing an opportune time to elect a historically high number of BIPOC candidates with invaluable lived experiences into local government roles. These elections will by no means singlehandedly address racial inequality but it will demonstrate a willingness to change the status quo and start empowering individuals and communities of color.

### **How will you promote restorative justice and address abusive and racist practices by the police force?**

The Restorative Justice (RJ) team at YWCA Madison has been one of several local coalitions that have successfully advocated for and implemented RJ training and practices into our community. While receiving training in RJ and implementing it within law enforcement systems will not undo its longstanding abusive and racist history and its practices, it does point towards increased accountability of the police from the community. We must continue to fight to decriminalize poverty and the slew of social and economic consequences that come from it. One of the major steps to accomplish this is reallocating funding from the police into vital community resources such as mental/behavioral health, affordable housing, quality education for children/youth, and increasing access to vocational training opportunities for youth and un/underemployed adults. Another crucial step our community has taken towards this measure is the creation of the

Police Civilian Oversight Board and the Independent Monitor role, which I fully support.

**Due to the ongoing economic impact of Coronavirus, many local governments are expecting unprecedented budget shortfalls. What would you prioritize in the budget? Where would you make cuts?**

As a social service professional, I will always gravitate towards meeting human and social needs (ex: affordable housing, comprehensive mental/behavioral health and AODA treatment services, affordable healthcare and access to it, equitable public transportation). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated already existing financial and economic shortcomings where basic needs will be steadily competing against needs to support the economic vitality of our city. Should I become Alder, I will prioritize funding to provide economic relief for businesses and households, increasing access to and availability of affordable housing, enhancing our mental/behavioral health systems and access, and investing in the educational and vocational needs of children and youth.

**How have you elevated diverse voices in government and public discourse? How would you continue to do so if elected to this office?**

When Tree Lane Apartments opened in summer 2018, YWCA Madison was the service provider. During the difficult time we worked closely with this project, one of the coalitions we fought hard to assemble was a resident advisory board. Residents were reading the frequent new stories calling their residence a homeless shelter and/or stereotyping the behaviors of non-residents to everyone living in the building. They were angry, hurt, and confused and didn't feel empowered to speak their truths. We invited residents to gather and build community and

coalition with their neighbors as well as building and social service staff. We also invited and informed residents about community forums and meetings in order to provide powerful testimonies and perspectives, or to just show up and show physical support to their neighbors. When the environments were hostile and/or inflexible to the scheduling needs of residents, myself and colleagues amplified their voices forward through our networks and platforms as homeless service providers. I strive to continue amplifying these voices and experiences through my leadership and career; serving as Alder on the Common Council will not change, but enhance these efforts.

Right now, my campaign team is not just focusing on engaging who historically votes in local elections, but determining who does not and why. District 16 is geographically large and diverse socioeconomically. While many residents are politically engaged, there are also many residents who are not and may not be aware of the upcoming election and how much local government impacts their livelihood. One thing I am actively doing is working to recruit more organizers to translate documents and literature into languages that are prevalent in our district and city (mainly Spanish and Hmong). With safety in mind, I'd like to meet with individuals/groups with diverse perspectives to hear more about what they see as pressing issues for themselves and communities. For instance, while I have ideas about solutions to gaps the Black community is facing in Madison, Black Madisonians are not a monolith and shouldn't be treated as such. I pride myself on being a listener and being flexible to the needs and concerns of others, especially those who have different experiences, backgrounds, and abilities than mine.

**What Are The Largest Transportation Issues You Wish To Work On And How Will You Address Them?**

As a quickly growing city that offers many amenities, we need to continue investing in developing a robust public transportation system. One of these is supporting the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system and its implementation, especially within neighborhoods/communities that have inequitable access. I also believe efforts into increasing understanding of the BRT, its financial implications on the city budget and taxes, and producing outcomes that demonstrate its effectiveness will be helpful, especially for residents who are privileged enough to not need to rely on public transportation.

**Any Other Issues/Topics You Wish To Discuss?**

Thank you for the opportunity to answer these important questions, be interviewed, and the potential to be supported through a public endorsement! #DemocracyWins