

ALACHUA COUNTY LABOR COALITION

2024 Alachua County Commission Candidate Questionnaire

INSTRUCTIONS:

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this questionnaire.

This questionnaire is divided into eight sections covering issues important to Alachua County Labor Coalition members and Alachua county's working class. Each section contains multiple questions (which are bulleted). Be sure to respond to each question, but please limit your responses in each section to 750 words (or less).

We will be hosting a public candidate forum to provide coalition members and the general public an opportunity to follow up on your responses. Separate forums will be held for commission and mayoral candidates.

The forum is scheduled for Thursday, August 1st at 6:00 PM (location TBD).

Candidates must return a completed questionnaire by Monday, July 22nd at 11:59 PM in order to receive an invitation to the forum.

Completed questionnaires should be returned to Coordinator@LaborCoalition.org.

NOTE: The Labor Coalition does not endorse any candidates, and the inclusion of these questionnaire responses to our website should not be taken as an endorsement.

Labor and Wages

- Federal and state laws give most workers the right to form and join unions. Do you support or oppose the right of all private and public sector workers to organize a union?

Support

- Would you publicly support workers in our community who are seeking workplace rights, including a living wage and the right to union representation?

Yes

- The questions in this part relate to living wages, benefits, and economic inequality.

BACKGROUND: The Alachua County Commission [made significant progress on providing living wages for municipal workers, including part-time, temporary, seasonal, and contracted workers](#). This year, the state legislature passed, and the governor enacted [HB 433](#), which prohibits city and county governments requiring their contractors to pay workers a wage above the state's minimum wage after September 30th, 2026. Additionally, HB 433 prohibits local governments from requiring employers provide heat protections to their workers.

- How do you define a living wage?

A living wage is the wage or annual income required for a household to afford a quality standard of living for all members of that household to thrive. This includes affording all of our basic needs, such as food, water, housing, education, healthcare, transportation, clothing, utilities and other essential needs.

- What do you think the Commission can do to decrease the gap between wages and the cost of living in Alachua County?

As one of the large employers in the area we are dedicated to raising the wages of all our employees to a living wage. We increased our minimum wage each year and given COLAs to ensure that our staff can afford their needs. This year our minimum wage will be \$18/hour and last year we gave a 10% COLA as well as merit increases and added parental leave for employees. We are also setting up an Economic Development Office that will be looking at ways to attract and retain high quality, well paying jobs in Alachua County and to look at how we can leverage our spending to reflect our values and goals to address issues such as climate change and housing while building a qualified workforce.

To improve wages and benefits for workers throughout our County, I think we need encourage our other institutions and major employers to adopt our living wage as well. We also need to focus on health care as a target. Healthcare is often the most expensive, or one of the top 3

expenses, for a business. It is so expensive that many small businesses cannot provide it at all. There are new models arising that provide fair, fully transparent pricing to employers or individuals at high quality centers that offer comprehensive preventive and primary care services. Exploring ways to Partner with our clinic and other employers to expand a model that allows an employer or individual to pay a risk adjusted fixed fee per patient for all services, and in some cases add additional payment or shared savings for meeting experience, quality or utilization targets would bring dramatic shifts in costs and health outcomes. These savings, in turn can be passed on to individuals in wages and other benefits. The County could lead the way in offering this healthcare model and allow other local businesses and organizations to join.

- What role should large employers in Alachua County play in helping improve wages, worker benefits, workplace safety, and reducing inequalities, if any?
- How would you encourage local employers to address these issues, in light of the state's recent preemption of local governments requiring contractors to pay their employees a living wage?

I am unsure of the details of this preemption and what is allowed as I have not studied it, but some possible ways (depending on this preemption language) we can consider encouraging this with out the ability to require it is to have scoring for our RFPs and other contract negotiations ahead of contracting. We can also simply have our own agencies continue to track the living wage and share our desire to see all businesses and institutions follow suite. Some good news is that the preemption will not impact our existing contracts and won't go into effect for a while (2026, I believe).

Housing

- How can the County and/or its partners build significant new housing for our workforce?
- What partners do you envision the County working with on such an initiative?

The county can use the funding we have set aside in the infrastructure surtax to buy land, develop infrastructure and partner with non-profits and private developers to build affordable housing stock. We have committed to focusing on 50% AMI and below as this is the critical need in Alachua County. We can also continue to resource the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, putting more general funds and the funds from the sales of Escheated properties in this fund in order to have money available to work with developers. The county can also work to create incentives for inclusionary zoning and consider ways to make infill and redevelopment projects more feasible and easier to accomplish.

- How should the County balance the need for both workforce rental housing and workforce homeownership opportunities?

The county needs to ensure that we are looking at a broad variety of housing project options and investing in the housing types we need most based on the data and information we have on current stocks. For attainable home ownership, we can explore owning underlying land with a Land trust so that equity accrues for the house but at a modest rate while the land value is retained with the county. We can also develop rent to own programs where people don't need a down payment to access a home and/or where a % of rent going into savings account type program that the Tenant can access as a down payment after a certain amount of time. We also need to remain focused on retaining the existing affordable housing stock we have and working with the owners and managers to ensure that they are well maintained and do not shift. We have programs to offer landlords funding assistance to make upgrades and ensure their units meet housing standards and are energy efficient.

- Do you support or oppose mandatory inclusionary zoning in unincorporated Alachua County?

I think inclusionary zoning is not a one size fits all thing. I support inclusionary zoning and think we need to explore where we want to see an increase in density and need affordable housing and target these areas. Given that we have to make the developers "whole" per the state statute, I feel we have to be strategic about how we do this so we get maximum benefit for the dollars spent.

- The questions in this part relate to local-level renters' rights protections.

BACKGROUND: Alachua County created the [Residential Rental Unit Permit Program](#) a comprehensive rental housing ordinance in 2022 that required: landlords or property managers to inform their tenants of their legal rights and responsibilities, universal health and safety inspections, and cost-saving energy and water efficiency standards. The County also passed a Fair Housing [ordinance—which prohibits landlords and property managers from discriminating against renters](#) on the basis of lawful source of income (e.g., Section 8 vouchers), citizenship status, domestic violence survivor status, gender identity, and more.

In 2023, the state legislature passed, and the Governor enacted [HB 1417](#), which preempts city and county governments from requiring many, but not all, of the protections in the Residential Rental Unit Program and Fair Housing ordinances. [View the legal analysis provided to the ACLC on options similar to those in the rental permit program still available to local governments here.](#)

- Do you support or oppose restoring protections formerly guaranteed by the County's Residential Rental Unit Program, provided they are designed in a way that does not violate state law?

Yes

- What options for protecting renters do you think are available to the County, **in light of HB 1417?**

We have the ability to enforce minimum housing standards with code enforcement and to provide education on the rights and resources tenants do have through things like Humans Rights ordinance and other programs. We also have an incentive program mentioned above for landlords to make upgrades to their units.

While HB 1417 does not preempt local prohibitions on Fair Housing ordinances generally, it does make it difficult to enforce the requirement that landlords and property managers only consider “the portion of the rent that the Section 8 voucher holder is required to pay out-of-pocket (as determined by the local housing authority issuing the voucher) in any rent-to-income financial qualification calculation.”.

- What will you do to see that the County’s Fair Housing protections **for Section 8 voucher holders** are enforced, **in light of HB 1417?**
- What will you do to see that the County’s Fair Housing protections **for survivors of domestic abuse, immigrants, trans people, and others** are enforced, **in light of HB 1417?**

Criminal Justice

- How would you reform Alachua County Court Services to encourage the kind of courtroom advocacy required for the more frequent and robust use of diversion programs?

I have been the primary advocate for the County to invest in diversion and re-entry programs. We are currently starting a contract for a re-entry program and have been undergoing an Audit and re-work of court services. In order have quality diversion programs, we need to have a good working relationship and collaboration with the sheriff, court system, the state attorney, the Public Defender and advocacy groups and we need to develop a robust way to screen every case for qualification for diversion programs so that the judges can easily make that determination.

I think we also need to not just focus on court services but also on the ways we can reduce arrests as we open the new central receiving facility which will serve as an intake center that offers mental health counselors and social workers that can review cases and refer people to the services they need, rather than being arrested.

Food

- What will you do about providing access to non-processed, real food options to communities in Alachua County that don't have access to it (i.e., food deserts)?

- What partners do you envision the County working with on such an initiative?

This has been one of my primary initiatives and we have a number of things happening on this front. In addition to the current contract to develop a food hub for Alachua County to support our small and local farms being able to sell to our institutions and other wholesale accounts, we are working to explore how we can work with partners such as bread of the mighty and the food is medicine program to offer fresh foods and access local produce. We also support the use of the county and city CRA dollars for an incentive to attract a retail grocery to Eastern Alachua County and we are supporting programs that empower youth, farmers and food entrepreneurs that are working to address food sovereignty in our county.

Corporate Responsibility

- What will you do to ensure UF is a better community partner in Alachua County (e.g., union neutrality, living wages, payments in lieu of taxes, helping to ensure better access to quality housing, etc.)?
 - o What levers does the County have to pressure UF into being a better presence?

How do you plan to balance the needs/desires of constituents and business interests, and in which areas and do you think they are most in conflict right now?

Miscellaneous

- What actions should the county take to support GRACE Marketplace and other programs targeting homelessness.

The county needs to remain focused on permanent supportive housing - increasing the number and types of PSH we have, finishing the motel projects and expanding pilots like the container housing project. We need to work on how we can expand support to the service providers doing street outreach and offering safe places for those that can't Get a spot at Grace or another shelter. We also need to expand efforts to support families and children experiencing homelessness to fill the gap that Grace does not by offering more vouchers and other partnerships with organizations like Family Promise. We need to coordinate with the Domestic Violence Shelter on how to ensure the victims have the housing resources they need. We can also offer a loan loss reserve for landlords who take in unhoused people so that they have a comfort level that rent will be paid and the unit has some protection against damage to help incentivize more rental availability for those using vouchers.

- As the city of Gainesville has made cuts to its budget and may be forced into making more in the future, how do you feel about the county taking over services from the city both in the future and present?

o What services should be prioritized?

This is not a clear question and it would really depend on the services. I would never presume to suggest or offer how the city should prioritize their budget and cannot know what programs would be cut or need support. I can say that Think the programs that support basic needs and social services are of great importance as are those that focus on public safety and youth development. I think these are areas we all need to prioritize.