

**MEMPHIS MIDSOUTH  
DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS  
OF AMERICA**

**SHELBY COUNTY  
PRIMARY  
ELECTION  
VOTER GUIDE  
2026**



Updated May 4, 2026

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# FOREWORD

Voters in Tennessee - and especially in Memphis and Shelby County - are under attack from the very institutions that were created to serve them.

Voter suppression is the main tactic being used against us in the political space, and what makes it so dangerous is that it takes various forms.

**Voter suppression can be active and obvious** – such as when the government does things like removing voters from the registration rolls with no notice, making up rules about who may or may not cast a ballot, or limiting access to voting by taking away early voting and mail-in ballots and provisional ballots. Right now, your legislators in Nashville are cooking up new ways to take away your ability to vote them out of office.

**But voter suppression can also be passive and subtle** - this is how we normally experience it. Bosses can refuse to give workers paid time off so they can go vote. Candidates running for office host sketchy websites (if they have one at all) with no meaningful information. They offer no policies, no statistics, no promises – all while airing their dirty laundry and wilding out on Facebook. Local media institutions (newspapers, news sites, policy blogs, TV journalists) make no effort to dig into *who these candidates are, where they come from, or what they believe in*. There is little reporting on what any candidate seeks to accomplish other than getting elected.

So by the time a voter actually gets to the polls - mind you, this is a person who...

- can afford to leave work for at least an hour and half
- has a means of transportation to get to the polling place
- has a valid photo ID
- has proper up-to-date voter registration
- is at the right precinct location

... they might try to look up something about the candidates on their phone while waiting endlessly in line, only to discover that there is no good information to be found. When they finally make it through the line and get to the voting booth, they are met with a list of names they do not know, with no idea of what separates any of them from each other. They might pick the name they've heard the most, or whose sign they liked, or who their coworkers talked about at work, or whose family has been in politics longest. They fulfill their civic duty - but they do it blindly, hoping for the best.

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***The bottom line is this: lack of information IS voter suppression,  
just as surely as a poll tax or a literacy test.  
Political scientists call it “voter fatigue.”***

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When voters are not given a reason to **want** to vote - when they don't know who any of these people are or what they stand for, when the decision of whether or not to go vote means whether to take a pay cut or not, when they vote and vote and vote and nothing in their lives ever gets better and the same awful people keep getting to run for office with no consequences for their bad actions - they eventually stop voting. Another voter is suppressed.

This is how someone like Paul Young can become mayor of Memphis – in a major American city with more than 600,000 residents, not even 25,000 people voted for him.

It's pathetic - laughable, even. But it points to how the system has been designed to function.

**What does that also mean?**

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***It means that political power is very much up for grabs in Memphis. It is sitting there, waiting for the working class to organize - to become coordinated enough to move collectively and strategically - so that they can grasp it.***

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The Electoral & Policy Committee of the Memphis-Midsouth chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America was formed to help working people grasp this power. We studied, analyzed, researched, weighed options, and wrote this voter guide to help the working class and the left-leaning members of the electorate make the best decisions possible at the polling place.

# WHAT DOES THIS VOTER GUIDE COVER?

**This voter guide is for the Shelby County Primary election on May 5, 2026. Early voting begins April 15, 2026.** Our goal is to issue a voter guide before every election in Memphis and Shelby County for the foreseeable future. Eventually, we will build our capacity to cover more ground than what we have here. (This is our first attempt at this, so give us a break, ok?)

**This voter guide is for the Democratic primary ONLY in the following races:**

- **County Commission • County School Board • County Mayor**

**And for fun, we also threw in our recommendation for the Democratic primary for US House District TN-09 – which will be held on August 5, 2026.**

Be on the lookout for our full voter guide for that election, which will cover the County General, State Primary, and Federal Primary races.

There are more races than just these three on May 5, 2026. This guide DOES NOT cover:

- Assessor of Property
- Circuit Court Clerk
- County Clerk
- County Trustee
- County Court Clerk
- Juvenile Court Clerk
- Probate Court Clerk
- Register of Deeds
- Sheriff

While we recognize that these are important positions in the county government, we just didn't have the capacity to research all these races.

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***We had absolutely zero interest in “recommending” anyone for Sheriff - a position that has been complicit in the federal occupation of our city, in the terrorizing and kidnapping of our immigrant community, and in perpetuating the carceral state’s for-profit machine of death and misery.***

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We have also only covered the Democratic primary. While we can't rule out that ever having something to say about a Republican primary, that need was not apparent this election cycle

# OUR RATIONALE

## HOW DID WE MAKE THIS VOTER GUIDE?

This voter guide is the result of hundreds of hours of work by a group of dedicated volunteers within the Electoral & Policy Committee (EPC) of the Memphis-Midsouth chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America (MMDSA). We are organizers whose theory of change is based on strategically organizing around a credible plan to win meaningful power for the working class and the cause of democratic socialism. **In other words - do you like the policies of Bernie Sanders and Zohran Mamdani? We want to do that here in Memphis - and in Tennessee, more broadly.**

We are working people with jobs, families, and other obligations in life, and we did our best by researching online - looking at candidate websites, news sources, social media accounts, court records, voting records, etc. We attended candidate forums whenever possible so we could see candidates up close and in-person. We reached out to our allies in the various corners of the political scene in Memphis to learn from them. Each candidate was researched as thoroughly as we could manage, and that information was compiled into a central place. From there, the compiled information was reviewed by the EPC, and then the choice of whether to make a recommendation was deliberated upon as a committee and then put up to a vote by the EPC. **It was truly a collaborative effort from start to finish.**

## WHAT DOES SOMEONE HAVE TO DO TO GET RECOMMENDED?

We issued recommendations based on a variety of factors. We researched candidate positions about issues that matter to us, including:

- Opposition to the ongoing federal occupation of Memphis
- Opposition to xAI and Elon Musk's ongoing crime of polluting our city
- Opposition to the overreach of the state government in affairs of home rule in Memphis, especially the looming threat of the School Board takeover
- Support for the public school system as a cornerstone of our society, and opposition to the expansion of charter schools in Shelby County and the state voucher scheme
- Criticism and solutions for the current conditions at 201 Poplar and the deaths of inmates in custody there.
  - MMDSA also believes that the people of the New Chicago neighborhood should be centered in the ongoing discussions about moving the Criminal Justice Center there, protecting their rights, preserving the integrity of their neighborhood, and at a minimum, establishing community benefit agreements for the people there as a necessary part of the project moving forward.
- The candidate's legislative history, where applicable
- Any endorsements the candidate had received
- All financial or in-kind contributions to the campaign

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***MMDSA will never recommend a candidate who has received any contribution whatsoever from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).***

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We tried to consider the candidate and their campaign as a whole - how do they conduct themselves, how do they interact with other candidates, how well and how consistently do they represent their policies and beliefs?

In most cases, the candidates we recommend here don't conform to all the issues outlined above, so don't take our recommendation as meaning that all candidates we highlighted are bound to all these positions. **We are not here to speak for the candidates - they speak for themselves.** We are here to champion the cause of the working class of Memphis and Shelby County. Our recommendations went to the candidates who went on the record with the correct

position on one or more of these issues, combined with their campaign being pro-working class (as far as we could determine).

## WHAT DOES A RECOMMENDATION MEAN?

One important thing that we need to address right off the bat - **these recommendations are NOT endorsements**. We do not consent to any usage of our organization's name, logos, or any other identifying marks to create an impression that we have endorsed any of these candidates. Currently, MMDSA has not made any endorsements in this race. We have a very explicit step-by-step process for how a candidate can receive our endorsement and what that endorsement means over on our website. ([Check it out if you'd like to learn more!](#))

The main difference between a recommendation and an endorsement here is pretty simple. For us, an endorsement means we are throwing our entire support and energy into a candidate who embodies our ideals and who will be a champion for the cause of democratic socialism in Memphis, Shelby County, and West Tennessee.

A recommendation is just that - "a suggestion or proposal as to the best course of action, especially one put forward by an authoritative body," per the Oxford English Dictionary. Our recommendation represents what we believe is the best choice given the range of candidates available. In most cases, it's best to think of our recommendation as an expression of harm reduction; it's not always a question of who will do the most good, but it's a question of who will do the least harm, given the situation and strategy at hand. This is, unfortunately, the most common type of recommendation you will find in this edition of our voter guide.

Even more unfortunately - In most of these races, we do not have a recommendation for you.

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***The members of EPC viewed it as a basic requirement of this project that we not use our voice and platform to recommend subpar candidates. In other words, we chose to reject the "lesser of two evils" trap that voters so often find themselves locked within.***

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If you see a recommendation here, it means that this is not just someone who we find the least offensive, but it's someone who either actually deserves your vote or who needs to win against someone truly awful.

# SO, WHAT DID WE FIND?

## WE NEED BETTER CANDIDATES IN THIS TOWN.

With a few exceptions, this is an incredibly disappointing crop of candidates this year.

Between the perennial losers whose whole personality is running for office, the socially connected non-profit grifters, the brazenly corrupt and incompetent incumbent class, and the cops in sheep's clothing, it was really hard finding folks to recommend. Even harder was trying to find specifics from these candidates on policies and positions. Most of these people don't have a campaign website, and if they do, they're largely filled with nothing but slogans and AI-generated graphics. A shocking amount of information had to be retrieved from the depths of Facebook, which is now the main public forum for sussing out what these people are really like and what they believe. This is completely unacceptable, and the people of Memphis and Shelby County deserve better.

We look forward to finding and uplifting candidates in the future who will center the cause of the working class in their campaigns and speak specifically and plainly to the people in their messaging.

## WE NEED BETTER POLITICAL COVERAGE FROM MEDIA IN THIS TOWN.

We know that political analysis is icky. No media institution wants to be painted with the "biased" brush in public, so it shouldn't be surprising that no one publishes a voter guide with the sort of tendentious perspective that we have here. But it would be so simple for outlets like [The Commercial Appeal](#) or [The Daily Memphian](#) to simply publish a complete report - without a paywall! - on who these people are, where they come from, what they've done in the past, and if there's anything problematic there.

We found insane stories about some of these people in our research - which is, again, the surface-scratching that a handful of citizens were able to achieve. Out of an abundance of caution, we don't even want to allude to some of the things we found, but we believe they would be of significant interest to the public. We would be happy to talk to some journalists about what we stumbled upon.

The people of Memphis and Shelby County deserve to have political coverage that is more than simple recaps of local council meetings. They deserve media coverage that edifies them and holds our political ecosystem accountable. Investigate something, y'all!

## WE NEED BETTER OPERATIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY AT THE SHELBY COUNTY ELECTION COMMISSION.

One of the cornerstones of our research was using the Shelby County Election Commission (SCEC) website to comb through financial disclosure forms for these candidates. The number of inaccuracies and inconsistencies we found were astonishing. On multiple occasions, whole pages of these financial disclosure reports were missing - or the whole reports were missing altogether. We sent emails to the SCEC about these discrepancies, only to receive no response... and suddenly, someone's documents would appear on the website with no announcement or explanation.

The folks at SCEC need to get their act together and run a tighter ship. Besides the fact that they have a duty to the public to keep accurate records, they are leaving themselves open to further interference from Nashville. The state is looking for any reason at all to take away local control of our institutions, and mismanagement of this kind is exactly the kind of thing they latch onto. This also means holding the candidates to a higher level of accountability! Don't accept

sloppy or incomplete paperwork from these shysters. The people of Memphis and Shelby County deserve better from their elected officials and from their civil servants.

## **WE NEED MORE HANDS TO HELP DO THIS WORK.**

As stated before, it is our goal to issue one of these voter guides before every election in Memphis and Shelby County. It required a ton of work from some very dedicated volunteers to put this together, but we were still unable to cover every race. If we had more interested parties who could help us keep track of this stuff, the voter guide could become less of a time-crunch crisis and more of a slow-burn ongoing project.

The work is almost entirely remote, with the only need to attend meetings revolving around committee-wide check-ins and deliberation. For those of you who have been wanting to plug in to a pro-people, pro-socialism movement but don't have the capacity for the endless meetings and mobilizations, this is a way you can begin to meaningfully contribute to the work of the nation's largest socialist organizing coalition that makes an impact at the local level. If you have found this guide, you know our website – use the [Contact](#) form to connect!

Shout-out to Kelsey Hughes (@memphisurbanism on Instagram) and Randy Truong (@r.andytruong on Instagram) for using their platforms as social media personalities to help voters navigate the wilderness that is this upcoming county election, and we look forward to linking up with more advocates for pro-working class change in the future as MMDSA expands our capacity to be a meaningful force in Memphis politics.

# WHAT DO THESE PEOPLE DO?

## COUNTY COMMISSIONER

The Shelby County Commission consists of thirteen elected commissioners with each commissioner serving in Single Member Districts 1-13. So, thirteen commissioners are elected from thirteen districts and they serve four-year terms. They are limited to two consecutive terms. The Board of Commissioners' job is to enact legislation through ordinances and resolutions, approve the County's fiscal budget, set the property tax rate, make policy decisions, and most importantly, serve as a voice for their constituents. The most important line items that come up on the county's budget are public education, law enforcement (the department of corrections, the sheriff's office, and the courts), community services, and healthcare.

- Commission meetings are open to the public - you can access their calendar [here](#).
- Current [County Commissioners](#) (as of March 2026)

## SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER

The Shelby County Board of Education is made up of nine elected Board members who each serve four-year terms. Starting this year, they will be limited to two consecutive terms. The Board of Education oversees the policies, budgets, and operations for Memphis Shelby County Schools, which serves over 100,000 students.

- Meetings are held on the final Tuesday of each month and are open to the public.
- Board meetings are also streamed online and you can access archived meetings [here](#).
- Current [School Board Members](#) (as of March 2026)

## COUNTY MAYOR

The County Mayor is elected to a four-year term and oversees the budget and planning for different Shelby County government bureaus. He also acts as a resource for other elected officials of towns and cities within the county like, Bartlett, Germantown, Lakeland, Memphis, Millington, Arlington, and Collierville. One of the Mayor's responsibilities is to work directly with local chambers of commerce, business groups, the Shelby County Commission, and other administrators to nurture economic development and make our local government run more efficiently. The various departments that the Mayor oversees and allocates funding for are:

- Planning & Development
- Administration and Finance
- Public Works
- Corrections
- Health Services
- Community Services

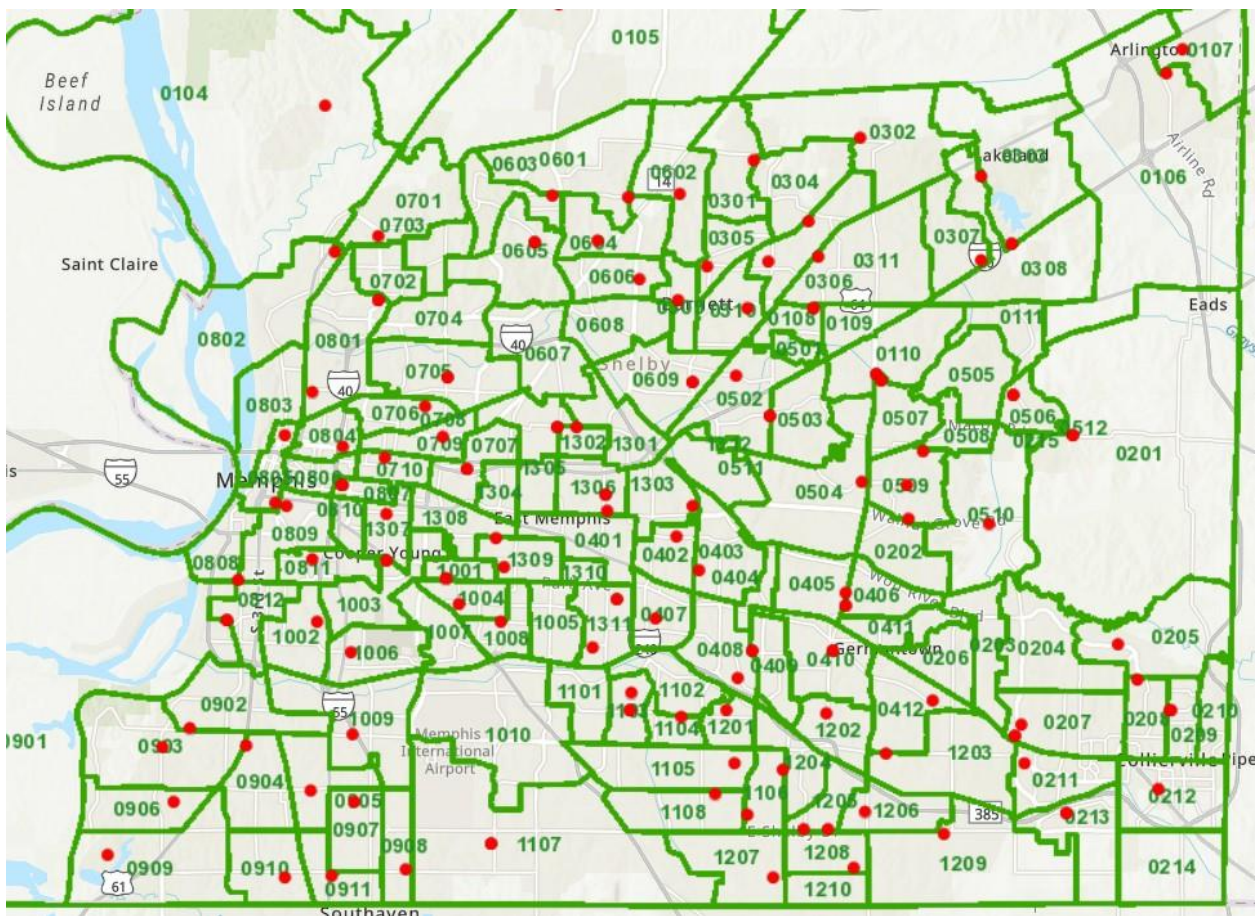
## US HOUSE REPRESENTATIVE

Tennessee has nine United States Representatives elected from nine different districts throughout the state. Two of these districts fall within Shelby County and are known as the West Tennessee Delegation: Districts 8 and 9. These Congressional reps serve two-year terms and there are no term limits. It's their job to represent the residents of Tennessee during annual sessions of Congress in Washington D.C. They approve the budget proposals of the President of the United States and most importantly, represent the needs of the residents in their state and districts.

## HOW TO FIND YOUR DISTRICT

Enter your address [here](#)

A four-digit number will cover the area you live in:



The first two numbers are your district number (02)

The second two numbers are your precinct number (Precincts make up the district)

You can find your current county commissioner [here](#), using the first two numbers from earlier

# COUNTY COMMISSION

## County Commission District 1 – No Recommendation

*Arlington, Millington, Shelby Forest, Kerrville, Bolton*

### Candidates

Sade Nicole Bradley

**Comments:** Although Bradley is running unopposed in District 1, MMDSA cannot recommend her. There are neither enough policy positions nor governing strategies easily available to confidently say that Bradley would uplift working class families.

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## County Commission District 2 – No Recommendation

*Germantown, Collierville, Eads, Pisgah*

### Candidates

No Candidates in the Democratic Primary

**Comments:** The suburbs may think themselves immune from the problems of the city; content to imagine that only those who live in Memphis are poor, have children who go to school hungry, or whose labor is exploited by their bosses. The truth of the matter is that poverty, food insecurity, and the long arm of the carceral state exist in Germantown and Collierville as much as they do within the City limits. We hope to see a bold, progressive champion for working families emerge in this district one day. Sadly, voters will have to wait four more years to get their chance.

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## County Commission District 3 – No Recommendation

*Bartlett, Lakeland, Brunswick*

### Candidates

Ryan Ramkhelawan

**Comments:** MMDSA firmly believes policy should allow all citizens to prosper. Time and again, the Democratic party relies on corporate growth to achieve this goal, and in the process leaves working-class families in the dust. Housing continues to increase, healthcare is more difficult than ever to access, and our air is being sullied by corporate greed. We wish for Shelby County to be attractive to new business not because tax rates are low and property is cheap, but rather because Shelby County has the infrastructure for a happier, confident, and healthier working class. Ramkhelawan appears to be pursuing a technocratic, pro-business agenda as the sole platform of his candidacy, leveraging his background in start-up and VC circles. He appears to have no interest in social justice or the cause of uplifting the working class. For this reason, MMDSA cannot recommend him.

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## County Commission District 4 – No Recommendation

*Sea Isle Park, Pleasant Acres, Eastwood Manor, Balmoral, Kirby Trace, South Germantown, Poplar Estates*

**Comments:** No one is running on the Democratic ticket in this district, which is a real lost opportunity. Our research indicates that some of the most pro-Sanders and pro-Warren precincts from the 2020 primary are located in this territory – indicating that there is real desire from voters in District 4 to see a progressive leftist in office. Ceding ground to the GOP without a fight is a real disservice to the people, and we hope to see a courageous leftist step up in the coming years to represent the working class families of District 4.

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## County Commission District 5 – Shante Avant

*Cordova, Shelby Farms, Sanga Point, Trafalgar, Cordova Club*

### Candidates

Shante Avant (incumbent) Milton

Bonds, Jr.

**Comments:** **MMDSA recommends casting your ballot for Shante Avant.** She has a proven track record of advancing the well-being of women and families through her servitude with Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis, positively impacting the lives of around 8,000 Shelby County residents. To this day, Avant continues to speak out against the state’s hostile takeover of our city, whether that be the Memphis Safe Task Force or Tennessee’s plans for our public schools. Furthermore, Avant’s opponent is a cop. The working class and immigrant community of District 5 cannot afford to elect someone who will give a blank check to the police state and perpetuate the reign of terror brought about by the federal occupation. The strategic choice here is clear - Shante Avant must carry this district over Milton Bonds, Jr.

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## County Commission District 6 – No Recommendation

*Raleigh, Egypt, Sunset Trace, Blue Ridge Park, Wells*

### Candidates

Charlie A. Caswell, Jr. (incumbent)

**Comments:** A lot of our non-recommendations on this list come from a place of distrust or skepticism. This is not one of those situations; by all accounts, Caswell seems to be alright. But he is running unopposed in this primary and unopposed in his general election - his return to the County Commission is all but assured. There is no need for us to recommend him.

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## County Commission District 7 – Kevin Morales

*Frayser, Vollintine Evergreen, Hollywood, The Heights, Grahamwood, Douglass, Binghampton, Hyde Park, Overton Park*

### Candidates

Jamie Naylor

Henri E. Brooks (incumbent)

Ester B. Moore

Kevin Morales

Dedriene Rogers

Josh Monhundro

**Comments:** **MMDSA recommends voting for Kevin Morales.** Over the past few months, Kevin has worked with our comrades in Memphis Public Library Workers United's fight for unionization by going door-to-door during canvasses and being a part of their rallies. His support in this integral step to a better Memphis solidifies his platform of poverty eradication. While in office, Morales intends to prioritize education, healthcare accessibility, community safety, and improving quality of life - all by raising corporate property taxes, not by raising rates for working families. He also proposes developing career tracks for high school and college graduates and free monthly health checkups. It is for these reasons that MMDSA recommends voting for Kevin Morales.

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## County Commission District 8 – No Recommendation

*Downtown, Midtown, Crosstown, Medical District, North Memphis, Soulsville, New Chicago*

### Candidates

Jerred Price

Will Richardson

**Comments:** In District 8, there are no candidates whose platforms are set up to meet the immediate material needs of Memphians. Both candidates have promised District 8 small business incubation, but how will that keep the unhoused population of Downtown safe or the hungry students in Frayser fed? This district already benefits from more grant money and small business funding than anywhere else in the city, while also being home to some of the poorest ZIP codes in Memphis. We hope that a progressive candidate willing to fight this unjust distribution of wealth and to center the needs of people over profits will eventually emerge in District 8, but unfortunately, the people will have to wait another four years for this opportunity.

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## County Commission District 9 – No Recommendation

*South Memphis, Whitehaven, Trigg, Boxtown, Westwood, Walker Homes, Mt. Pisgah, T.O.*

*Fuller State Park*

### Candidates

Rod Blount

Karen Streeter

Khari-Ray Massey

Ricky Dixon  
Sam D. Echols, IV  
Jonathan Lewis

**Comments:** In such a crowded field, it should be easier to find someone who stands out from the pack with a bold progressive agenda, especially in a district that contains some of the poorest communities in Memphis. But we found many of the same issues with this group of candidates that we found in other races - lack of information, broken websites, no concrete policy positions, and weak rhetoric. The communities of South Memphis and Whitehaven have been badly served with poor representation for decades - most notably with the recent criminal scandal involving Edmund Ford Jr. It is long past time for District 9 to have a candidate deserving of their trust, but we'll still be waiting to find out who that will be.

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## County Commission District 10 – No Recommendation

*Orange Mound, Alcy-Ball, Glenview, Oakville, Castalia Heights, Nonconnah, Elliston Heights, Bethel Grove, Sherwood Forest, Messick Buntyn*

### Candidates

Brandon "DD" Washington  
Rebecca Jane Edwards  
John Luke Bradley  
Samuel B Nelson  
Lashanta Rudd

**Comments:** Of all the districts that should be able to produce a charismatic, fighting champion for the working class of Memphis to rally around, it is this one - home to Orange Mound, one of the most important Black neighborhoods in America and one of the most impoverished by capitalism and racism in our city. Despite the variety of backgrounds and stances that these candidates bring to the table, we felt that no one had both the maturity and the correct political perspective to bring about the change this community so dearly needs. This district cannot afford to be underserved by its representation in local government, and we hope that whoever is elected by District 10 will do the bold, necessary work of organizing this community and building the power of its working class.

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## County Commission District 11 – No Recommendation

*Parkway Village, Memphis International Airport, Capleville, Williamsburg Colony, Fox Meadows*

### Candidates

Miska Clay Bibbs (incumbent)

**Comments:** Miska Bibbs is the incumbent in this race and unopposed - both in the primary and in the general. She has a long history of education advocacy. However, it is basically impossible to find clear, substantial policy or stances, even for her seeming area of expertise - education. It is because we are unable to confirm Bibb's views on the state's plans for our schools, ICE at the doors of schools and businesses, or how she intends to aid the thousands of students who go to school hungry across Shelby County that we cannot give a recommendation.

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## County Commission District 12 – Erika Sugarmon

*Hickory Hill, Windyke, Southwind, Roseleigh, Buckingham Farms, Mallard Point, Ashley Ridge*

### Candidates

Erika Sugarmon (incumbent)

Jevonte Porter

**Comments: MMDSA recommends voting for Erika Sugarmon in this race.** Before stepping into politics, she taught at White Station High School for 20+ years and has worked with Memphis Shelby County Education Association. During her time in office, she has put forth alternatives to the state's imminent takeover of our schools, filed a lawsuit against the federal occupation of our streets, and has opposed increasing the tax burden of working-class families to rebuild 201 Poplar. Through these issues, Sugarmon has demonstrated a citizen-first agenda, and a willingness to buck the status quo. Her opponent, Jevonte Porter, appears to be bankrolled and supported by the non-profit sector of the capitalist class, as well as by the Democratic party establishment of Shelby County. We worry that these deep ties to capital will make him more accountable to his fundraisers than to the people, while Sugarmon has already demonstrated her bona fides as a people-first elected official - making her the correct strategic choice in this race

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## County Commission District 13 – Lena Chipman

*Berclair, Richland Acres, High Point Terrace, Cooper Young, Chickasaw Gardens, University of Memphis, Colonial Acres*

### Candidates

LaGina "Gina" Mitchell-Scott

Amber Huett-Garcia

Lena Chipman

**Comments: MMDSA recommends voting for Lena Chipman.** She is running to be a voice for all Memphians. Lena has participated in mutual aid efforts geared towards our transgender community and as a transgender woman herself, she understands the top-down oppression an unchecked government is capable of committing. Lena envisions a government that looks like all of us, that reflects all of us, and she intends to make this happen by continuing to speak out against the Memphis Safe Task Force, installing local protections to minimize harmful laws passed by higher governmental powers, and by expanding public transit as part of a broader social safety net. And as an active member of MMDSA, we know that Lena's commitment to fighting for the working class is more than just lip service: she has stood shoulder to shoulder beside us in the struggle to build a more just and democratic society. For these reasons, MMDSA believes that Lena Chipman is the best choice in this race.

# SCHOOL BOARD

## School Board District 1 – No Recommendation

### Candidates

Dolores Missy Rivers

Hailey Marie Thomas

Michelle McKissack (incumbent)

**Comments:** Based on the information we could locate for these candidates, we don't believe there's anyone running in this district who will advocate for students and teachers when the state takeover of our school system inevitably happens. Michelle McKissack is currently serving in this position and we have concerns. Just last year, she helped facilitate the agreement between xAI and MSCS which allowed Elon Musk's company to upgrade plumbing and HVAC in 38109 area schools in exchange for his data centers polluting the air these students are breathing every day. Southwest Memphis has been incredibly vocal in their disapproval of xAI's presence in their neighborhoods and this deal is a disservice to them. There simply wasn't enough public information about the other candidates to garner a recommendation from us.

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## School Board District 6 – No Recommendation

### Candidates

Stacey Kelly

Marinda A-Williams

T. L. Harris

Contessa Humphrey

Juliette Eskridge

**Comments:** Four of these candidates had no campaign website or online information regarding their platforms and policies. T.L. Harris is the only candidate in this race with a campaign website and his platform has a heavy emphasis on increasing reading proficiency and literacy. This sounds promising, but we'd like to know more about how he plans to make these things happen. Seventy-eight percent of students in MSCS are not reading at grade level and we cannot afford empty campaign promises. We could not find any insight as to where Harris stands on the state takeover or teachers' collective bargaining, therefore we were unable to recommend him for this race.

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## School Board District 8 – Ayleem Connolly

### Candidates

Tanya Frey

Ayleem Connolly

**Comments:** **MMDSA recommends voting for Ayleem Connolly.** When researching School Board candidates, we were looking for two specific things:

- Do they oppose the hostile state takeover of our school system?
- How likely are they to support the preservation of the Professional Educators Collaborative Conferencing Act, our teachers' collective bargaining framework, which is under direct threat from the state?

Ayleem Connolly is explicitly pro-labor and anti-state takeover, but she also emphasizes the importance of protecting immigrant students who are under attack from the Memphis Safe Task Force and a state legislature that is doing its best to keep these children from getting an education. She has used her campaign for County School Board as a vehicle to

amplify working class struggles and social justice issues. It is rare to find a candidate who is not only incredibly transparent about where they stand regarding issues like these, but whose campaign actually centers these issues instead of themselves. We frankly need more people like Ayleem Connolly running for School Board. We recommend her for District 8 and if elected, MMDSA looks forward to seeing how she fights to protect our teachers and students.

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## School Board District 9 – No Recommendation

### Candidates

Joyce Dorse Coleman (incumbent)

Tamara Jordan

Johnathan Carroll

Louis M. Morganfield III

Damon Curry Morris

**Comments:** Tamara Jordan and Damon Morris support the state takeover of MSCS and therefore, do not qualify for our recommendation. We could not locate any substantial information for Louis Morganfield. We sifted through the incumbent's campaign Facebook page, which was riddled with AI-generated flyers, and were unable to discern where she stands on the state takeover or teachers' right to bargain. Therefore, we have no recommendation for this race.

*Correction: An earlier version of this guide included Johnathan Carroll in a list of candidates who support the takeover of Memphis schools by the state. Since this voter guide was posted, Mr. Carroll made a post on the [Vote Jon Carroll](#) Facebook page correcting this understanding. With this information, we have removed his name from the list. In the interest of full transparency, we are including this correction and a link to his post correcting that understanding.*

# SHELBY COUNTY MAYOR

## Candidates

JB Smiley, Jr.

Melvin Burgess

Harold Collins

Mickell M. Lowery

Marie N. Feagins

Heidi Kuhn

Rusty Qualls

**Comments: MMDSA recommends voting for JB Smiley, Jr.** Many Shelby County residents have resigned themselves to the idea that our local government's hands are tied when it comes to ICE kidnapping our neighbors off the street, the richest man in the world poisoning our air supply, the state plotting a hostile takeover of our school system, over 31 percent of our children living below the poverty line, and all of the other factors that keep us poor, sick, uneducated, and incarcerated. But the reality is that the mayor of a county like ours with a population of over 900,000 people can use their office to pursue a working-class agenda and speak out against the policies that contribute to the conditions we have outlined above.

JB Smiley, Jr. has consistently supported our labor community and most recently, he championed Memphis Public Library Workers United's fight to achieve civil service status. If elected, he needs to maintain and increase this level of advocacy for the working class. Smiley is also the only mayoral candidate to call the current Presidential administration what it is: a fascist, authoritarian regime. In these times, silence is indeed complicity and we cannot afford a mayor who is complicit. Smiley has spoken out about the deplorable and inhumane conditions at 201 Poplar and has pledged to find a solution that is not a new jail, unlike some of his opponents. He has committed to appointing a Health Department director who protects the air and water quality of Shelby County residents and has explicitly stated that xAI is committing environmental racism by poisoning poor, Black neighborhoods. Smiley has been the most outspoken candidate when it comes to social justice issues within Shelby County.

Mayoral candidates tend to make a lot of empty promises, but Smiley does seem to be offering more than just the prospect of creating more jobs. These promises are all on the record and if elected, we will hold him to them. While he is not an ideal candidate as he is not a Democratic Socialist, Smiley is the best option we have and MMDSA recommends him for this position.

# US HOUSE DISTRICT TN-09

## Candidates

M. LaTroy A-Williams

Steve Cohen (incumbent)

DeVante R. Hill

Justin J. Pearson

**Comments: MMDSA recommends voting for Justin J. Pearson.** Even if Pearson was not the clear choice for our recommendation in this race, we would still not be recommending Steve Cohen. While MMDSA can acknowledge that Congressman Cohen has had significant positive legislative achievements throughout his twenty-four-year tenure in the House, the fact is that he has accepted over \$300,000 from AIPAC, making him the third highest recipient in the state only after Marsha Blackburn and Bill Hagerty. This alone is enough for him to lose our recommendation as MMDSA unwaveringly supports the Palestinian people while the Israeli government continues to wage a genocide against them. Congressman Cohen is also seventy-six years old and is representative of a specific kind of career politician unwilling to relinquish power and make way for the new guard.

We believe that Justin Pearson is the only candidate in this race who can meet and currently understands the urgency of the moment we are in on a local, state, and federal level. Rep. Pearson is pro-union and has stood with the Memphis working class on picket lines and at protests while Congressman Cohen has failed to be physically present within the community he represents. Rep. Pearson has a platform that prioritizes affordable housing, common sense gun legislation, Medicare for all, increasing the minimum wage, and combating poverty. While we clearly think that Pearson would be better than Cohen, this is not a free pass for Pearson. Throughout his career in Nashville, he has yet to demonstrate his abilities as an effective legislator. No one can doubt his credentials as an activist, but if he wants to take Cohen's seat, he needs to show his constituency that he can bring home meaningful wins for Memphis.