

Candidate Responses – Orange County Sheriff

Jason Smith

Question 1: Position Seeking:

JS: Sheriff

Question 2: Have You Previously Held this Position?

JS: No

Question 3: Will you be attending the August 23, 2023, Orange County Candidate Showcase?

JS: Yes

Question 4: What are the biggest challenges you think you will face if you were elected to serve?

JS: I do not take for granted the trust the community would be placing in me by electing me as Sheriff and the biggest challenge that any Sheriff faces is that this is not a job that can be done alone. While I have worked hard over the past 19 years to pursue certification in a number of disciplines within law enforcement, I will still have to earn the trust of the community and my employees every single day. I plan to do so by continuously improving the functional operations of the office, investing in the technology we use, and expanding the community engagement programs we offer. The Orange County Sheriff's Office will need to work diligently to retain the law enforcement officers and staff who love Orange County and want to continuously work to make it better. This is a challenge that I look forward to accepting.

Question 5: Do you support civilian oversight of law enforcement and how would you encourage community participation in law enforcement oversight?

JS: The Sheriff is the only elected law enforcement official in the Commonwealth. `Civilians weigh in on the effectiveness of the office every four years, so in essence, there is built-in community oversight. Currently, under VA Law 9.1-601, there is no legal method to create a civilian review board for a Sheriff's Office. This only applies to police departments. If this were to change, before making an educated decision on a civilian review board, there are many questions that would need to be answered. In addition, localities that have established civilian oversight committees have found that they do not pursue complaints against law enforcement as stringently as an internal review or a Virginia State Police investigation would.

Each year I personally administer the Citizens' Police Academy. This is a unique program designed to enable members of the community to have a better understanding of the operations of the Orange County Sheriff's Office and our community. The course is 10-weeks (3-hour evening sessions each week), is provided at no charge, and is open to Orange County residents over the age of 18, Orange County business owners, and people employed within the County. More than 400 citizens have been taken advantage of this opportunity during the 16 years I have assisted and coordinated this program. I have thoroughly enjoyed sharing my passion for law enforcement with the participants. In 2010, I attended the National Citizens' Police Academy conference and received certification for this program, which seeks to advance public safety through leadership, advocacy, and service. I include topics in the program on police powers and our limits of authority, use of force, and the structure and divisions of the

Orange County Sheriff's Office. Since 2010, we also offer an annual youth academy which I have coordinated for many years. This year the program was coordinated by our School Resource Officers as an additional opportunity to facilitate relationship-building with the youth in Orange County. Through these programs, we have been able to educate the public on law enforcement operations. This helps to prevent misconceptions regarding law enforcement in Orange County. In addition, we have a training simulator that allows us to put our citizens through law enforcement scenarios making split second decisions and utilizing de-escalation techniques. I highly encourage all of our residents to participate in these programs.

Question 6: New residents to Orange County will likely witness normal agricultural practices such as manure spreading, pesticide application and slow-moving farm machinery on our roads and highways. How can the County help support peaceful coexistence between existing farm operations and new residents to the community? What will you do, if elected, to help educate the general public about the agricultural industry?

JS: Farming is near and dear to my heart. I grew up on a farm in Orange County where my family and I continue to live today. With growth in any community comes concerns with road safety. Preserving our rural character and way of life means respecting those who work in agriculture and prioritizing their ability to farm and transport goods and equipment.

Road safety in general is a priority for the Orange County Sheriff's office and will continue to be a focus as we aggressively enforce laws specific to reckless and distracted driving as well as those operating a vehicle under the influence.

If elected, our office will continue to increase our social media presence in order to better educate the general public to increase awareness regarding best agricultural practices and sharing the road with all users, safely. Our agency will also be willing to partner with the Orange County Extension Office in education and promoting positive relationships with the farming community.

Question 7: Do you support rehabilitation programs in prisons, jail, and in the local community, and if so, how would you advocate to continue expanding funding for these programs?

JS: I support evidence-informed rehabilitation programs and the incorporation of those programs into various communities within Orange County. Orange County, in partnership with other surrounding localities and Rappahannock Rapidan Community Services recently received a \$253,382 grant from the Opioid Abatement Authority to implement an overdose response unit comprised of certified peer recovery specialists. This is an excellent example of the ways in which we can pursue funding opportunities and partnerships in order expand programs in Orange County which would reduce recidivism, lower the tax burden of overcrowded prisons, break destructive cycles, and help our citizens lead productive lives.

Question 8: Members of the agriculture community often experience trespass on their property. If elected, how would you protect the personal property rights for all citizens of Orange?

JS: If elected, the Orange County Sheriff's Office would educate the public, especially during hunting season, on the importance of posting their properties with "No Trespassing" signs. Some of the most frequently asked questions regarding trespassing are specific to those who utilize hunting dogs. Social media reminders would be posted to help the public to better understand their rights specific to those concerns. The Orange County Sheriff's Office works

with Game and Inland Fisheries' Conservation Officers to enforce the laws specific to trespassing and will continue to do so in order to protect the personal property of the citizens of Orange County.

Question 9: Nationally, law enforcement has struggled with retention and recruitment. What plans do you have to address and improve these issues in Orange County?

JS: The Orange County Sheriff's Office has not been immune to the nationwide struggle to recruit law enforcement officers. I have assisted in the hiring process for over 11 years and I have also been asked to work with several jurisdictions as they work to promote law enforcement as a career. We have a number of incentives in place to reward our deputies for their years of service with Orange County, such as Senior Deputy and Master Deputy titles and stipends. Certifying a law enforcement officer can take anywhere from 10 months to a year and losing a certified officer to another jurisdiction that can offer a higher salary has been a concern for some time.

In the most recently adopted budget, the Orange County Board of Supervisors incorporated pay increases that made Public Safety positions more competitive with the surrounding counties. This is useful in retaining our employees, and we are grateful that the community has supported this use of public funds.

Deputies must know that their Sheriff has their best interests at heart. That is why Orange County, with input from the Sheriff's Office, is working on a physical and mental fitness program to help first responders deal with hardships that occur on the job. There will be an annual physical fitness test with a stipend starting this October to reward those who strive to maintain a healthy and physically fit lifestyle, which in turn will help us serve the community better.

If elected, I will work with Germanna Community College and other colleges and universities with Criminal Justice programs to recruit and promote Orange County as a great place to live and work. I will also promote through the VA Transition Assistance Program for our military members getting back into civilian life. While it is important to recruit new employees in order to fill vacant positions, we will never compromise on hiring just to fill a vacancy.

There are extremely talented and valued members of the Sheriff's Office who put their lives on the line every day. They must be shown how much they are appreciated for the service they provide. The Orange County Sheriff's Office is strong because so many members of our team choose to live and work in the county we love. They are a part of this community, and they participate fully which makes them invested in their work and highly motivated to succeed.
