

COALITION FOR A BETTER MEMPHIS
Shelby County Sheriff Candidate Questionnaire
Election Date: May 4, 2010

Name: James E. Coleman, Jr. _____

Section 1: Qualifications and Background (1 question)

Section 2: Vision and Strategies (3 questions)

Section 3: Improving the System (2 questions)

1. QUALIFICATIONS AND BACKGROUND

1. **Qualifications: Describe briefly your qualifications for holding the office of Shelby County sheriff. (Please answer in the space below. You may attach a resume or other description to provide us with additional detail.)**

I am the Chief Jailer for the Shelby County Sheriff's Office and have led the jail from where it was to where it is today. There has been no single task in Shelby County Government more difficult, yet within 7 years we have received certification and accreditation from state and national regulatory agencies. The jail once despised by some is now regularly sought after for consultation on best practices by sheriff's offices and other criminal justice agencies. I am a proven leader and visionary ready to lead the sheriff's office from "good to excellent".

2. **What events or experiences caused you to decide to run for this office?**

The decision of Sheriff Luttrell to run for County Mayor was the single factor in my decision. I have worked with Sheriff Luttrell to make our office one that is respected both locally and nationally; I don't want to see this movement changed. I can continue to lead us in the direction we are headed. We cannot afford to reverse our progress with a new administration with that does not understand where we are headed.

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2. VISION AND STRATEGIES

1. **Law enforcement philosophy: What is the best way of reducing crime in a community? What best practices should we be considering, in Shelby County that have reduced crime in comparable counties? What is the best role for the sheriff's department in this?**

The best way of reducing crime is by educating the people. Shelby county has a 70% drop out rate in our school system when they drop out of school they drop into crime. This education must take place on two fronts first at home and then in our communities. We must educate our citizens on how to "take back" their neighborhoods and we must provide a village to take care of the children who parents are not or cannot be their role models.

We must continue with "data smart policing", using technology to identify criminal trends in order to predict and protect against criminal activity. And once we have arrested the person we must use our jail to help arrest the problems. We cannot continue to return the over 90% of convicted persons back into society in the same or worse shape they were arrested in.

The Sheriff's Office role must be that of a community advocate. We must be the champion for safe and secure neighborhoods, for the disadvantaged and advantaged citizens. We must be tough on crime and empathetic to the cause of crime.

2. **Management philosophy: What is the best way of managing a law enforcement agency with several distinct missions, including law enforcement and jail management? The best way to manage people regardless of the station in life is to be consistent in your application of policy and procedures, be fair with each individual situation and never take yourself too serious. We must never forget we are servants of the public who have been entrusted to be role models and if we demand that of our staff we will be successful.**
3. **Jail costs: How can the jail be managed humanely, efficiently and effectively – and cost less money? Managing a jail humanely is not difficult if you have well trained staff. Training of staff never ends and is not confined to a classroom setting. Supervisors must be competent and possess the ability to train their subordinates at every level. In order for the Shelby County Jail to be more efficient, effective and cost less we would need to invest in a new staff friendly jail. Our current facility is labor intense; a new "Direct Supervision" designed facility has proven to save taxpayers dollars in the long run. Absent that, we must empower every**

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agency in our criminal justice system to ensure the people in our jails are those who present the most immediate danger to our society if allowed to be free while awaiting trial. We must use current technology more effectively and look for viable alternatives to incarceration.

3. IMPROVING THE SYSTEM

- 1. Shrinking service area: How can you manage the law-enforcement side of the sheriff's department as city annexations shrink its service area? Although the city annexations have shrunk the geographical service area the number of residents has not shrunk. The development of multi and single family housing in the service areas demands a diligent sheriff's office. There is no zip code or unincorporated area that does not deserve the most effective law enforcement possible. The not so often thought of side of law enforcement with the sheriff's office is the service provided in our courts. Shelby County has over forty courts we provide officers for. These officers are certified and in harms way when dealing with the public, many of whom are facing serious charges and long sentences. Shelby County serves fugitive warrants throughout the entire county, seeking people who are trying very hard not to be caught and some are extremely dangerous.**

The shrinking geographic area has not diminished the need for a full service county sheriff's office.

- 2. Community relations: What are the best ways of strengthening relations between the sheriff's department and the diverse communities it serves? Strengthening the community relations is a constant challenge for the sheriff's office. Our county has become a multi ethnic community, and each resident must be offered the same level of safety. We must recruit people who look different, who are fluent in English and yet speak other languages as well. We must go into non indigenous communities and help the residents understand our laws and learn to respect their customs carried out within our laws. When we show as we have shown, our department to be resident friendly, we will have a great relation with all communities in Shelby County.**

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