

King County Democrats 2025 Endorsement Questionnaire

Candidate name
Girmay Zahilay
Candidate name pronunciation
GUR-my ZAH-hil-eye or hear it at www.namedrop.io/girmayzahilay
Candidate pronouns
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X/Twitter/BlueSky/Threads/etc.
https://x.com/girmayzahilay
Link to candidate headshot
https://www.electgirmay.com/gallery
Any other campaign link you would like to share
https://www.electgirmay.com/campaign-updates
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Consultant name
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What type of position are you running for?

King County

Which position are you running for?

Executive

Are you a Democrat?

Yes

Have you ever been a member of another political party?

No

Does your campaign have a code of conduct for staff and volunteers?

Yes

Will you share a link to your code of conduct?

<https://www.electgirmay.com/code>

What motivated you to run for this position and how will you evaluate your success?

I'm running for King County Executive because I believe bold, inclusive leadership can make King County a place of safety, opportunity, and dignity for all, no matter their background. This belief is rooted in my story. My family fled persecution and arrived here as refugees. King County gave us a chance through affordable housing, good schools, and decent jobs. That opportunity changed our lives. But today, those same opportunities are out of reach for too many. We face a severe housing crisis, a crushing cost of living, urgent gaps in behavioral healthcare, and rising public safety concerns. People are working hard and still struggling to get by. As Executive, I'll fight to expand access to housing, mental health care, good jobs, and community safety. I'll also be accountable for real results. That means tracking how many people are housed, how many crisis cycles are interrupted, how safe our neighborhoods are, and how much economic opportunity we're creating—especially for historically excluded communities. Success to me means better lives, fewer barriers, and trends moving in the right direction. I'll measure progress by outcomes that matter in people's everyday lives.

King County is in the top 15 counties in the country for area and population with amazing diversity across cultures, ethnicities, languages, and other factors. Please share with us how you've prepared yourself to represent this diverse population. For instance, what experience or training have you had in preparation for this role?

As a refugee and immigrant who speaks English as a second language, I know firsthand the challenges our diverse King County residents face. I was raised by a single mom in South Seattle public housing projects, experienced homelessness, and saw gun violence and poverty. These experiences give me a connection to our diverse communities and a drive to fight for equity. I now serve as Chair of the King County Council, leading the legislative branch as its chief executive and championing transformational policies. I've led on creating crisis care centers, raising the minimum wage, passing life-saving tenant protections during the pandemic, and advancing criminal justice reforms during the protests of 2020. I've passed missing middle housing legislation, launched a billion-dollar workforce housing initiative, and helped transform working class neighborhoods like Skyway. As Budget Chair, I've navigated fiscal crises with transparency and compassion. On the Sound Transit Board, I fight for safer, more accessible transit options. Before office, I was a business attorney, a nonprofit founder and executive director serving youth, and worked at the White House and Congressional Hunger Center.

Knowing that the County Strategic Climate Action Plan will be updated in 2025, what priorities do you bring to that important plan?

As a Councilmember, I'm proud to have championed the Extreme Weather Mitigation Legislation that developed a regional operation plan for extreme weather centers with a focus on our most-vulnerable residents. We need more climate investments and I am committed to seeing several climate priorities advanced in the 2025 update and as Executive:

- Create a Green New Deal Framework for a just transition to clean energy and to build an inclusive green workforce. I'll champion workforce development and apprenticeships especially for historically excluded communities.
- Enhance resilience for our communities most at-risk by climate change by improving infrastructure like cooling and heating centers, and equitable access to resources.
- Support the shift to a zero-emission bus fleet by 2030 to meet our carbon reduction goals, assuming that transition achieves our end goal of reducing carbon emissions when balanced against ridership goals.
- Expand renewable energy projects like wind and solar on county-owned properties.
- Retrofit County buildings for energy efficiency and create incentive programs
- Push for land use policies that support higher density development near transit

We understand the tension between the Growth Management Act, achieving climate goals via mass transit, and supporting rural areas with roadway maintenance and development. How do you propose to balance these priorities?

We must uphold the core principle of the Growth Management Act: focusing growth within urban boundaries. That means prioritizing density and development in urban areas while protecting our environmental and agricultural lands from sprawl and degradation. To truly protect rural King County, we must also strengthen code enforcement. Right now, we don't have enough staff to consistently hold developers accountable when they violate land use, environmental, or agricultural protection rules. I will invest in staffing and enforcement capacity to ensure our laws are followed and our rural communities

are protected. At the same time, we must invest in both mass transit and rural infrastructure. I've championed transit expansion in underserved communities like Skyway, including the Via on-demand service, and I support expanding our Transportation Benefit District. But TBD revenues shouldn't only fund transit—we must also dedicate funds to maintain and upgrade rural roads that families depend on for work, school, and essential services. As Executive, I'll direct the County to create a strategic framework for transportation investments—guided by safety, ridership, land use, and equity.

Harborview is an important level 1 trauma center and healthcare safety net for the region. Please share with us how you propose augmenting current funding sources to ensure its viability and prepare it for future needs.

The financial and operational health of Harborview is critical—not just for King County, but for the entire PNW. As the only Level 1 trauma center serving Washington, Alaska, Idaho, and Montana, Harborview provides lifesaving care far beyond King County. Accordingly, I would advocate for other counties and states to contribute. King County residents should not bear the full burden of supporting a hospital that serves such a vast region. Last year, as Budget Chair, I assembled a delegation of Councilmembers to negotiate a revenue deal between Harborview and King County, ensuring the financial stability of both the hospital and our public health clinics. But to sustain Harborview, we need new revenue sources. I'm proud to be the only candidate in this race who recently joined local elected officials in calling on the Governor to pursue new local taxing options. As Executive, I will continue to advocate for new funding in Olympia and strengthen partnerships with state and regional governments to ensure long-term financial sustainability for Harborview. I'll lead efforts to keep Harborview a national leader in trauma care, with the funding and resources it needs to serve all.

Behavioral healthcare remains a top priority and a growing problem. Knowing that Medicaid falls short of funding the cost of behavioral health care services, how do you propose meeting this need?

When I saw the state of our region's overdose crisis during the pandemic, I took action. I asked the executive to work with me on a behavioral health levy. We collaborated with unions, businesses, regional partners, and service providers to shape the Crisis Care Centers levy, which I championed through its passage on the ballot. We're now on track to build crisis centers around the region, restore long-term mental health bed capacity, and support our workforce. My goal as Executive is to build the best behavioral health system in the nation. This includes a well-staffed crisis line, mobile crisis responders, and more recovery centers. I'll also focus on short-term strategies like making overdose-reversal medications more accessible. Public education campaigns to warn people about fentanyl and other drugs as well as addressing the youth mental health crisis will be a priority. I'll also advocate for a progressive tax code to ensure sustainable funding for behavioral health services. Additionally, I'll push Olympia to stop privatizing mental health services, enhance state-run mental health hospitals, and follow the law by providing restoration services to individuals in county jails.

King County has committed to pro-equity contracting with minority- and women-owned businesses (MWBs) and reported that 7% of total 2021 contracting dollars went to MWBs. What actions will you take to reduce systemic discrimination against MWBs and expand the participation of MWBs in county contracts of all sizes and across our communities?

I was the prime sponsor of a King County Council motion declaring that race- and gender-conscious affirmative action practices are urgently needed to eliminate discrimination that neutral policies have failed to address. The motion called on the Governor to rescind Directive 98-01—which has wrongly prohibited race- and gender-conscious measures for over two decades—and urged state action to restore equitable affirmative action tools. It also committed King County to setting measurable MWBE contracting goals, exploring the creation of a dedicated MWBE office, and fully implementing the 2021 County Auditor's recommendations on contracting equity. As Executive, I will strengthen and expand these efforts. I will set clear, countywide equity targets for all departments, increase accountability by publicly reporting progress, and provide technical assistance programs so small MWBs can compete effectively. I will streamline permitting and certification processes and remove unnecessary administrative barriers that block access to capital projects. I'll also ensure that every new County initiative includes an equity impact analysis and that community-rooted businesses are part of planning.

King County has many open job positions. Staffing targets reflect the county's expected level of service. Please tell us your plan for the open job positions and the factors that drive it.

Many King County Departments are facing staffing shortages from Metro, to the Sheriff's Office, to public defenders. While each department has unique challenges, I recognize that massive labor market issues are limiting our ability to build a diverse and well-staffed workforce. As Executive, I will expand apprenticeship and internship programs with local schools, host more County career fairs, and invest in training centers and outreach campaigns. Our local unions must be partners in these efforts, and I will collaborate with them to build strong workforce pipelines. I am proud to have far more union endorsements than any other candidate due to my strong track record with labor. To improve staffing, we need to make King County the best place to work and we can do so by providing our workers the benefits they need to support their families and live a balanced life. We should be providing benefits like childcare support and transportation stipends. The childcare crisis is impacting every sector of our county and I have a universal childcare proposal to tackle this head on. If we want King County to meet the needs of our residents, we must take care of the people who serve them.

Certification

- The candidate hereby certifies that, to the best of their knowledge, the provided information is true and accurate.