

Vote411 Voters' Mini-Guide

Special Election April 5, 2022

Pennsylvania State Representative

District 24

This Voters' Mini-Guide is an excerpt of the Vote411.org online Voters' Guide -- a project of the League of Women Voters. All information in Vote411 Voters' Guides is submitted by the candidates and has not been edited or altered in any way.

This election will fill the seat vacated after Democratic state representative Ed Gainey was elected Mayor of Pittsburgh. The candidate who is elected on April 5th will take office right away and serve until January 2023.

The 24th Legislative District contains several neighborhoods in the City of Pittsburgh, including Highland Park, Lincoln-Lemington, Homewood, Brushton, East Hills, Park Place, Belmar and Garfield, along with the Borough of Wilkinsburg.

To vote in this election, you must register by March 21, 2022. All registered voters, regardless of party, may vote in this election.

Description of office: The General Assembly is the legislative branch of government in Pennsylvania. It is composed of two houses: the Senate is the upper house, and the House of Representatives is the lower house. A majority vote in both houses is necessary to pass a law. The House of Representatives consists of 203 members. Representatives must be at least 21 years old, have been citizens and lived in their respective districts one year before their election, and must live in their districts during their terms of service.

Term: 2 years

Candidates (choose 1):



Martell Covington

Party: Dem

Biographical Info:

Occupation: Legislative Aide - Minority Leader, Sen. Jay Costa

Education: Howard University

Campaign Website: www.martellforpa.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Martell4PA

Twitter: twitter.com/martellforpa



Questions:

Q: What issue(s) would you prioritize, and how would you work with others in government to get legislation passed and signed into law?

A: Public Health which focuses on maternal and infant health, making sure that mothers, particularly Black mothers are being supported to the fullest extent possible before, during and after birth and that their babies are given all the care available to protect their lives. Community Investment: increased minimum wage in PA, increase support to small businesses and entrepreneurs. A deliberate focus on affordable housing. Education & Equity: encourage collaboration with and between education stakeholders, advocate for increased support for socio-economic and disability focused education and out of school time. Environmental: push for infrastructural audits to ensure that our city will remain safe through varied weather conditions in our city.

Q: What changes, if any, would you support making to Pennsylvania's voting laws?

A: House Bill 2090, known as the K. Leroy Irvis Voting Rights Protection Act, sponsored by House Leader McClinton, would make voting easier by providing more ballot drop locations, permitting same day registration and continuing to allow for early voting. These are all things that have been adopted in other states. I plan to sign on as a cosponsor to this bill on the first day I am able to. In addition to this, I will advocate and fight every day against the unrelenting attacks on voting rights we see happening at every turn in Harrisburg. I will take an active approach to this by collaborating with colleagues and stakeholders to pursue, create, and push legislation that bolster a defense of our voting rights against such attacks.

Q: Article 1, Section 27 of the PA constitution guarantees the rights to clean air, pure water, and the preservation of the environment. What actions would you take to protect these rights?

A: First, we have to make sure that all lead lines are being replaced in homes, schools and public serving facilities. The commonwealth also needs to work to expand knowledge around the dangers of radon and the importance of radon testing. It is about investing in education that builds mobilization, as well as investment in direct action. I also believe that the dollar amount of fines, spills and leaks should be greatly increased.

Q: There are several pieces of gun legislation being considered on comprehensive background checks, red flag laws, and firearm safety training. What is your position on these measures?

A: I support all of these measures. I believe that each of these measures is necessary. We have a duty to protect our communities especially after the increase in gun violence over the past 3 years. Firearm safety training is essential and it should be accessible and a measure of accountability to all that own guns or are considering gun ownership. I am in support of Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO) as well. If we can protect people from someone that wants to hurt them, we should do so. And we are able to, so we must do so. We must also encourage safe gun ownership, particularly for minorities such as black, queer, and disabled people through gun safety education for current and new gun ownership, legislate for the develop of "safe zones".

Todd Elliott Koger

Party: Rep

Biographical Info:

Occupation: Former Law Clerk, Allegheny County Planner, and Science Teacher. Publisher of Black Pittsburgh Newspaper (Facebook)

Education: Duquesne University Law School, California University of PA, and an A.S. in Labor Education

Qualifications: Through and through during the past decade or more, fighting against entrenched political incumbents, as an authentic black voice in the community (protecting the importance of the black vote). The mantra "next man up" appears to now be playing itself out with the "Special Election" April 5, 2022.

Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/blackpittsburghnewspaper



Questions:

Q: What issue(s) would you prioritize, and how would you work with others in government to get legislation passed and signed into law?

A: AUTHENTIC BLACK LEADERSHIP!!! Skirmishes between small-time drug dealers are taking their toll on the impoverished pockets of Allegheny County's black neighborhoods. The drug trade has become the working-class aspiration for our black youth. Failing public schools and broken families have failed to foster bigger ambitions. And the death toll is not the only problem. Being a witness to a shooting, whether at school, in the community, or at home, has a major influence on children, including increased risk of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, difficulty in school, engagement in criminal activity, and abuse of drugs and alcohol. Everything matters little if we're not protecting our most precious resource --black youth.

Q: What changes, if any, would you support making to Pennsylvania's voting laws?

A: EQUALITY OF RIGHTS UNDER THE LAW shall not be denied or abridged in Pennsylvania because of the race or ethnicity. Not as Republican or Democrat but as a black on March 2nd, I argued in the PA Supreme Court without any help and/or support from the various local black organization or activists, against the PA Legislative Map's diluting (for the next 10-years) the BLACK VOTE by separating Wilksburg and Homewood voters who share a middle and high school, fire and police protection, garbage removal, a busway for transportation, and nonprofits providing human services, among other (planned annexation). We have similar work opportunities, standards of living, common environmental, healthcare, educational concerns, and bonds of ancestry/history.

Q: Article 1, Section 27 of the PA constitution guarantees the rights to clean air, pure water, and the preservation of the environment. What actions would you take to protect these rights?

A: The most important environment issue is GUN VIOLENCE: The black community is precarious with unique challenges that require a specific set of policy responses to address need from the earliest days of life through adulthood. IMPROVING EDUCATION: Local blacks have lower levels of educational attainment. Moreover, many of the service providers within the educational system do not cultivate the full potential of black students. IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT RATES: On average, blacks experience higher unemployment rates, lower labor force participation rates, and lower earnings than their counterparts. PLACE-BASED POLICIES: Blacks tend to be more sensitive to their environment growing up which materializes in behavioral issues. INVESTMENT IS NEEDED!!!

Q: There are several pieces of gun legislation being considered on comprehensive background checks, red flag laws, and firearm safety training. What is your position on these measures?

A: We have an out-of-control crisis with violence and the "status quo" way of doing things isn't working. Implicit and explicit biases, for decades, in the provision of human service delivery affecting accessibility and perpetuating systemic racism that has increased unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and homicide in black neighborhoods. The sorting of Allegheny County workers into different jobs along the lines of race, ethnicity, and gender remains one of the most pervasive features of the regional labor market. The inability of local school districts to provide a safe environment for black children to learn is an epidemic needing address immediately. WE SHOULDN'T SEE ANOTHER BALLOON RISE TOWARDS THE CLOUDS TO HONOR A DEAD BLACK CHILD!!!