

Sharon Tomiko Santos
Endorsement Questionnaire 2026

Please describe your background (education, employment, community and civic activity, union affiliation and political activity).

Elected Experience

Chair, Education Committee; Member, Finance Committee and Consumer Protection and Business Committee.

Other Professional Experience

Non-profit governance and management, including creating three non-profit organizations (two national, one local); Local government executive branch policy and community relations

Education

Franklin High School; B. A., The Evergreen State College; M.A., Northeastern University.

Community Service

Board member, Neighborhood House; Member, Washington Civil Rights Coalition; founding Board, Hate Free Zone of Washington (OneAmerica); founding Board, Puget Sound Public Radio, KUOW; founding member, Washington Tax Fairness Coalition; founding member, Task Force on Immigration and the States, National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL); former Board member, Seattle Chapter JACL; former Board member, Wing Luke Museum; former Board member, YMCA Youth and Government.

Why are you running for this position and what differentiates you as a candidate?

I am running to retain House Position 1 in the 37th LD for the same reasons I ran for this position in 1998: to advance the voices and visions of the people who shaped my worldview and instilled the fundamental values that still influence me and my work in the Legislature. As the daughter of an immigrant clergyman and of a Special Ed teacher who was a strike leader in her union, my history on issues of diversity, justice, and equity extends beyond idealism to concrete action in challenging status quo thinking and with pragmatic problem-solving. I stood up to the Governor and the state Attorney General in the aftermath of 9/11 to successfully block "anti-terrorist" legislation that would have harmed immigrant and refugee families throughout our state and around the world, forcing state agencies to learn how the proposal affected our communities and to redesign a policy that works for everyone. I stood up to the Superintendent of Public

Instruction to insist on basic civil rights provisions in the state school code which, he later admitted, allowed him to protect gender-inclusive bathrooms for LGBTQ+ youth. At a time when democracy is under attack, I am the experienced leader.

According to Research Firm ECO Northwest, King County is on track to miss its affordable housing goals for the future. What policies or budget choices will you support to escalate the production of housing in King County, particularly for residents from lower and middle-income levels?

Affordable housing must, by necessity, accommodate broad segments of our population, from young professionals to retired seniors, and a variety of household configurations, from singles to multi-generational families. Further, our policies must recognize that the concept of "affordability" is not static but, rather, a reflection of multiple economic forces which impact housing prices. I support housing policies for King County that promote mixed housing stock for multiple income ranges. This includes additional emergency shelter facilities, transitional housing, multi-unit housing, and single family housing. I also strongly support efforts to periodically adjust artificial cost inflators. I believe that the state could also serve to spur greater conversion of existing un- or under-used buildings into affordable housing by creating a low-interest redevelopment fund for private owners to access financial support to update existing buildings to meet current building codes.

Recent years have seen historic policy wins for renters in the legislature. What additional policy priorities would you advocate for to address the needs of renters?

As a member of the House standing committee on Consumer Protection and Business, I am working to develop a policy which aims to curtail the documented deployment of discriminatory algorithmic technology in the renters market through stricter anti-trust regulation. This legislation would prohibit certain AI-driven practices that result in market manipulation and rent inflation as violations of the Consumer Protection Act. I am further committed to re-imagining how local governments and the state can partner to create affordable rental housing for public servants such as teachers, firefighters, and public nurses who serve our communities.

In the current federal administration, marginalized communities have been under attack. How will you work to protect democracy and human rights in our state?

This statement identifies the essential problem that I have dedicated my

life and career to eradicating: that is, the elimination of community marginalization which is antithetical to the unifying and inclusionary goals of our democratic institutions. As a daughter of District 37, I was raised to recognize the inherent dignity of every person and to understand that my welfare is symbiotically bound to the collective well-being of our entire community, to paraphrase the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This early training taught me to be vigilant in protecting and upholding our individual rights and freedoms in every sphere of human interest and activity as enshrined in our federal and state Constitutions and through the rule of law. It is why I was able, long before the enactment of the Keep Washington Working Act, to secure an agreement with the Gregoire administration to prohibit state collaboration with federal ICE deportation activities. It is why I have championed data disaggregation, affirmative action, marriage equality, and community preservation as policy priorities that raise the visibility and the viability of communities that continue to be marginalized.

At the same time the risk of climate catastrophes is increasing, federal funding and infrastructure support is being cut to address growing climate needs. What policies do you support to improve Washington's climate resiliency, recognizing that marginalized communities are disproportionately impacted?

State policies must re-examine how to holistically prioritize actions that mitigate vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. In general, state policies are deliberated in isolated policy siloes rather than through comprehensive inter-disciplinary analyses. By this I mean, for example, that climate change impacts on human health may be considered in the Health Committees while the impact of growth management on climate change may be considered in the State and Local Government Committees. What is lost in this approach is that while growth management policies encourage greater housing density, this housing policy in turn exacerbates poor health outcomes especially in poor, urban communities when closely sited tall buildings block natural light, reduce natural ventilation, and increase heat entrapment. As the prime sponsor of HB 1262, I believe that the Governor and the Legislature must strengthen the mission and the authority of the existing Governor's Inter-agency Commission on Health Disparities to fully realize the necessity and urgency of inter-disciplinary, cross-agency collaboration in tackling some of the most complex issues facing our state such as climate change.

Across the state, small businesses are the backbone of the state's economy. What policies would you support to improve the environment for small, local businesses?

The concerns of small businesses in Washington state vary by legal structure, by size, and across industry sector. From my experience, we must recognize how state policies impact small businesses based on these distinct characteristics in order to support a business environment that enables these enterprises to thrive. For example, in District 37, policies that place higher tax rates on service industries significantly impact mom-and-pop restaurants that reflect the diversity of the communities disproportionately to more homogeneous national restaurant chains that benefit from economies of scale. My focus in the Legislature has been to elevate the specific and differentiated needs of small businesses whether this is in tax policy, in access to public contracts, in access to capital, or technical assistance in regulatory compliance. I have supported the elimination of a gross receipts tax, the expansion of OMWBE opportunities, and the growth of the Linked Deposit program, and leading policy conversations about, for example, impacts of the mandatory employer offered retirement program on very small businesses (1-50 employees) in linguistically isolated communities.

For citizens to function in today's world, everyone needs affordable access to technology and the necessary skills and supportive resources to succeed in the digital age. What policies will you support to ensure rural and marginalized communities are not left behind?

The COVID pandemic illuminated the key role of accessible and reliable technology in maintaining a functional economy and continuity of government as well as the urgent need to improve the digital literacy skills of the populace. To these ends, the state enacted programs to eliminate the digital divide for rural communities as well as other underserved communities. I support data-informed policies that highlight both progress toward and ongoing challenges in meeting our objectives, particularly in terms of broadband deployment and affordable connectivity to high-speed internet services as well as in access to personal or community-based computing or communications devices. This will enable the Legislature to target necessary investments that support the health, financial security, and safety of Washington families and communities. I am especially concerned about ensuring that our students are equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills related to digital citizenship and media literacy in age- and developmentally-appropriate curricula throughout their K-12 tenure. Finally, I support state policies that further the 2024 FCC determination of broadband as a public utility.

It is our paramount duty to make ample provisions for the education of all children in our state. What two top education policy priorities will you work to address in the next legislative session?

The state Supreme Court has clearly articulated at least two essential tenets about basic education in Washington: 1) The state Constitution confers a "positive right" to an equitable public education onto every student residing within our borders; and 2) There is nothing more basic to public education than the classroom teacher. With this lens, I intend to focus on the efficacy of existing policies and practices in supporting the constitutional rights of students to receive an equitable public education in non-traditional settings. I am particularly concerned about the quality of learning that is available to students who are involved in the justice system, whether through county facilities or state long-term residential rehabilitation facilities. In addition, I am concerned about stabilizing our education workforce. Recent studies suggest that we are losing educators and administrators at a higher rate than we are attracting into the profession. I am especially worried that, within the next ten years, Washington will not have adequate numbers of principals to staff every building.