

# 2020 GWINNETT COUNTY SHERIFF'S CANDIDATES RESPONSES



Lou Solis (R)



Curtis Clemons



Benjamin Haynes



Floyd Scott



Keybo Taylor

**Public Safety** – The Sheriff's Office plays a vital role in immigration enforcement, as 47 percent of individuals deported come from county jails. Cobb County currently participates in Immigration & Customs Enforcement's (ICE) 287(g) program, which deputizes sheriff to carry out the work of immigration enforcement. Counties with 287(g) programs have a troubling history of racially profiling drivers. In addition, according to the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute it is costly for local law enforcement to hold individuals past the time of their release, costing "an estimated \$88 million from 2008 to 2017, or about \$9 million a year statewide on average over a decade." **Do you support the 287(g) program? (Yes/No) Please explain.**

Failed to Respond.

Let's be clear, I DO NOT support the 287 (g) program. I unequivocally reject the discriminatory and expensive ICE Deportation program that the current Sheriff's administration renewed in May of 2019. Upon being sworn in as Gwinnett County's next Sheriff, my first order of business will be to sever the connection with ICE, and immediately end the 287(g) Deportation program in Gwinnett County. This program has destroyed families, while creating fear and division between the [omitted].

I support significant reform of the 287(g) program. Gwinnett 's reported 287(g) instances totaled close to 5,700 in 2017. Most of the people detained under 287(g) are being held for minor offenses such as driving without a license and ICE should not be involved. These would merely be ticketed offenses in other counties. It should be a priority to protect and serve all people in Gwinnett and have the trust of the community. As Sheriff, [omitted].

I do not support the 287g Program because I worked at the Gwinnett County Jail before the 287g Program was ever introduced into the jail. There was already a system in place that addressed the undocumented immigrant issue which worked just fine and once I become Sheriff, I will re-introduce that system and do away with the 287g Program.

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**Money Bail System** – Former DeKalb District Attorney J. Tom Morgan opined in the Atlanta Journal Constitution that "money bail unfairly punishes the poor, overcrowds our jails, and allows wealthy defendants to buy their way to freedom." In Georgia, nearly 20,000 residents suffer in prolonged pre-trial detention, although they are presumed innocent, because of their inability to pay bond. Individuals are at risk of irreversible mental and physical health problems; loss of employment and housing; increased costs of family care, and predatory lending by bail bondsmen. The Sheriff plays a tremendously influential role in the public discussion on the use of money bail. **Do you support ending the money bail system? (Yes/No) Please explain.**

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I DO support ending the money bail system provided there are guidelines in place to ensure the return of a defendant for their appointed court date. As part of my platform, I intend to implement bail and bond reform by working with the Solicitor General's Office and State Court judges to allow signature bonds for non-violent, misdemeanor offenses with bonds of \$500 or less, and end the domino effect of poverty (Job Loss) and homelessness [omitted].

Bail reform in the State of Georgia is needed. We have too many inmates that are currently in jail simply because they cannot afford bail. The money bail system penalizes the most vulnerable in our society. As Sheriff I will advocate for sound criminal justice reform that includes bail reform that allows for the equal treatment of all citizens regardless of economic factors. People should not sit in jail because they are poor and cannot [omitted].

No, and I'll tell you why, without the bonding companies the love ones of the incarcerated person will have to pay the full amount of money the judge set on the warrant, or the traffic citation will have to be paid in full before being released.

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**Mental Health** – Studies show that individualized community-based mental health services lowers the risk of recidivism. While data on how many individuals in Georgia jails suffer from mental health issues vary by county, according to the Atlanta Journal Constitution, it is projected that anywhere from 15% to 50% of the population suffers from mental health issues. To address these issues, county sheriffs have engaged in efforts to address problems in jails, from diverting individuals from jail to treatment programs to supporting justice reform efforts to increase funding to mental health services and institutions. **How will you ensure jail safety and to address the special needs of those with mental illnesses? Please explain.**

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I will implement Crisis Intervention Teams and mental health training to all deputies to address detainees experiencing a mental health crisis, and when possible divert persons with mental health issues to a treatment facility or a diversion Mental Health court established in Gwinnett County, a collaborative effort between the Courts, D A's Office, attorneys, police agencies, and mental health treatment programs. By working together, we hope to provide a variety of programs and consistent supervision [omitted].

It is critical to acknowledge the link between inmates and those who suffer from mental health issues. We must fully integrate mental health treatment and substance abuse programs into inmate rehabilitation. It is important to establish routine therapeutic practices for an inmate while incarcerated to set a precedent for an inmate's positive and healthy reentry into society. With quality mental health treatment and support we can reduce our jail population and decrease recidivism while increasing [omitted].

The one way is to make sure they get the treatment they need first and foremost then they will be evaluated to find out their mental capacity before placement at another facility. Some mental health patients just need to be on their medications which in some cases they can't afford in the community.

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**Criminal Justice Reform** – Under Georgia statute, sheriffs have the power to release individuals pre-trial and without the requirement of bail. Every year, hundreds of individuals in Georgia are jailed for minor traffic infractions. For undocumented immigrants, arrests for traffic violations will likely lead to their deportation. Even for U.S. citizens, traffic violations are considered criminal offenses and could lead to high fines and individuals being placed on probation and/or in jail. **Do you support reform efforts to decriminalize traffic violations in Georgia? (Yes/No) Please explain.**

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I DO support the effort to decriminalize traffic violations in Georgia as part of Criminal Justice Reform, with some exceptions. Those exceptions are DUI, driving without valid Insurance, or driving without a valid license. Those three violations typically are at the root of many vehicular deaths and devastation, financially and otherwise, for those left to deal with the impact. Most other traffic violations are used as a means to justify detaining undocumented citizens, however, with [omitted].

As a former Sheriff's Deputy in north Georgia I have worked traffic cases. Every officer/deputy has a level of discretion regarding traffic offenses and the issuance of a citation versus arrest. I support the education of law enforcement officials for proper use of this discretion to ensure that all citizens are treated fairly and humanely and that there is an end to bias with this system.

Yes and No, for minor traffic violations I would say yes to decriminalization, but those that are more severe I say no.

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**Jail Conditions** – Georgia has one of the highest rates of imprisonment in the United States, with some of the deadliest jail conditions for individuals detained. In 2019, seven people died while in custody at the Cobb County jail. Six of the individuals died due to “medical emergencies,” – two of the cases remain under investigation and one case was ruled a suicide. Every year, the Cobb County Sheriff oversees 25,000 individuals in its jail, with more than 2,000 individuals housed every day. **How will you ensure jail safety and protect the health and safety of those detained at the jail? Please explain.**

Failed to Respond.

As part of my platform at Clemonsforsheriff.com, I will implement Crisis Intervention Teams and training to all deputies to address detainees experiencing a mental health crisis, to de-escalate volatile situations and reduce excessive violence lawsuits. I will eliminate the use of the chronically abused restraint chair and dissolve the RRT tactical team which has evolved into a “goon squad.” I pledge to provide all, who are brought to the jail, with fair and humane treatment [omitted].

Ongoing investigations have brought shame to the Gwinnett Sheriff's Department. I have spoken out about this during my campaign. As Gwinnett County Sheriff, I am committed to making significant and lasting reforms that focus on promoting rehabilitation, de-escalation efforts, and fair treatment for inmates as they go through the criminal justice system. Everyone who goes through the criminal justice system deserves to have their human and civil rights respected and protected. Gwinnett should be a [omitted].

One of the first things I plan to do is shut down the RapidResponse Team (RRT) to retrain them and put them under new supervision. RRT is necessary but they just need to be retrained.

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