

MEMPHIS-MIDSOUTH DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA



**EARLY VOTING
JULY 17 -
AUGUST 1**

**ELECTION DAY
AUGUST 6**



VOTER GUIDE

★ ★ ★ 2026 ★ ★ ★

SHELBY COUNTY GENERAL AND FEDERAL & STATE PRIMARY ELECTION

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FOREWORD

The first words in the very first edition of our Voter Guide were these:

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

At the time we wrote those words, it was the spring of 2026 - before *Callais v. Louisiana*. We sought to make a larger point about the insidiousness of voter suppression through voter fatigue and lack of information.

As we write the second edition of our Voter Guide, in the summer of 2026 and in the wake of the US Supreme Court and the Tennessee State Assembly's dismantling of the 9th District, we can only state that what little remained of the mask of decency or propriety from our elected leaders has now been completely dropped.

Communities as disparate as Orange Mound in Memphis and Brentwood in Nashville now share the same federal congressional district. In this vacuum of chaos, candidates have arisen who are openly corrupt, manifestly incompetent, or simply not ready to meet the moment. Opposition leaders release timid statements, and the timeline is flooded with meaningless, destructive AI slop. In every corner of Memphis, there is a sense of doubt and defeat.

But we are here to tell the working class of Memphis that there is hope.

In the rush to fracture Shelby County into three different districts, the Republicans seem to have made **a critical strategic error** - one they would have caught if they had the least bit of shame or enough intelligence to do the math.

By having to incorporate the populace of Memphis into less-populated rural areas that have reliably voted Republican, **they actually watered down their advantage**. And since they have failed to account for the intense leftward swing that has already been measured in races all over the country in response to the wholesale backlash against Donald Trump and the MAGA agenda, **they have likely watered down their advantage too much**.

If Memphis turns out to vote in November the way that other American cities have, we can and will defeat them.

This is why it is more critical than ever to make sure you are registered to vote by October 5 so you can turn out for the election in November.

If you believe you are already registered, check your registration [on the State of Tennessee website](#). If you are registered under an old address, update your address. **Make sure you have a plan to vote, ideally by taking advantage of early voting when you can vote at any polling location in the county. The early voting period lasts several days, giving you lots of flexibility in timing your visit to the polls, and wait times are dramatically shorter than voting on Election Day.**

If you can only vote on Election Day, make sure you know where your polling location is, because you will not receive an absentee or provisional ballot if you're in the wrong place - you will be turned away and told to go to your designated polling location, starting over from square one.

The most dangerous thing that the Tennessee Republican Party and the capitalists running our government can imagine is an informed and active Memphis working class that is registered to vote.

From this base of power, Memphis will have the ability to effectively resist the pre-emption and coercion of state forces against our self-determination. **If we want leaders who actually lead in this city** - leaders who will fight to defend organized labor and workers' rights, who will root out corruption at every level, who will use every tool at their disposal to eradicate poverty from every neighborhood and corner of Memphis - then seizing the levers of power at the electoral level will be necessary.

Because the truth is this - because of meddling from the GOP and their attempts to engineer victories that rely on low voter turnout, **political power is very much up for grabs in Memphis and in the state of Tennessee**. 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.

The Electoral & Policy Committee of the Memphis-Midsouth chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America was formed to accomplish this task. We 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. We studied and analyzed and researched and weighed options so that you wouldn't have to.

WHAT DOES THIS VOTER GUIDE COVER?

This voter guide is for the **Shelby County General & Federal and State Primary Election**, which is held on **Thursday, August 6, 2026**.

Early voting begins Friday, July 17, 2026, and ends on Saturday, August 1, 2026

This Voter Guide is for the **Democratic primary ONLY**.

The races covered are:

- US Senate
- US House of Representatives
- Governor
- Tennessee Senate
- Tennessee House of Representatives
- Tennessee State Executive Committee
- Shelby County Criminal Court, Division I and Division VIII*
- Shelby County General Session Criminal Court Division VII
- City of Millington School Board
- Town of Collierville School Board

In our previous Voter Guide, we were only able to cover the headline races in the Shelby County Primary. We have been able to greatly expand our capacity thanks to the addition of several more volunteers assisting with research and copywriting, and we hope to maintain this level of full coverage of Memphis and Shelby County elections.

In this Voter Guide, we only covered the Democratic primary. While we can't rule out that we would ever have something to say about a Republican primary, that need was not apparent with this election cycle.

**The version of this guide released on July 10, 2026, did not include coverage of this race, which became open due to retirement and did not have a full list of candidates for us to vet available [until after June 20](#). This guide was updated on Tuesday, July 28, 2026, include the Division VIII race after deliberation by the Electoral and Policy Committee.*

OUR RATIONALE

HOW DID WE MAKE THIS VOTER GUIDE?

Our Voter Guide is the result of hundreds of hours of work by a group of dedicated volunteers within the Voter Guide Subcommittee of 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 Bernie Sanders and Zohran Mamdani? We want to do that here in Memphis – and in Tennessee, more broadly.**

We are working people with jobs and families and other obligations in life, and we tried to do our best by researching online – looking at candidate websites, news sources, social media accounts, court records, voting records, you name it. We also conducted research by attending candidate forums whenever possible so we could see these people up close and in-person, and we also reached out to our allies in the various corners of the political scene to learn from them.

As much as possible, we base our research and decisions on public statements and extemporaneous answers to questions asked in public. As a matter of course, we do not issue questionnaires for candidates, and we do not conduct private interviews with candidates except in rare instances where special interest warrants it. We conducted private interviews for only one race in this Voter Guide – the TN House District 96 race between Gabby Salinas and Dr. Telisa Franklin. This is because we place a high value on a candidate's ability to communicate directly and honestly about their support for the working class in the public forum. We are not interested in being pandered to in private or in reading some AI-generated bullshit that someone sends us in an email.

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 or not to make a recommendation was deliberated upon as a committee and then put up to a vote by the EPC, requiring a substantial quorum of overall MMDSA members in good standing. **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 and the exploitation of our water supply
- Opposition to the overreach of the state government in affairs of home rule in Memphis, especially the state takeover of Memphis-Shelby County Schools.
- Unwavering support for the public school system as a cornerstone of necessary public services deserving of full funding, 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, as well as the for-profit carceral state in general
- Support for marginalized communities in Memphis and Tennessee, especially people of color, LGBTQIA+ folks, and people without documentation
- Support for Medicare, TennCare, and access to free healthcare
- Support for labor unions and the rights of workers to organize and form unions, including opposition to right-to-work legislation and opposition to the dismantling of PECCA for public school teachers

- The candidate's legislative history, where applicable
- Any endorsements the candidate had received
- All financial or in-kind contributions to the campaign. We strongly prefer candidates who are funded by small donors, and we are wary of candidates who are funded by corporate PACs

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

We also considered the candidate and their campaign as a whole: how do they conduct themselves, how do they interact with other candidates, and 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 of the issues outlined above, so don't take our recommendation as meaning that *all* of the candidates we highlighted are bound to *all* of these positions. **We are not here to speak for the candidates - they speak for themselves.** We are here to champion the working class of Memphis and Shelby County, and 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 OUR 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 suggest we have endorsed any of these candidates. Currently, MMDSA has not made any endorsements in this election. We have a very explicit process for candidate endorsement 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 among the available candidates. In most cases, it's best to think of our recommendation as an expression of harm reduction: not necessarily who will do the most good, but who will do the least harm, given the situation and strategy at hand. Unfortunately, that is 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.

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.

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.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

WE NEED EVERYONE TO UNDERSTAND THAT PRIMARIES ARE (ALMOST ALWAYS!) MORE IMPORTANT FOR THE WORKING CLASS THAN GENERAL ELECTIONS

How often have you been told that “this is the most important election of your lifetime,” only to get to the poll and be disappointed with the choices before you?

This is a common experience for most working-class voters who desire real change - but primary elections are the way we can solve this problem before it ever happens.

In a primary election, voters get to choose among the Democrats (or Republicans) who will be on the general election ballot and represent the party. This isn't an election where you simply have to “vote blue, no matter who” - this is an election where you get to voice your preferences and support the Democratic candidate who you believe will fight most effectively for you.

As folks on the left and members of the working class, this is where details really, *really* matter, and it's why our Voter Guides usually cover primaries instead of generals. Especially in a heavily Democratic-leaning city like Memphis, most of our city-wide, county-wide, and state district general elections are basically automatic wins for whichever Democrat makes it through the primary - making the primary election, effectively, the “real” election. Finally, primaries tend to have a fraction of the turnout of general elections - meaning it requires fewer total votes to yield a winner, and therefore, a dedicated and organized push from leftist voters can easily result in a victory. Every vote matters, but it *especially* matters in primaries!

For these reasons, in almost every instance, primaries just matter more than general elections to us. Primaries are where we can actually push working class champions over the line, and it is crucial that you make sure to vote in every primary to turn out and support the right candidates.

WE NEED BETTER CANDIDATES ACROSS THE BOARD – ESPECIALLY IN PLACES THAT ARE “SAFE” REPUBLICAN SEATS

As usual, we are pretty disappointed with the vast majority of the people running for office this cycle.

Since the 2010 Tea Party wave destroyed the narrow foothold that the Democratic party held in Tennessee, the GOP has been working overtime to entrench themselves and make it harder to grab any power from their clutches. And to be fair, that's politics - when your side wins, you press your advantage and do everything you can to weaken your opponent's ability to strike back.

But the Tennessee Democratic Party (TNDP) hasn't been doing themselves any favors with their candidate recruitment process. There were many last-minute scrambles to pull petitions in districts that didn't have a single Democrat running, resulting in well-meaning but otherwise unprepared candidates to emerge without a serious ground game to campaign with or a clearly thought-out policy platform to campaign for. There are still many districts in West Tennessee without a Democrat running in the primary, meaning there will be no effective challenger to a Republican in the general election. We cannot “give up” on rural areas and wealthy suburbs - the working class is everywhere, and MMDSA is willing to do its part to build its rural organizing operation to reach them.

As evidenced by the slate of races we've already seen across the country in 2026, it's clear that candidates who are grounded in the work of organizing the working class and who will take bold positions to fight tooth and nail against the forces of entrenched capitalism and the GOP are rallying voters to their cause and delivering landmark victories. Instead of supporting incumbents who prove themselves time and time again to be ineffective, compromised, performative, or downright hostile to the working class, we deserve and demand fighters at every level who are grounded in their work as organizers and agitators and who can build the winning coalition of the future.

WE NEED TO DRAW A HARD LINE AGAINST THE USE OF AI IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

We get it - political campaigns are hard, and especially at the lower levels, funds are tight. It's hard to afford graphic designers, comms coordinators, and speechwriters. Everyone is looking for an edge, and maybe you're happy with how this flyer looks and think no one will notice.

But everyone noticed. In fact, we always notice, and we always think it looks awful.

Much has been made about the creep of AI into classrooms and workplaces. On the one hand, teachers are terrified that their students might not actually be learning anything or engaging critically with their course materials, allowing AI to do their thinking for them. On the other hand, workers are being forced to adopt AI as part of their workflow, or in many cases, are actively being managed according to input or decision-making made by or with AI systems. In both cases, the overall outlook is that AI is bringing us a future where accountability and effort are removed from the human condition. In other words - things that are supposed to be hard, but that make us better and give us purpose in the process, are being sidestepped by the weak and the greedy.

Political campaigns are supposed to be hard. Getting into office and uniting a coalition of voters to your side in an election is supposed to take effort - engaging your skills as a thinker, a speaker, an organizer, and a strategist all at once. AI cannot substitute that, and if you think that using AI is acceptable to help you win office, then as voters, we have every reason to believe you'll find it acceptable to use AI to do your thinking for you once you get there.

On top of that, of all the cities in America, please stop bringing AI-slop to the voters of Memphis - where the world's first trillionaire is poisoning our skies with pollution and draining our water supply to power his data center. Make no mistake: AI is a tool of the capitalists. In fact, this technology is their holy grail. They see it as the last piece of the puzzle needed to implement wholesale replacement of human beings in the workforce with automated processes and robots that don't need wages or healthcare or the right to organize against their bosses.

Bottom line - stop using AI in your political campaigns. If it wouldn't be accepted as a high schooler's homework assignment, then we're not going to accept it from someone running for office. Period.

WE NEED MORE HANDS TO HELP DO THIS WORK

As stated before, it is our goal to issue one of these Guides before every election in Memphis and Shelby County. In fact, since the last Voter Guide was published, we created the Voter Guide Subcommittee, which is dedicated to the research, production, publication, and proliferation of these guides for every election cycle. It required a ton of work from some very dedicated volunteers to put this together, but we know we could go deeper if we had more help. Ultimately, it is our goal for the Voter Guide to become less of a time-crunch crisis and more of a slow-burn ongoing project.

The work of the Voter Guide Subcommittee 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 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. Reach out to us [directly](#), via [our chapter website](#) or on social media ([@memphisdemsoc](#)) to get connected!

WHAT DO THESE POSITIONS DO?

Each elected politician takes a pledge attesting that they will faithfully, truthfully, and diligently carry out the responsibilities of each position **according to the will of the people that voted for them**.

US SENATE

Each state elects two senators for the US Senate. Currently, the state of Tennessee is represented by two Republican Senators: Marsha Blackburn and Bill Hagerty. Neither Senator fights for working-class people.

Blackburn voted to [deny healthcare](#) for tens of thousands of Tennesseans and supports a [bill](#) to turn over your voter information to the US government, supporting Trump's efforts to overturn not only the 2020 election results but to upend any upcoming elections **because they know they're going to lose**.

Although Hagerty is equally malevolent in the bills he supports, including funding [ICE kidnapping your neighbors](#), his [legislative website](#) is out of commission for us to provide explicit examples.

US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The House is responsible for drafting, modifying, and approving bills of legislation that go on to the Senate for voting approval. A legislative bill must be passed by both the House and Senate in identical form and then be signed by the President to become law.

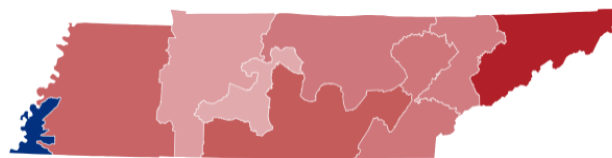
Theoretically, the number of seats each state has in the House is based on the population of each state according to US Census data. Historically, [this process](#) has been marred by racist practices, and Congress voted to cap the number of representatives to 437 in 1959. Now that the Supreme Court has effectively dismantled the [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#), which sought to "protect racial minorities' voting and representation rights," Republican gerrymandered states like Tennessee have resorted to redrawing these district lines to attack these rights.

In May, Tennessee Republicans [carved up Memphis districts](#) in order to erase Black representation and shift the state's sole Democratic district towards Republicans in this November's elections:

Previous congressional district boundaries by 2024 presidential election results

The map below reflects the congressional district boundaries enacted after the 2020 census shaded according to 2024 presidential election results.

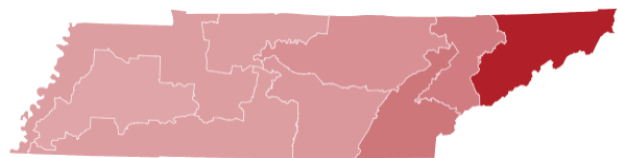
Harris (D) Trump (R)



New congressional district boundaries by 2024 presidential election results

The map below reflects the congressional district boundaries enacted ahead of the 2026 elections shaded according to 2024 presidential election results.

Harris (D) Trump (R)



BALLOTEDIA Source: Nashville Banner

BALLOTEDIA

Because of [their](#) evil, racist political gerrymandering, follow [these steps](#) to find out if your district has changed. You can view the updated district maps [here](#).

GOVERNOR

Tennessee Governor holds the state’s executive power, commands the National Guard, chairs a variety of state authorities, and holds enactment power over legislation. This role is held by Republican Bill Lee, who has attacked [your healthcare](#), robbed [your schools](#), opposed [your union](#), threatened [your marriage](#), and attacked [your family](#). He is [personally](#) and [professionally](#) racist and [anti-LGBTQ+](#). Lee finishes his last term this year after being reelected during the decade’s [lowest voter turnout](#).

TENNESSEE SENATE

There are 33 seats in the [Tennessee Senate](#), representing the state’s 33 districts. Similar to the US Senate, this body of government is responsible for approving bills proposed by the Tennessee House of Representatives to be sent to the governor for approval and signature (enactment). Tennessee State Senators are elected to a four-year term. You can find out your current Tennessee State Senator [here](#).

TENNESSEE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Together with the Tennessee Senate, the [Tennessee House of Representatives](#) comprises the legislative body for the state, sending bills to the Governor. Currently controlled by Republicans, this is the body of government that started the [redistricting](#) proposal at Trump’s request. You can find out your current Tennessee Representative [here](#).

There are 99 seats in the Tennessee House of Representatives, and all 99 positions are up for election.

Year	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Governor	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	
Senate	D	D	D	D	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	R	R	S	S	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	
House	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	

Tennessee has had a Republican trifecta of state power for the last 15+ years

From: Ballotpedia

STATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The State Executive Committee (SEC) is not part of the legislative or executive government. They are political party representatives for the Tennessee Republican and Democratic Party. Each of the state’s thirty-three districts elects one male and female representative for each party, totaling to 66 representatives, or two representatives per district. **Please note that our research for this guide focused only on the Democratic Party candidates.**

Described as volunteer positions, these elected representatives serve four-year terms on their respective party’s executive committee, helping support party candidates and "administering the affairs of the committee."

In this 2018 [article](#), the then-Communications Director for the TNDP compared the SEC to the board of directors for companies, *which is a terrible metaphor for what government should represent. Government for the people and by the people* should not be run like a capitalist business that puts profits over people.

It remains unclear what these elected positions actually do day-to-day, other than hold immense power over which candidates are allowed to become party nominees. Their connection voters' actual wills and desires is also unclear, as they continuously support status quo politicians who disregard campaign promises once elected. Most candidates on the

ballot this year lack campaign websites and [information about them is limited](#). If we are to continue to suffer under the two-party system, we, the people, must demand more transparency in political party committees.

CRIMINAL COURT DIVISION I AND VIII

Criminal Court is a state court that mostly hears felony-charged cases and can hold jury trials. Even if you've never been accused of a crime or been taken down to 201 in a squad car, you may have still encountered the Criminal Courts. If you've ever served on a jury in Shelby County or seen a report on the local news about a high-profile case, this is one of the courtrooms you've seen. Because felony charges bring with them possible sentences of incarceration of a year or more, the importance of having fair judges who will hear all the evidence and make rulings that protect the rights of the accused is extremely high.

While these courtrooms are not the last place you can have your rights vindicated, the decisions that get made in these courtrooms set the base of facts for those decisions and have enormous impacts on the people accused of crimes, their families, and anyone who might rely on them in their life. This courtroom is one of the only places in our criminal legal system that police and prosecutors actually must take accountability for misconduct and face real consequences for their actions, like the exclusion of evidence that has been illegally obtained or the testing of their hunches that lead to weak cases that still result in charges and the loss of time and money for those accused.

GENERAL SESSIONS CRIMINAL COURT DIVISION VII

General Sessions is a county court that is the first stop for many people accused of crimes in Shelby County. These courts cannot hear jury trials, and any pleas that include felony charges must be entered "upstairs" (in 201 Poplar lingo) in the state Criminal Courts. General Sessions courts hold quite a bit of power over working people because most charges brought by the State are misdemeanors that never reach Criminal Court. In fact, nationally, only five percent of all charges filed are ever brought to trial to actually be heard by a jury of one's peers.

The temperament and philosophy of judges in this courtroom can mean the difference between a quick resolution to a person's interaction with the criminal legal system and a months-long struggle to vindicate your rights and finally resolve the issues that brought you in contact with this system.

TOWN OF COLLIERVILLE SCHOOL BOARD

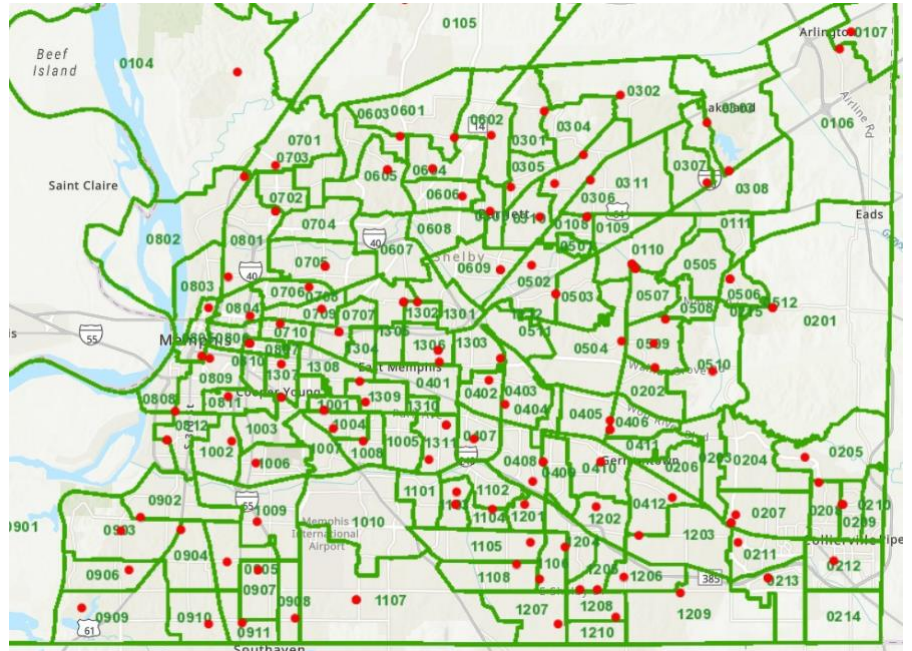
Local school board members are responsible for overseeing school operations within Collierville Schools, separate from Memphis-Shelby County Schools. There are five school board positions, and candidates are elected to a four-year term.

CITY OF MILLINGTON SCHOOL BOARD

Members of the Millington Municipal Schools school board govern the Millington Municipal Schools district, separate from Memphis-Shelby County Schools. There are 7 school board positions, and candidates are elected to a 4-year term.

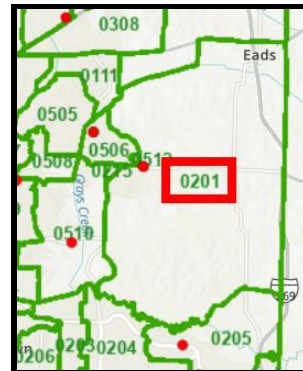
APPROACH 2 – VIA THE SHELBY COUNTY GOVERNMENT:

1. Enter your address [here](#)



2. 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 (01)
➔ Precincts make up a district



US SENATE

Democratic Primary – Marquita Bradshaw

Candidates

Marquita Bradshaw

Maria Brewer

Civil Miller-Watkins

Diana Onyejiaka

Comments: **Memphis-Midsouth DSA recommends voting for Marquita Bradshaw.** Bradshaw's activism surrounding those affected by the Memphis Defense Depot and other instances of environmental racism led multiple Memphis-Midsouth DSA members to sign her petition to run for Senate when she first ran for office in 2020. She has proven to be an outspoken and powerful environmental justice advocate and political force, shocking the state Democratic Party in 2020 in a primary upset through a combination of savvy organizing and engaging with activist communities across the state.

Her historic 2020 campaign for US Senate was endorsed by all five Tennessee DSA chapters, as well as the national DSA organization. Although she was sidelined by the state Democratic Party and Gloria Johnson in 2024, in 2026 she stands as both the most progressive choice and the growing party consensus to take on incumbent Republican Bill Hagerty and the GOP in November. The remaining candidates all have progressive platforms to varying degrees, but none of them have the track record, funding, or infrastructure to take on a statewide primary campaign, much less seriously challenge the GOP.

US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

District TN-05 – No Recommendation

Candidates

Yolanda Cooper-Sutton

DeVante Hill

Rachel Hurley

Carrie Iacomini

Chaz Molder

Comments: We deliberated between two candidates in this race: Chaz Molder and Carrie Iacomini. While Molder has been campaigning against Andy Ogles for months and does seem the likely Democrat on the ticket in November, at the time this guide is being written (late June 2026), Molder has made no mention of two major concerns for Memphis residents: ICE occupation and xAI. His focus seems to primarily be on rural areas in middle Tennessee, and while we certainly don't want to discount the issues of working-class rural Tennesseans, this confirms a major concern about the redistricting of Shelby County: how effectively can someone who isn't from Memphis represent us?

The other candidate in this race worth noting, Carrie Iacomini, does seem to align with us ideologically as she is running on Medicare for All, abolishing ICE, and shutting down xAI. She does not have the campaign infrastructure in place to receive a formal recommendation from us, and we feel she needs more experience running a campaign if she hopes to defeat someone like Ogles.

Yolanda Cooper-Sutton is a sitting Memphis City Councilwoman who has accused Memphis firefighters of ["raping" the city](#) for asking for what the city previously promised them. DeVante Hill's platform is unclear and questions concerning his relationship with law enforcement (especially during the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020) rule out a recommendation from us. And while Hurley seems to be fed up with the Democratic establishment and is attempting to present herself as an alternative, her excessive and unapologetic use of AI for her campaign (for a district that includes Boxtown), refusal to debate her opponents, and blocking concerned citizens on social media for calling her out on these things prevents us from serious consideration.

District TN-08 – No Recommendation

Candidates

Dewey Gordon Bryan

Jordan Hinders

Heidi Kuhn

Leonard Perkins

Comments: Heidi Kuhn, who recently came in fourth place in the Democratic primary for the Shelby County mayoral election, is the most experienced candidate in this race as she is finishing her second term as Shelby County's Criminal Court Clerk. She has served in two Shelby County positions: Director of Training and Workforce Development and Special Assistant and Lead Strategist to the Sheriff. Due to high profile endorsements from establishment Democrats and her connections to certain community organizations like the Afro-American Police Association (they defended the officers who murdered Tyré Nichols), we can't be sure that her legislative ideas to address crime will align with our values.

Each of the remaining candidates have served in the military and their campaigns are focused on veteran affairs: Gordon Bryan is a former Navy and FedEx pilot who supports Medicare for All and if elected, he wants to end the Trump administration's tariff policies, return to investing in renewable energy, and secure more federal funding for school districts. Jordan Hinders is a Deputy Sheriff from Arlington with progressive ideas about raising the minimum wage and taxing the rich. The final candidate, Leonard Perkins, is a pastor whose primary focus appears to be veteran affairs and labor rights. We have no recommendation, as Kuhn seems the likely winner of this primary and we see no reason to recommend a candidate whose alignment with our values is questionable.

District TN-09 – Justin J. Pearson

Candidates

M. LaTroy A-Williams

London Lamar

Justin J. Pearson

Jim Torino

Comments: **Memphis-Midsouth DSA recommends voting for Justin J. Pearson.** He has always been a close ally for working people, from stopping a pipeline cutting through South Memphis to standing with us in the fight against xAI. His platform does not stop at activism: Pearson intends to make immigration swifter and easier, build green energy with unions, and cease all armaments to countries that bomb others. We are not alone in recognizing Pearson's strengths; he has garnered endorsements from politicians like Ro Khanna of California, Chris Rabb of Pennsylvania, Bernie Sanders of Vermont, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, as well as a multitude of organizations like Indivisible (both Memphis and National) and Track AIPAC.

Pearson's campaign is truly grassroots with 98 percent of funds raised being individual contributions. This is in stark contrast to his opponent London Lamar, who took money from Michael Bloomberg and endorsed his 2020 presidential run. In this election cycle, Lamar has accepted donations from the Excellence in Public Education PAC, whose mission is to eradicate public education to make way for charter schools. This puts her in alignment with the likes of Brent Taylor and Marsha Blackburn. Even more heinous is Lamar's hawking a strong and fearful position on America's unjust attack against Iran. We call for an end to unfettered munitions access to Israel, and going to war against Iran for the sole benefit of Netanyahu's regime is wholly unacceptable.

GOVERNOR

Democratic Primary – No Recommendation

Candidates

Carnita Atwater

Tim Cyr

Jerri Green

Adam Kurtz

Kevin Lee McCants

Comments: The Democratic primary for Tennessee governor is supposedly a statewide race, but it has shaped up to be deeply rooted in Memphis politics. The leader and far-and-away favorite to win the nomination is Memphis City Council member Jerri Green, who impressed the TNDP in 2022 when she performed better than anticipated in a Democratic challenge to the GOP-leaning TN House 83. The next year, she won her City Council seat as the most progressive candidate in her race for suburban District 2. Green has managed to run a solid campaign so far, raising some \$400,000 from mostly smaller donors, and her platform is bold for someone backed by the suburban moderates and fundraisers who control the statewide Democratic party.

In contrast, you have the campaign of North Memphis activist and local Democratic club fixture Dr. Carnita Atwater. A highly progressive (even radical, in the best possible sense) candidate who previously ran for governor in 2022, Dr. Atwater was able to get over 20 percent in a three-way primary and, on paper, should be able to present a challenge to Green for the nomination. However, Dr. Atwater's 2026 campaign is hobbled by a dire lack of fundraising and a non-existent "ground game," which is happening amid accusations of TNDP putting its weight behind Green in order to starve other campaigns of volunteers and donors. While claims of party bias may feel like an easy cop-out for an underperforming primary campaign, in the context of the TNDP's lack of support for progressives like Gabby Salinas in 2018 and Marquita Bradshaw in 2020, it starts to sound plausible.

Rounding out the actively campaigning candidates is Nashville musician Adam "Ditch" Kurtz, whose colorful outsider persona and anti-corruption platform have generated some momentum for a campaign that unfortunately lacks the resources needed to compete for statewide office.

Reviewing all three, they each have issues preventing us from recommending them: Green's progressive platform is at odds with the party insiders backing her campaign, Dr. Atwater is aligned with our values but hardly has a campaign infrastructure to speak of, and Kurtz's campaign would be exciting if he ran for local office but feels like a vanity project when you consider what is needed to run statewide.

That said, any of the three would be a vast improvement over the horrid GOP favorite Marsha Blackburn.

TENNESSEE STATE SENATE

District 29 – No Recommendation

Candidate

Raumesh Akbari

Comments: State Senator Raumesh Akbari is a Democratic incumbent running unopposed to represent Tennessee's 29th Senate district. A Cordova High graduate, Akbari has represented this district since 2019 and has served as Senate Minority Leader since 2023. She is one of the most prominent Democrats in the state legislature and, as minority leader, carries significant influence in setting the tone and direction of the party's opposition to the Republican supermajority. She has consistently voted against school voucher bills, pushed legislation to cap the number of single-family homes large entities can own, introduced a bill to require insurance coverage of contraceptives, and has worked on legislation to raise the minimum wage.

That said, we are not making a recommendation in this race for several reasons. On the federal occupation of our city, Akbari has not offered the kind of clear and unambiguous opposition we would hope to see. In early 2026, she [framed](#) the federal occupation of Memphis in terms of its potential economic benefits to businesses and tourism, rather than centering the civil liberties concerns that other elected officials have been willing to name plainly.

On AI, her record is mixed. She has advanced user protection legislation aimed primarily at minors, which is commendable. But she has also sponsored legislation paving the way for further AI normalization in the classroom, which raises questions about where she stands on protecting workers and students from the threats of unchecked AI adoption. Her foreign policy positions also give us pause. While she has publicly [expressed support](#) for Israel, we could find no public statements addressing the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Palestine. That silence itself is a position, and not one we find acceptable.

As the highest-ranking Democrat in the Tennessee Senate, representing one of the most working-class districts in the state, Akbari's constituents deserve a senator who uses every tool and platform available to fight unapologetically for them. We hope Akbari (or another future hopeful) will rise to that standard.

District 31 – No Recommendation

Candidate

David Weatherspoon

Comments: Running unopposed in the TN Senate 31 primary is David Weatherspoon, a hospital chaplain and longtime fixture at local Democratic Party clubs. Recruited by the Future901 PAC to prevent the race from going unopposed in the general election, Weatherspoon previously ran for this seat in the 2018 Democratic primary. He is by all indications an intelligent and kind person who would represent the district much better than Brent Taylor, the inflammatory GOP incumbent who appears to possess neither of those qualities.

However, we have misgivings about Weatherspoon's centrist platform, including his stated desire to ["increase the number of state-funded prosecutors and public defenders to deal with the influx of cases"](#) stemming from the federal

occupation of our city. His campaign messaging about civility and “neighborliness” falls flat against Taylor, a right-wing smear merchant who embodies the worst of Trumpian trash talk.

District 33 – No Recommendation

Candidates

London Lamar

Tamika Abrum

Comments: While combing through campaign financials can be tedious, we’ve also found it enlightening. London Lamar accepting a campaign donation from the Excellence in Public Education PAC, a pro-charter and pro-voucher committee, makes her ineligible for our recommendation. Marsha Blackburn, Brent Taylor, and John Gillespie are among the other elected officials who have taken money from this committee, which seeks to do away with free public education in our state. Lamar accepting donations from committees that go against the interests of her constituents and aligning herself with establishment Dems gives the impression of a career politician. This is the kind of candidate we would like to see less of.

We could not find enough public information on her opponent, Tamika Abrum, to form an opinion. Senate District 33 is one of the most left-leaning districts in the state and we would love to see a true progressive candidate emerge in the near future.

TENNESSEE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

District 83 – No Recommendation

Candidate

Margaret Price

Comments: First-time candidate and experienced progressive campaign staffer Margaret Price is running unopposed. Although we did not vote to make a recommendation in any of the uncontested Tennessee House primaries, we are excited by Price's campaign and believe that she will be a candidate to watch going into the general election. Her detailed platform is centered on a pro-labor, pro-family agenda. She explicitly calls for greater local control and autonomy for municipalities; given how the GOP-controlled TN State House has time and again pre-empted local governments from passing progressive legislation, this is an important issue. With a district specifically drawn to favor the GOP, we know Price is facing an uphill battle against incumbent Mark White, but as her campaign website states: "Hope alone doesn't win elections. Organizing does."

District 84 – No Recommendation

Candidates

Joe Towns, Jr.

Kyler Gilkey

Comments: This is a case of two bad choices. On the one hand, the incumbent Joe Towns, Jr., has served in the state house since the 1990s and would seem on paper to be a seasoned public servant. However, his Facebook is full of AI-generated posts containing (frankly disqualifying) hate speech against various groups, including Jewish people, Catholics, and the LGBTQ+ community. On the other hand, he is being challenged in the primary by Kyler Gilkey, a Steve Cohen staffer who is endorsed by Mayor Paul Young (the person maybe most responsible for xAI's presence in Memphis) and funded in much too large a part by people from outside Tennessee who list their job as "lobbyist" or "consultant" in campaign finance reports.

To boil it down, Towns is too much of a loose cannon (and may have read the writing on the wall, as he entered and won a contentious five-way Democratic primary for Shelby County Criminal Court Clerk), and Gilkey is a corporate Dem who owes too much loyalty to the same kind of pay-to-play insider politics that brought us things like xAI. We hope that by this time in 2028 we see a truly progressive challenger for this seat.

District 85 – No Recommendation

Candidate

Jesse Chism

Comments: Jesse Chism is the unopposed Democrat incumbent representing District 85 in the Tennessee House of Representatives. A graduate of Overton High and former teacher with Memphis Shelby County Schools, he currently serves as Chair of the Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators and works as a real estate investor.

Chism does not have a public-facing website or platform, so everything we know about him comes from his legislative record, Facebook, and other online resources. Voters deserve to know where their representatives stand, and this absence of any public platform makes that harder than it should be.

In 2025, he took a lukewarm stance against the federal occupation of our city, [arguing](#) that it should be under the “direct leadership” of Memphis Police Chief CJ Davis. While we appreciate pushback against the federal occupation’s unchecked presence on Memphis streets, we’d prefer a more full-throated rebuke of this federal overreach that is actively endangering our city. His campaign finance record also gives us pause. He [accepted](#) \$5,000 from a pro-charter school lobbying organization funded by billionaire Jeffrey Yass, one of the most prolific national funders of school privatization.

There are genuine bright spots in his record. He voted against school vouchers, supported Medicaid expansion in 2018, and earned the backing of the Tennessee AFL-CIO in 2024. But this is not enough for us to make a recommendation in this race. The working people of District 85 deserve someone who tells their constituents where they stand, fights back hard when the community is targeted, and refuses money from interests that work against them.

District 86 – Justin J. Pearson

Candidates

Justin J. Pearson

David Page

Comments: [Memphis-Midsouth DSA recommends voting for Justin J. Pearson](#). While we are rooting for [our recommended US House 9](#) candidate Justin J. Pearson to make it all the way to Washington D.C., he is also on the ballot in a contested primary to retain his Tennessee State House seat in the event his congressional bid is unsuccessful. We, of course, are recommending him in this position also, and cannot say enough good things about him.

District 87 – No Recommendation

Candidate

Karen Camper

Comments: Tennessee State House Minority Leader Karen Camper is running unopposed in both the primary and the general election. She has represented Tennessee State House District 87 district since 2008. A thoughtful politician whose career in the State House has unfortunately coincided with the total collapse of the state Democratic party and the establishment of Republican supermajority, Leader Camper appears to be a dedicated public servant who has been dealt a particularly bad hand.

However, at a certain point, a leader needs to lead: her response to the recent Congressional redistricting was ineffective. She offered no visible strategy except for a handful of stalled lawsuits brought by others, even though she herself detailed in a letter how the redistricting was shown by the Republican members’ own actions to be explicitly and illegally racially motivated. Her response to the stripping of Democratic committee assignments was ineffective (again, a very detailed letter), and although she's pro-worker, pro-immigrant, pro-civil rights, pro-LGBT+ and more, her constituents are going to need more than strongly worded letters in the face of Jim Crow 2.0.

District 88 – No Recommendation

Candidate

Larry Miller

Comments: The longest serving member of the Tennessee House of Representatives, Larry Miller has held this seat for over 30 years and is practically the definition of an “elder statesman.” An effective legislator, he was endorsed by the TN AFL-CIO Labor Council in 2024. Miller is running unopposed in both the primary and the general election; he’s so safe in the seat, in fact, that he offered to take his GOP opponent in the 2024 election to lunch because he was “[one of my constituents](#).”

The problem that creeps up with this, however, is that Miller has been so safe for so long that it has led him to choices that should be challenged. For example, in 2025, he accepted a \$2,000 campaign contribution from flagrant union-buster Amazon. This is the danger of “safe seats,” and why progressive primary challenges aren’t about “dividing the party” but rather about keeping the party responsive to the people it serves.

We think that if Miller had a young, energized, progressive primary challenger, then taking Amazon’s money (and the money of other questionable campaign contributors, such as the Big Tobacco-affiliated Reynolds American PAC) would have looked a lot less appealing.

District 91 – No Recommendation

Candidates

Torrey Harris

Arriell Gipson-Martin

Comments: It had seemed a new political star was being born when Torrey Harris challenged (and defeated) incumbent John DeBerry in 2020. He was one of the first openly-LGBTQ+ representatives ever elected to the Tennessee State House in Tennessee and his prospects as a young, fresh progressive looked great. Much to our disappointment, he has not met our expectations. Due to his position as co-chair for the Tennessee-Israel Legislative Caucus, including traveling to Israel [to work with the Israeli government in 2025](#) during the ongoing Gaza genocide, we cannot recommend him.

His opponent, Ariell Gipson-Martin, recently ran for Shelby County clerk this year. She doesn’t appear to be a serious candidate and her ties to the Young administration give us pause. This district stretches from the Orange Mound neighborhood to Cooper Young in Midtown and is integral to both Black history and for working people. These candidates are not a reflection of the representation this district sorely needs, and we hope that in two years, a candidate will emerge that we will feel confident recommending.

District 93 – No Recommendation

No Official Candidates

Comments: The passing of well-liked progressive lawmaker G.A. Hardaway leaves this seat open for the first time in almost twenty years. His son, T.J. Hardaway, a former staffer who has served on multiple political campaigns, was

appointed to fill the vacancy and is currently running a write-in campaign for the November general election (no candidate from any party has officially qualified for the ballot). Time will tell how effective Hardaway will be, but at the moment he and his concrete policy positions are very much an unknown.

District 95 – No Recommendation

No Candidates Filed for the Democratic Primary

Comments: Drawn specifically to encompass the wealthy and conservative Collierville, Eads, and Lakeland exurbs, this district has been heavily Republican since its boundaries were remapped in 2022. This seat was unchallenged in 2024 and 2026. Only 25 percent of the vote to Democrats in 2022, this is pretty much the definition of a safe seat for the GOP. No progressive challenger seems forthcoming, and it will take a strong campaign to seriously compete. We are certainly watching for someone to step up and look forward to seeing incumbent Kevin Vaughan sweat.

District 96 – Gabby Salinas

Candidates:

Gabby Salinas
Dr. Telisa Franklin

Comments: **Memphis-Midsouth DSA recommends voting for Gabby Salinas.** Incumbent Salinas was endorsed by Memphis-Midsouth DSA in 2018 and 2020 (equivalent to a recommendation today, as our process has changed). Her history of bold progressive activism, disability advocacy, healthcare advocacy, and challenges to both corporate Democrats and the GOP make her extremely well liked by our membership. In the interest of due diligence, we conducted thorough research, including candidate interviews. Even without that previous history there is a clear distinction between Salinas and her primary challenger Dr. Telisa Franklin. A Bolivian immigrant, Gabby has been outspoken against ICE’s illegal activity as part of the federal occupation of Memphis, and has used her position as a state legislator to organize rapid response and mutual aid efforts.

In contrast, her opponent Dr. Franklin lists “public safety” as her number one priority in campaign materials, and in fact, during the 2024 Democratic primary, Dr. Franklin filmed a campaign video with members of the Memphis Police Association. While the rest of Dr. Franklin’s policy positions certainly sound progressive in a vacuum, the focus on supposed “public safety” in the context of the dangerous and unnecessary federal occupation of Memphis (especially combined with past endorsements *and* donations from law enforcement organizations) make us question her ability to be an effective advocate for working-class families.

District 97 – No Recommendation

Candidates:

Jesse Huseth

Comments: Running unopposed in the primary, Jesse Huseth was the Democratic nominee for this seat in 2024 and barely lost out to Republican John Gillespie in what was the most competitive Tennessee House race in Shelby County. An old-fashioned “labor Democrat,” Huseth combines a heavily pro-union, pro-public education agenda with a number of much more moderate positions. His campaign focus on “public safety” definitely gives us pause (especially in the context

of the federal occupation of Memphis) but his actual policy suggestions are mostly reforms, and he does not appear to be endorsed by any law enforcement organizations. While Huseh is certainly an imperfect candidate from some perspectives, the saying is “you go to war with the army you have,” and he represents the Tennessee Democratic Party’s main hope to flip a State House seat in the greater Memphis area. Huseh’s grounding in the labor movement combined with his broad base of support within the party make him likely to appeal to both progressives and moderates.

We had a good deal of deliberation about recommending Huseh, especially given the horrible record of the GOP opponent he will face in the general election in November. We did not take our decision to pass on a recommendation here lightly and feel that despite any misgivings on our part, a Huseh victory would be an overall win for the working people of Memphis.

District 98 – No Recommendation

Candidates:

Antonio Parkinson

Comments: Running unopposed in both the primary and the general election, Antonio Parkinson feels like a cautionary tale about the limits of a politician whose politics begin and end with personal charisma and a generic desire to serve the community. A veteran and former firefighter, Parkinson is well-liked by his allies and opponents alike, and his direct manner combined with his panache (he is especially noted for his personal style) make him a distinctive figure. Even the mention of his name was enough to generate smiles of recognition amongst many of our members, and if the qualifications for office were “being your coolest uncle,” Parkinson would be a slam dunk.

As a legislator, however, our opinion is decidedly more negative. Much like many of our uncles, Parkinson is oddly conservative policy-wise. He recently introduced two separate bills for enhanced prison sentencing and funding AI-based “weapons detection” in schools, among others. He’s [surprisingly bad](#) on LGBTQ+ issues. He’s also the recipient of a surprising amount of corporate donations (including from Amazon, Ely Lilly, Cigna, and United Healthcare) and no amount of fiery rhetoric (or hot takes about [Memphis seceding from Tennessee in response to redistricting](#)) will eliminate that conflict of interest. We suspect that if he continues leaning conservatively and fails to show up on issues like reproductive healthcare, he may find himself facing a well-organized challenger in the future.

District 99 – No Recommendation

No Candidates Filed for the Democratic Primary

Comments: In contrast to [TN House 95](#), TN District 99 is a large rural district that also includes many middle-class neighborhoods in Bartlett and Millington. It has not been challenged by the Democrats since the 2022 redistricting. In 2024, an independent pro-reproductive freedom candidate with limited resources and funding received 25 percent of the vote (to put this in perspective, according to campaign finance reports from 2024, independent William Mouzon only raised about \$1,000, compared to the \$76,000 raised by his GOP opponent). We feel this district represents a chance to run a bold, progressive campaign in 2028 that could generate enough momentum to pose a serious challenge to GOP incumbent Tom Leatherwood.

TENNESSEE STATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

District 30 – Allan Creasy

Comments: [Memphis-Midsouth DSA recommends voting for Allan Creasy](#). The State Executive Committee is the body of both the Democratic and Republican parties that make decisions on policy and candidacy. We recognize the importance of these positions since their decisions permeate everyday life. We want to know that the people on this committee are thinking of the students who are going to school hungry every day or understand the struggles of our immigrant community to get the correct documentation (and even with papers are still harassed by ICE).

But their work is mostly in the shadows, and so are the candidates' positions. There are no public sites nor social media pages to gather the vital information to make the best possible decisions at the polls. All we can go off of is the current TNDP positions and candidates, which are middling at best.

For this reason, we are only able to recommend a single candidate. Creasy has been an ally to our chapter. We recommend him because of this relationship, along with his [outspoken stance against](#) the federal agencies occupying our city, support for [Medicaid expansion](#), and desire to [fight for public education](#).

JUDICIAL OFFICES

As an organization that is committed to ending the criminalization of working-class survival, demilitarizing the police, and investing in community self-governance and care rather than incarceration, the Memphis-Midsouth Democratic Socialists of America must hold any candidate seeking office in our criminal legal system to a very high standard. Most judges and candidates in the criminal system come from a background of prosecution where they either advanced, or at the very least participated in, the incarceration of our friends and neighbors for offenses that should not be criminalized (like drug possession) and help to inflict harsh sentences that do not truly address the harm done.

While we believe in courts as a method for dispute resolution, our system's overreliance on incarceration as a method of getting society's "pound of flesh" leads to worse outcomes for people that elites see as "undesirable," whether that is Black and brown people, our unhoused neighbors, or those who just can't afford a high-priced legal defense. The election of judges and district attorneys gives us as working people the chance to put people in positions of power who can make real material gains for the people who need it most, whether that's shutting down the coercive guilty plea mill, or forcing police and prosecutors to actually prove their cases in trials that each person accused of a crime should be afforded.

For a judicial office candidate to rise to the standard of receiving our recommendation, that person would need to be both deeply committed to transforming the system they hope to join and savvy enough to maneuver around the many obstacles that stand in the way of that progress.

This includes the weaponization of the Rules of Judicial Conduct, which have greatly limited the candor of candidates seeking to become a judge but impose no specific rules on judicial candidates expressing their true views of the system.

Shelby County Criminal Court, Division I – No Recommendation

Candidates:

Jahari Dowdy
Ray Lepone

Comments: In the race for Criminal Court Division I, there is no candidate we could recommend based on our high standards outlined above. However, there is a clear difference between the two candidates. Judge Ray Lepone is a career prosecutor, who touts specific "criminals" he has helped to lock in cages. He highlights his time working to deny the appeals of people fighting to have their rights to fair trials and rehearing of new evidence in a Tennessee Attorney General's Office known for its right-wing activism and in a state that already has some of the toughest laws in the country that restrict those with real evidence of innocence to ever be heard by a judge.

On the other hand, experienced criminal defense attorney Jahari Dowdy seeks to replace Lepone but makes no reference to the many injustices of the system or any indication of how she might stand up to the powers that will seek to keep the machinery of mass incarceration going at pace. While a background defending the rights of the accused is a positive sign for how a judge will conduct themselves, especially when compared to a lifelong prosecutor, this experience does not guarantee a better outcome for those who might stand before her if she to be elected to this seat.

Shelby County Criminal Court, Division VIII – No Recommendation

Candidates:

David “Hawk” Allen
Javier Bailey II
Latonya Burrow
John Dolan
Joe Ozment
Ruchee Patel
Katie Ratton

Comments: The vacancy for this seat was created by the retirement of Judge Chris Craft in June 2026. This timing led to a late filing period and the extension of the timeline for pulling and filing petitions to run for this seat on the bench. Many perennial judicial candidates and newcomers are in the race for this position.

As discussed elsewhere in this Guide, our chapter takes a strong stance against the use of AI, both in general and especially in campaign materials. We then must point out the obvious and heavy use of AI in materials for both John Dolan and Javier Bailey II, disqualifying them from consideration for our recommendation.

The candidates in this race give almost no indication of their judicial philosophy or stance on the [issues most important to this chapter](#), sticking with platitudes around “fairness,” “justice,” and “rule of law.” One candidate does distinguish himself by more directly addressing the voters he is running to serve: David “Hawk” Allen. The rhetoric on his website shows respect for the plight of the accused and the Constitutional rights that judges must uphold. However, his views on addressing feelings of lack of safety through the judicial process and using sentencing as a method to protect public safety do not align with values our chapter holds on opposing mass incarceration and fighting the criminalization of poverty. While this means we cannot recommend a vote for Allen, we appreciate his break from platitudes to give Shelby County voters a better understanding of the choice they get to make in a judicial election.

General Sessions Criminal Court, Division VII – No Recommendation

Candidates:

Taylor Bachelor
Billy Gilchrist
Serena Gray

Comments: In the race for General Sessions Criminal Court Division VII, none of the three candidates have displayed the political savvy or willingness to confront the system that would be required to receive our recommendation.

The strongest of the three candidates on the commitment displayed to challenge the entrenched powers of the criminal legal system is Serena Gray. Her background in criminal defense work and her slightly more pointed critiques of the system, including saying that she “worked to uphold the... Constitution and balance the scales of justice” and that she has a “clear understanding of what... must change” on [her website](#), show a slightly stronger commitment to the values outlined above than her opponents. While these do not rise to the level of recommendation, Gray does offer a clear alternative to the platitudes of “fairness,” “justice,” and “impartiality,” that she and her opponents all include in the text of their campaign materials.

CITY OF MILLINGTON SCHOOL BOARD

Position 4 – No Recommendation

Candidate:

Marie L. Thomas

Comments: Thomas ran an unsuccessful campaign in 2024 and, unfortunately, has not produced a public campaign website. With little to no information available on this unopposed candidate, there will be no recommendation in the primary.

Position 6 – No Recommendation

Candidate:

Amanda “Mandy” Compton

Comments: Compton is running unopposed, and she has not updated her campaign platform since 2022. There will be no recommendation in the primary.

TOWN OF COLLIERVILLE SCHOOL BOARD

Position 2 – Jason Morrison

Comments: **Memphis-Midsouth DSA recommends voting for Dr. Jason Morrison.** Although the Collierville school district excels academically on paper, not every school in the district is given the resources to perform equally well. Decades of gentrification have created the need for the Collierville School Board to prioritize equity across all schools in its district. Dr. Morrison is the only candidate who promises equity and the prioritization of removing socioeconomic barriers within schools so that every child in Collierville public schools has an equal opportunity to succeed. Dr. Morrison has high community engagement, and he has made his stance on introducing equity into Collierville Schools publicly evident.

While we do approve of Dr. Morrison's equity position, there are no other aspects of his platform that we would consider remarkable. There is, however, a potential write-in candidate who does not advocate for fairness within our school systems as Morrison does. Ultimately, we found that Morrison's presence on the school board would indeed be a step towards equality in the Collierville school system.