

King County Democrats

2019 Candidate Questionnaire County Level

Candidate Name	Girmay Zahilay	
Position Sought	King County Council, Position 2	
Home Legislative District	37th	
Are you a Democrat?	Yes	
Campaign Name	Friends of Girmay	
Campaign Contact Information	Mailing address: PO Box 23125, Seattle, WA 98102	Phone: 206-552-8773 Fax: NA
	Website: electgirmay.com Email: info@electgirmay.com Twitter: @GirmayZahilay Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ElectGirmay/	
Campaign manager or point of contact	Michael Charles or Michael Fertakis	
Consultant(s)	CD Strategic	

Part I – Candidate Background

*Please limit each answer to **no more than 250 words**.*

Please briefly summarize and highlight your qualifications, education, employment, community and civic activity, union affiliation, and other relevant experience.

I am an attorney, non-profit founder, and organizer with experience in anti-poverty, youth development, and legal advocacy work. Below are a few of my most recent civic experiences:

RISING LEADERS, INC. | Founder, President, Board Member

- Founded a 501(c)(3) non-profit that empowers low-income and underserved middle school students by expanding their professional networks, providing them high-quality mentorship, and equipping them with leadership development training. We are dedicated to supporting bright, young minds as they become leaders in their communities and beyond. We now operate in 3 states, including Washington State (South Seattle).

THE WHITE HOUSE | Legal Extern in the Office of White House Counsel

- Supported counsel to the President of the United States by conducting research, summarizing legislation, and writing memos on various legal issues ranging from policy implementation to federal ethics laws.
- Led the Domestic Policy Professional Interest Group, which required organizing policy discussions and policy-related events with senior White House staff.

CONGRESSIONAL HUNGER CENTER | National Emerson Hunger Fellow

- Participated in year-long social justice program that trains leaders in the fight against domestic poverty through placements in community based organizations across the country, and policy experience through placements in Washington, D.C. The program bridges community-based efforts and national public policy.

I also received a degree from Stanford, and my law degree from the University of Pennsylvania.

Describe your history of political involvement, if any, in the Democratic Party, particularly in Washington state politics. In what offices have you served or previously sought to be elected or appointed?

I have volunteered on campaigns in the past in various regions around the country, but never undertaken the tremendous challenge of running for any elected office before.

What prompted you to run for this office? What priorities are you seeking to address with your campaign?

An elder in the Seattle community once told me "It is a fire in the belly that makes for good political leaders." My fire comes from watching my mother continue to struggle to pay rent and stay in her home despite working double shifts at a nursing home for 20 years. My fire comes from watching the neighborhoods where I was raised in South Seattle continue to replace Black people with Black Lives Matter signs. My fire comes from watching the kids I mentor through my nonprofit show so much talent and brilliance, and yet understanding that mentorship cannot change the policies and systems that leave those students with few resources and abundant obstacles.

I'm running for King County Council, D2, in 2019 because now is the time for changing the way we address our most challenging regional issues. I believe in the promise of our youth and our seniors alike. I'm running for King County Council because in one of the wealthiest counties of the wealthiest nations in the world, its unacceptable that our neighbors should be too poor to live. I believe the county government must take a leadership role in designing creative new solutions to building more affordable housing, fixing our criminal justice system, promoting environmental justice, and providing reliable access to transportation. I want to change the priorities of our political system, give our communities greater access to government, and fight for bold progressive policies.

From whom are you planning to ask for an endorsement? If you have received endorsements to date, please list them.

I am planning on asking every Democratic organization and elected official in my district for their endorsement. I also plan on seeking the support of labor, environmental groups, transportation groups, civic engagement organizations and any other organization that supports Democratic priorities and gives endorsements.

We will also be seeking the endorsements of community leaders that have been involved with the fight for equity and social justice, leaders that have stood on the front lines for years to make sure District 2 remains a vibrant, diverse community despite its tremendous challenges.

I have received the endorsement of Senator Joe Nguyen.

Please describe your campaign strategy - provide in writing your campaign goals and present progress towards them to your KCDCC endorsement interview.

Our campaign strategy is to knock on as many doors as humanly possible in addition to raising the funds needed to run a competitive race. We set a goal of raising just shy of \$140,000 by the Primary and we are currently at almost \$100,000 after 2 months of fundraising. We are not accepting a dime from corporate PACs or corporations.

This campaign won't be about raising money though, this campaign will ultimately be about convincing people that the time for change is now, and that the next generation of leadership is ready and energized to tackle the challenges of our time. We are going to spread this message out by making our campaign

accessible to all via digital media channels like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter as well as showing up in community spaces regularly, sharing our message of change, and listening actively to the concerns and ideas of our neighbors.

Have you ever been a member of any other political party? If so, what party? Have you ever given money to a candidate from another party in a partisan race? If so, to whom and when?

I have always been a Democrat, and I have never given money to a candidate from another party.

Please answer the following questions. Your answers will not disqualify you from consideration for endorsement by KCDCC.		Yes*	No
1	Have you ever failed to pay any taxes or failed to comply with court ordered judgments?		X
2	Have you ever been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor?		X
3	Have you ever been a member of any other political party?		X
4	Have you ever been found in violation of a Public Disclosure Commission, Federal Election Commission or Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission regulation?		X

* If you answered "Yes" to any of the above, please explain your answer:

Part II – Local and State Issues

Please limit each answer to **no more than 250 words**.

#	Question	Yes	No	Qualify your response
1	Do you support the right of public workers to unionize, bargain, and strike?	X		
2	Do you support legislation at the local and state level to require equal pay for equal work for all genders?	X		
3	Are you willing to have yourself, your staff and your peers undergo training to understand and combat institutional racism and implicit bias?	X		
4	Are you willing to have yourself, your staff and your peers undergo training to understand and combat sexual harassment?	X		
5	Do you support a plan to restrict pollution with a cap and trade system?	X		
6	Do you support the Growth Management Act's goals of focusing development and population growth in existing urban centers in order to protect rural land use in rural King County?	X		
7	Do you support restoring lost funding for the King County WSDOT Roads Division?	X		

8	Do you support increased funding for the King County District Court Regional Mental Health Court?			
9	Do you support requiring King County Sheriff's deputies to wear body cameras?	X		
10	Do you support the repeal of Tim Eyman's I-747, which artificially limits property tax increases to 1% per year, regardless of population growth, inflation, or need?	X		
11	Do you support maintaining King County's sanctuary status to protect undocumented immigrants?	X		
12	Do you support the creation of a new youth jail for King County?		X	
13	Will your campaign be accepting contributions from corporate PACs, such as, but not limited to, fossil fuel, pharmaceutical, or health insurance companies?		X	

Part III – Free Response Questions

*Please limit each answer to **no more than 500 words.***

Please review the King County Democratic Platform at <https://www.kcdems.org/d/platform/platform.xml>. How have you worked, and if elected, how would you work to implement the goals in this platform?

After graduating from Stanford in 2009, I participated in an economic development, anti-poverty fellowship program. I spent the first six months in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, where I helped low-income residents get access to fresh food by incorporating produce into local corner stores and food banks. I realized, however, that while food banks offer temporary hunger relief, they do not implement the systemic changes necessary for long-term prosperity.

Seeking to change systems, I moved to Washington, D.C. and worked with policy organizations to advocate on behalf of low-income citizens. I researched and wrote summaries on Congressional proposals, such as healthcare and tax reform, that aimed to aid the poor.

I helped activists around the country participate in the political process by updating them on federal legislation and showing them how to persuade their elected officials to vote in their favor on issues like tax reform and universal healthcare. I also met with members of Congress to report my findings on community health in Brooklyn. They all agreed that having first-hand accounts from community members is integral to making sound policy. I learned here that the most effective solutions to poverty marry the strengths of grassroots and government efforts: bold legislation that actively seeks input, leadership, and commitment from the people it is intended to impact.

After my time doing policy and organizing work, I enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania Law School. In my third year of law school, I interned at the White House and saw how the Obama administration combined law, policy, and grassroots efforts to drive change.

In 2014, I started my legal career in New York. Practicing as an attorney taught me how to solve problems, manage people and a process, and communicate effectively. Through my pro-bono legal practice, I represented incarcerated people serving for nonviolent offenses and worked to grant them early release. But generally speaking, private practice was too removed from the communities I wanted to serve. With this

in mind, I co-founded Rising Leaders, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that gives underserved middle school students educational resources, mentors, and life-skills training.

After moving back to Seattle, I launched a second chapter of Rising Leaders in Seattle with the help of dozens of incredible volunteers from around King County. We currently partner with Aki Kurose Middle School and plan to launch in Highline Public Schools this fall. Rising Leaders has now expanded to its third city in Washington, DC.

Just as I have in the past, I plan to continue advancing education equity, the alleviation of poverty, and criminal justice reform. My specific plans on these points are below.

King County plays an important role in providing many health and human services. Do you support increasing funding for these programs, and if so, how would you fund them?

I absolutely support increasing funding for these programs. I also recognize that Washington State has the most upside down tax code in the country. Thus, we must think through creative, non-regressive ways of funding county programs until a progressive income tax is passed.

I am very interested in exploring the creation of a County Bank that would allow us to collect interest on our revenues and borrow against our funds which we could use to fund infrastructure and human services. I am also in favor of finding ways to increase employer participation in health and human services programs so that major corporations pick up more of the task.

Describe your vision for tax reform and tax fairness. What changes to the state's tax system would you ask the Legislature to make?

Washington State has the most regressive tax system in the country, and we simply cannot continue to rely on taxes that disproportionately impact our low-income residents. My vision for tax reform and tax fairness is one in which the wealthiest Washingtonians and corporations pay their fair share. The most important change we can make is to pass a progressive income tax. Additionally, despite it failing in the legislature this past session, I have faith that we will one day soon have a state capital gains tax which will help offset some of the regressive taxes. Additionally, I would ask the legislature to allow cities and counties to have more ability to raise revenue through progressive options like the Employee Head Tax.

The other is lobbying for changes to the current limits that are placed on what the County can or can't tax. We currently have two significant sources of revenue: Sales tax and property tax, and it's mostly property tax. With that capped at 1 percent, over time, if you factor in inflation and population, our actual revenues are trending down and down, year after year. The lack of progressive tax options has meant that as region's income on a whole has risen, our tax burden – contrary to conventional wisdom – has declined significantly. This is largely because the sales tax is imposed on a narrow base of goods that doesn't reflect what we spend our money on in this economy.

We could change the sales tax so that it applies to more of the sales happening in our modern economy, but at lower rates than the ten or ten-plus percent we currently face. That would be fairer and has been done successfully in other jurisdictions like Hawaii and New Mexico.

Another idea we could pursue is fixing the B&O tax. Taxing a business on gross revenues just doesn't make sense for small businesses in particular. We could instead include a Value Added Tax, which is a tax on each stage of production that is ultimately paid by the end user. It's more fair and better for job creation.

If you were in charge of putting together a budget proposal for King County, what would it look like? How would you raise revenue to avoid harmful cuts to public services?

If I were in charge of putting together a budget proposal for King County, it would be a budget focused on the people of King County. I would not include or approve anything like what happened last year when the council voted to approve over \$130 million in funding to the Mariners when that money could have instead been used to build more affordable housing or a whole host of other programs that would have benefited the public.

As the true regional governing body, the King County Council has a responsibility to step up to the challenge and lead on our region's homeless crisis. My budget would include additional funding for services related to homelessness in addition to investments in affordable housing.

Additionally, we have to be doing more to make it easier for our youth and low-income riders to use public transit. Fare enforcement disproportionately impacts youth, people of color, and low-income individuals. Failing to pay the fees associated with this is one of the leading entryways to the criminal justice system, and we should be doing everything we can to prevent people from entering the justice system. I would ensure the county finishes developing a full-on program that would help people who are very low-income afford bus fare, and would look to find ways to raise revenue to make ridership free for individuals under the age of 18.

All of this is of course going to require funding, which is why I would like to propose a King County public investment vehicle. This investment vehicle would be used to invest a portion of public pension funds into local infrastructure projects. In other words, public employees currently have retirement funds that are invested in a portfolio of assets, and I believe a portion of those funds should be invested in local infrastructure like public transit. Other municipalities, like Dallas, New York, and Los Angeles, have had similar strategies for investing public pensions in local infrastructure and have gotten positive returns for their public employees. The benefits of this public investment vehicle are that we have a source of funding that does not come from additional regressive taxation, public employees get a good return on investment, and we all get to benefit from the economic multiplier effects of investing in the local economy.

Washington state has the most regressive state tax code in the country. What changes at the county or state level would you propose to move towards a fair and progressive tax system?

At the state level, I would propose re-examining all tax breaks currently on the books and any that are shown not to be providing a net public benefit should be eliminated. We should not be giving massive tax breaks at a cost to average Washingtonians. Additionally, I would like to see a capital gains tax passed and a portion of it used to replace regressive and burdensome sales and property taxes.

At the county level, as I described in the previous question, I would like to propose a King County public investment vehicle. I would also like to look towards establishing a county bank that would allow us to keep our money instead of paying interest to Wells Fargo. The additional revenue and bonding capacity would allow us to take on a whole host of progressive policies without relying on additional regressive taxes to pay for it.

What specific social justice issues are most important to you? How have you addressed them? How would you use your elected office to address them?

First, I care very much about youth development. I have worked with hundreds of underserved youth throughout the country through the nonprofit I co-founded, Rising Leaders. One major system of oppression for youth is our criminal justice system and I support ending youth incarceration. The legislature recently passed SB 5290, a bill that stops courts from putting kids in jail for things like running away from home, breaking curfew, and skipping school. Washington State is the #1 utilizer of detention for non-criminal violations like these, detaining more youth than any other state in the country. Let that sink in. Passing SB 5290 is a good start, but not enough. I am committed to working with legislators to take the long overdue step of ending our system of youth detention at the County. We support moving fully into the diversion programs and community based solutions that have been shown to be more effective and less damaging to our youth and our society as a whole. The time for incremental steps is over. We need bold action and I know the County and the State can work together to initiate a new era of justice in our region.

Second, affordable housing and displacement are extremely important to me. My mother continues to struggle to pay rent and stay in her home despite working double shifts at a nursing home for 20 years. The communities where I was raised in South Seattle have been fully gentrified. Funding and building affordable housing must be a top priority for the King County Council. The Council must match the importance of this issue to its budgeting and spending priorities -- it cannot spend \$130 million on financing stadiums while this issue exists. The Council should sell surplus land that it owns to purchasers who commit to building affordable housing. The Council should work with state and local governments to agree on focused, measurable goals for building affordable housing and create clear strategies for achieving those goals as a region. As a county councilmember, I would support having a Central Authority at the county level which would allow the entire region to pool its resources and make focused, coordinated investments in affordable housing.

Third, political access is an issue that's important to me and is an overarching problem that spans multiple substantive issue areas. If our political system continues to be misaligned with our interests, we are unlikely to achieve any of our policy goals. We need get money out, and get people in. I will not accept contributions from corporate PACs or corporations. We must limit the influence of money in politics, support publicly funded campaigns, enact term limits, and demand transparency, accountability, and urgency in the governing process. To give people access to power we need to first understand that giving access is not a sacrifice government makes -- it is the only way government works. No one can tell you more about a community and the issues it faces than the people who live in it. Every initiative we undertake, every policy we adopt, and every dollar we spend, must be done hand in hand with the people it is intended to impact. I will explore new and innovative ways of bringing people in and giving people access: targeted fellowship programs that recruit leaders from underserved communities; paid transportations to board and commission meetings; paid internships in King County government for students from underrepresented populations; social media initiatives that open the process to young people, partnerships with employers, community centers, barber shops, and places of worship that bring government to the people. Furthermore, we can't talk about access without talking about the voting process itself. I will explore online voting; I will push for literature and materials to be written in all the languages spoken in our County; I will work with colleges and universities to do voter registration drives; I will advocate for employers to have voter registration workshops during work hours; I will support Election Day as a paid holiday; and I will fight for prisoners to get back their right to vote.

Fourth, I also care a lot about environmental justice. Growing up in neighborhoods like Rainier Vista and Holly Park, I saw the families I grew up around suffering from a plethora of illnesses like asthma and diabetes. Communities of color and low income communities are disproportionately impacted by the impacts of climate change, and are statistically more likely to have higher rates of health problems due to the effects of pollution. Environmental justice demands that the Council maintains clean and healthy living standards for our most marginalized communities. We must prioritize infrastructure upgrades and improvements in underserved parts of the county. We must continue to review health outcomes by zip code and see where sanitation and environmental upgrades can be made to promote health equity.

Finally, public transit as a social justice issue is important to me because access to reliable transportation is the single biggest factor for escaping poverty. All transportation decisions should be viewed through an equity lens and we must ensure low-income neighborhoods have more access especially in this era of extreme gentrification. To do so, we can explore partnerships with rideshare and other technology companies to increase options for residents with disabilities and residents in neighborhoods like Hillman City, Rainier Beach, Renton, and Skyway. We can expand the Orca Lift program to be free for all youth and elderly in the County, and also make it even more accessible for low-income residents. We must decriminalize fare evasion, which currently targets youth of color disproportionately.

How have you worked to combat climate change? How would you use your elected office to ensure your municipality drastically lowers net carbon emissions by 2030 and achieves carbon neutrality by 2050?

My commitment to environmental goals started as a teenager when I was the president of Franklin High School's Earth Corps, and continues today as I train middle school youth to become socially and environmentally conscious leaders through the nonprofit I founded called Rising Leaders. In my personal life, I have committed to living my life without a fossil fuel powered car and instead rely on public transportation and bike and ride share programs. Environmental justice and climate advocacy are central pillars of my campaign agenda and I hope to dedicate the rest of my life implementing policies that promote healthy and sustainable futures for the people in our communities.

I would like to use the power of the office to advocate for doubling our ridership and accessibility of public transit because cars are the biggest emitters of pollution in our region. We must also speed up the timeline of transitioning King County Metro to an all electric fleet. Current plans are to have an all electric fleet by 2040, but according to a 2017 report on the feasibility of creating a zero-emission King County Metro vehicle fleet, the existing bus fleet consumes about 10 million gallons of diesel fuel annually and accounts for 80 percent of King County government's greenhouse gas emissions. I also want to ensure that the busses that travel routes going through areas with the lowest levels of air quality are the first to be replaced. King County has a responsibility to ensure that we are committed not just to clean energy policy, but environmental justice as well.

Do you believe elected officials have a responsibility to bring up the next generation of leadership? If so, how do you plan on doing so?

I believe that we have a responsibility to prepare the generations that come after us to lead, which is why I started a non-profit specifically focused on empowering low-income and underserved middle school students by expanding their professional networks, providing them high-quality mentorship, and equipping them with leadership development training. We are dedicated to supporting bright, young minds as they become leaders in their communities and beyond.

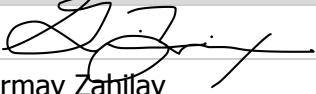
I would explore new and innovative ways of giving new people access to government since exposure is the best way to prepare the next generation. I would create targeted fellowship programs that recruit leaders from underserved communities; paid transportations to board and commission meetings; paid internships in

King County government for students from underrepresented populations; social media initiatives that open the process to young people, partnerships with employers, community centers, barber shops, and places of worship that bring government to the people.

What is your definition of diversity? What experience do you have promoting diversity?

My definition of diversity is ensuring our government has the demographic make-up necessary to achieve a goal of equity in King County. In other words, the people in leadership positions not only reflect the demographics of the population, but the people in leadership have the demographics necessary for bringing about policies that treat all communities fairly and respectfully, and provide equitable access to opportunities and resources.

I affirm that all the information provided in response to this questionnaire is true, complete and correct, to the best of my ability, and that no relevant matter has been omitted.

Signature		Date: May 7, 2019
Printed Name	Girmay Zahilay	