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LAW ENFORCEMENT

Can an activist also be the sheriff?
Alyshia Dyer is finding out.



Washtenaw County Sheriff Alyshia Dyer is a former deputy was elected in a narrow upset in 2024. Jacob Hamilton, MLive.com

The outsider perspective that propelled her into office also is causing fierce issues.

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ANN ARBOR — Four years ago, Alyshia Dyer stood beneath a black banner that read “No mass surveillance!” protesting a plan to blanket the Ypsilanti area with automatic license plate readers, greenlit by the county sheriff’s office.

Today, she’s sheriff.

Her journey from organizer and reform advocate to liberal Washtenaw County’s top law enforcement official helps explain both Dyer’s appeal and the challenges that have defined her first year-and-a-half in office.

A former deputy who was elected sheriff in a narrow 2024 upset, Dyer promised to bring a social worker’s perspective to policing and steer people away from the criminal justice system.

Her victory mirrored a larger political appetite for insurgent candidates. As with figures across the political spectrum — including New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, President Donald Trump and U.S. Senate nominee Abdul El-Sayed, whom Dyer campaigned for — supporters saw her less as a steward of the status quo than as an agent of change.

But the same outsider perspective that helped propel her to office has also thrust Dyer into fierce political and institutional fights, testing the limits of what a progressive activist can accomplish wearing the badge.

CONTROVERSIES

She has clashed with fellow Democrats over budgets and oversight, like an investigation into the stub of a marijuana joint allegedly discovered in her county SUV. She has defended controversial personnel decisions such as appointing a former romantic partner to a key role. And she’s navigated the pressure of the office’s first fatal police shooting since 2009, on top of three lawsuits from former employees.

She argues much of the criticism lodged against her is politically motivated, amplified by her status as one of just two female sheriffs in Michigan and among the youngest in state history at 36.

Still, the conflicts risk overshadowing the accomplishments at the center of Dyer’s agenda, including sharply reducing traffic stops and ending cooperation with federal immigration enforcement. A small vanguard of reform-minded sheriffs elsewhere has encountered many of the same obstacles.

“It’s like steering a really, really big battleship. It’s really intractable. It’s really hard,” said Jessica Pishko, a journalist and lawyer who has written a book on U.S. sheriffs.

Dyer said the experience has given her a

deeper understanding of what’s ahead.

“I have a newfound appreciation for just how hard the job is and how hard it is to really change culture,” she said. “We’re not just trying to make the community safer. We’re trying to change the culture around what safety is.”

FROM RUNAWAY TO DEPUTY

Dyer said her path to law enforcement began as a teen.

Raised by her mother, she bounced between homes as a child, attending almost a dozen elementary schools before settling in Ypsilanti.

At times, they were homeless and lived with relatives. Dyer ran away from home several times, and she had mixed encounters with police.

“There was a part of me that felt at the time if I went into law enforcement and became an officer, I could really help change the system,” she said.

She wanted to be a lawyer, but policing offered a faster path to a stable income.

Dyer said she ran away for good at 17. She enrolled at Washtenaw Community College as a first-generation student, graduating from the police academy at 21.

She became a road patrol deputy at the sheriff’s office. Across nearly seven years on the job, she never advanced through the leadership ranks, but the experience left an impression.

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ELECTION 2026

Michigan constitution goes before voters every 16 years

Nationwide, state constitutions have become the battleground for rights and liberties — on both the left and right.

Quinn Yeargain for The Conversation

Beyond picking governors, state legislators, local officials and representatives to serve in Congress, voters in almost every state this year will have the opportunity to amend the language of their state constitution. In one state, they could potentially rewrite the constitution altogether.

Although the U.S. Constitution is rarely amended, voters frequently amend their state constitutions. In every election cycle, voters are asked to ratify constitutional amendments.

In recent years, around 100 amendments have been voted on in each cycle. Most of them are proposed by state legislatures, but some are proposed through the voter initiative process.

This year, however, voters in Michigan will decide whether to convene a state constitutional convention in 2027. At a constitutional convention, elected delegates consider editing or rewriting the state’s constitution, with virtually no limits on what they can do.

Michigan’s constitution requires that voters be asked every 16 years whether to hold a convention, and the last three times the question appeared on the ballot, voters rejected the idea in landslides.

If Michigan voters do want to call a convention, an election for 148 delegates would be held in 2027, and the elected delegates would meet to discuss whether to completely overhaul the constitution or propose small changes, although they might not come to an agreement at all.

State constitutions play an increasingly important role in American politics, though voters may not know much about them.

PROTECTING RIGHTS

Every state has a constitution, and each constitution has an individual bill of

SEE ELECTION 2026, A2

IN YESTERDAY’S EDITION

New homes aim for lasting affordability

Five new homes on the Northside of Kalamazoo are intended to stabilize struggling blocks with homes that will remain affordable for the next 99 years.

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