

# PHILADELPHIA PLATFORM

2023-2024

## Philadelphia Platform 2023-2024

### Introduction

In 2019, the Philadelphia Delegation introduced The Philadelphia Platform. It included a series of four policy areas that the Philadelphia Delegation agreed to focus on during the 2019-20 Legislative session. The purpose was to present a clear, coordinated legislative agenda so that our colleagues in the General Assembly, the Governor, and our constituents knew where we stood. The hope was that by focusing on these areas we could improve the health, safety, and economic opportunity of Philadelphians, and thus all citizens of the Commonwealth. For the 2023-24 Legislative session, we have decided to continue our efforts and outlined a series of six policy areas that will be primary priorities of the Philadelphia Delegation.

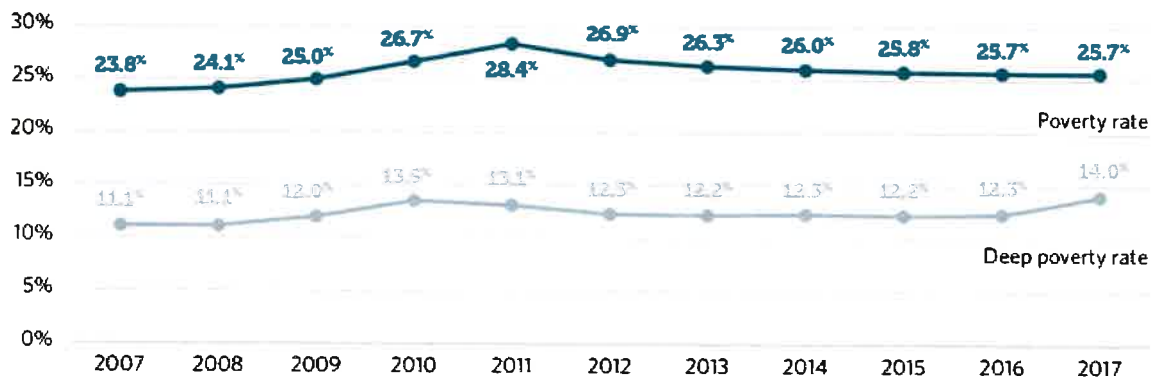
### Platform Objectives

In 2019, we asked the question: What is the best way to measure “well-being”? Is it Population growth? GDP? Graduation rate? Employment?

The conclusion we came to was that no one statistic could tell the whole story.

We decided that we would use the metric of poverty. The problem of poverty – and deep poverty – in Philadelphia has nagged policy makers, politicians, businesses, and communities for decades. Research showed that poverty levels remained at nearly the exact same level in 2016 as it was in 2006 (roughly 26%, and 12% deep poverty). New data from the US Census Bureau showed that while the poverty rate remained at that level in 2017, the deep poverty rate rose to 14%<sup>1</sup>.

### Poverty and Deep Poverty in Philadelphia, 2007-17



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, one-year estimates, 2007-17, Table B17002 (Ratio of Income to Poverty Level in the Past 12 Months). <http://factfinder.census.gov>

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In Pew’s Report on Philadelphia’s Poor, we can see the long systematic impact of poverty in our city. The Great Recession had a big impact on urban poverty. In Philadelphia the poverty rate rose sharply during and immediately after the recession and has fallen slowly since. In Philadelphia, the rate was 23.8 percent in 2007, the last year before the downturn, and peaked at 28.4 percent in 2011. Since that point Philadelphia has seen a 2.7 percentage point improvement since 2011- our poverty rate fell to 25.7% by the end of 2016. The location and composition of households in poverty in Philadelphia has also changed with areas of poverty and high poverty increasing and expanding to new neighborhoods, according to a report by the Pew Charitable Trusts Philadelphia Research Initiative. It is present in most, if not all, of our legislative districts<sup>1</sup>.

While this information is an important start, so much has changed since we first studied poverty back in 2019. The outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic in March of 2020 has drastically changed the way we work, learn, and interact as a society. While millions of people were losing their jobs, the government stepped in and provided Economic Impact Payments, increased unemployment payments and food benefits, rental subsidies, and tax credits. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities COVID-19 Relief achieved a historic drop in poverty in 2020. Around the country these programs “lifted 17 million people above the poverty line, reducing the number of people below the poverty line by more than one-third.”<sup>2</sup>. The data confirms what the Philadelphia Delegation has always known to be true: when we invest in our citizens they thrive.

The goal of the Philadelphia Platform during the 2023-2024 Legislative Session will be to make policy changes that will increase the well-being of our city, its people, and measurably improve the economy.

Our platform seeks to address poverty around 6 main planks: (1) Workforce, Development and Education; (2) strengthening our Democracy; (3) housing; (4) health and wellness; (5) criminal justice and public safety reform; and (6) Infrastructure and Climate Readiness.

While each policy priority under these give planks is critical to uplift Philadelphians out of poverty, we are focusing on three in anticipation of the 2023-2023 budget.

A. Raise the minimum wage to \$18: The federal minimum wage has been \$7.25 an hour since 2009. Over 23 states have decided to make increases to the minimum wage over the years, including all states that border Pennsylvania- New York, New Jersey, Delaware, West Virginia, Maryland, and Ohio all have higher minimum wages than Pennsylvania<sup>3</sup>. According to the Economic Policy Institute “there is no part of this country where even a single adult without children can achieve an adequate standard of living with a wage of less than \$15 an hour.”<sup>4</sup> We cannot continue expecting workers to be unfairly compensated for their time. Many of these minimum wage jobs were considered “essential” during the pandemic. They were cheered and praised for continuing to work, while higher-waged jobs shut down or transitioned to work from home. This issue is critical in Philadelphia where rising

rental costs, food, and other essentials make increasing the minimum wage essential to ensuring a life sustaining career.

B. Reducing gun violence: A recent Penn study found that investing in communities through trash removal, eliminating abandoned properties, greening up blocks, and providing home repairs can reduce crime by as much as 22%<sup>5</sup>. According to a 2021 Philadelphia Inquirer Article- 10 or more people have been shot since 2015 on 57 city blocks. The blocks are in neighborhoods with higher poverty rates and lower life expectancy than other parts of the city<sup>7</sup>. They are also in areas that were “redlined”, or marked “hazardous” or “declining,” on a 1937 assessment grades map from the Homeowners’ Loan Corporation, published by the city’s Office of the Controller. We are asking for a 100 Million investment on these 57 blocks- the resources going quickly and directly to these blocks to invest in these communities and reduce gun violence.

C. Improving Educational Outcomes: School buildings – We need to start a comprehensive rebuilding program for Philadelphia public schools, addressing deferred maintenance, safety, and vital upgrades. When students enter a school building with crumbling infrastructure, no air condition, rodents, and other safety hazards reaching equity in the educational system is impossible. We have the federal dollars to do this now. We are requesting 500 Million to remake the educational experience of our kids.

### **Platform Planks:**

Each plank of the platform comes at the central challenge of poverty from a different angle.

#### **1. Workforce, Development and Education**

*Vision & Goal:* The Pennsylvania Guarantee – A place in employment, higher education, or training for all young people at the completion of high school.

*Policy Priorities:*

- Raising the minimum wage to at least \$15.
- Access to quality, affordable childcare.
- School-Industry Partnerships – educate and encourage Philadelphia’s workforce development community and partners to take advantage of funding through PA smart and create school-based pre-apprenticeship programs empowering young students to pursue new careers with the right skills.
- Increase the number and quality of apprenticeship programs using state contracting and grant programs to incentivize this increase.
- Create a personal financial literacy class for high school students.

## 2. Strengthening Our Democracy

*Vision & Goal:* The World Bank states that good governance is a pre-requisite for poverty eradication. (citation) The Commonwealth must regain the confidence of its citizens by limiting corruption and dishonesty.

*Policy Priorities:*

- Requiring elected officials to resign upon conviction.
- Per-diems for elected officials should be reimbursed only for expenses incurred.
- Implementing laws mandating increased campaign finance transparency.
- Keeping our elections timely and secure by allowing for early counting of mail-in and absentee ballots and enhancing penalties for intimidation at the polling place.
- Civic education classes for high school students.

## 3. Housing

*Vision & Goals:* To ensure healthy and productive living space by increasing protections to tenants, affordable housing, and access to legal assistance.

*Policy Priorities:*

- Placing a limit rent increases.
- Increasing income thresholds to allow more people to qualify for the Property Tax Rent Rebates.
- Incentivize builders to build affordable housing.
- Re-write the landlord-tenant act to include more protections for renters.
- Increase funding to legal organizations who assist in eviction sealing, tangled titles and landlord-tenant disputes.
- Investing in neighborhoods by addressing blight.

## 4. Health and Wellness

*Vision & Goals:* The Commonwealth has a duty to make sure its citizens have access to the medical care that they need to be productive citizens.

*Policy Priorities:*

- Continued abortion access to all Pennsylvanian's, including providing freedom from persecution for those seeking assistance from out of state.
- Implementing paid parental leave for new parents.

- Expanding mental health resources to all Pennsylvanian's, especially children.
  - Support the education and training of mental health professionals.
  - Increase availability of psychiatric beds and mental health care in hospitals, crisis, and other treatment centers for those in mental health crisis.
- Divert those with mental illness from our jails and prisons into the medical treatment programs they need.
- Partnering police with mental health professionals to assist on calls.

## **5. Criminal Justice & Public Safety Reform**

*Vision & Goals:* The Commonwealth must look at the entire picture of the criminal justice system and make needed adjustments that keep guns out of the hands of criminals and inject fairness and compassion into the process.

*Policy Priorities:*

- Gun Violence – Declare a state of emergency around gun violence and provide resources to all levels of law enforcement to eradicate illegal guns from our streets. This includes the regulation of ghost guns.
- Bail reform – Pass comprehensive pretrial reforms that remove financial considerations and minimize bias in pretrial sentencing.
- Probation and Parole – Provide additional funding to reduce caseloads of probation and parole officers while implementing best practices to reduce probation recidivism.
- Dignity for Incarcerated Women – Institute new structures and procedures that bring fairness and compassion to women – particularly new mothers.
- Improving the Juvenile Justice System by investing in rehabilitative solutions and community treatment for children.
- Commonwealth of Pennsylvania must pay its constitutionally mandated allotment for county courts and corrections, as ordered by the PA Supreme Court.

## **6. Infrastructure & Climate Readiness**

*Vision and Goals:* The Commonwealth must ensure that the infrastructure of the Philadelphia region has continued investment modernize our infrastructure to become comparable to other major US cities.

*Policy Priorities:*

- School buildings – Start a comprehensive rebuild and renovation program for Philadelphia public schools, addressing deferred maintenance, safety, and vital upgrades.

- Mass Transit – Support funding stability for SEPTA by allowing for greater local revenue in the capital and operating budgets.
- Climate Readiness – Investing in state infrastructure so that it is resilient and able to tolerate changes in our weather patterns, while also trying to decrease our carbon footprint.

## **Philadelphia Platform**

### *Plank 1 – Workforce, Development & Education*

#### **Introduction**

All around us states are raising the minimum wage and Pennsylvanians are leaving the Commonwealth in search of higher paying jobs and lower costs of living. If we are going to attract and retain quality employees, we need to give them reasons to stay. The first way of doing this is paying workers a livable wage and subsidizing childcare. Another way is preparing students for quality jobs while they are still enrolled in high school. Not all students graduating want to go to college or can afford to go. We need to make sure that they have the option to learn relevant job skills while still in school. Moreover, we should also be making sure that students learn financial literacy skills to help them thrive.

The federal minimum wage has been \$7.25 an hour since 2009. Over 23 states have decided to make increases to that over the years, including all states that border Pennsylvania. New York, New Jersey, Delaware, West Virginia, Maryland, and Ohio all have higher minimum wages than Pennsylvania. According to the Economic Policy Institute “there is no part of this country where even a single adult without children can achieve an adequate standard of living with a wage of less than \$15 an hour<sup>4</sup>.” We cannot continue expecting workers to be unfairly compensated for their time. Many of these minimum wage jobs were considered “essential” during the pandemic. They were cheered and praised for continuing to work, while higher-waged jobs shut down or transitioned to work from home.

The median annual cost in Philadelphia for childcare is \$10,920. For high quality care it could cost over \$25,000<sup>2</sup>. For lower income families, especially women, the choice is painfully simple; go to work and use a majority of your salary to cover childcare or stay home to look after the child themselves. From the beginning of the pandemic through January of 2021, 2.3 million American women have dropped out of the labor force, compared to 1.8 million men<sup>3</sup>. The Economic Policy Institute, projects that investing in childcare could create 2 million jobs around the country<sup>4</sup>. For Pennsylvanians it could free up about \$6,800 or 12% of an average family’s income to spend on other things<sup>11</sup>.

The Commonwealth must make sure our young people are graduating with the skills to succeed in a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. In 2018 Amazon promised 50,000 jobs to any municipality that won their HQ2 sweepstakes<sup>11</sup>. Philadelphia made an all-out push to win this coveted prize, only to lose out. But if it had won, would Philadelphians have the skills to compete for these jobs? Or would these jobs be filled by others: imported from other parts of the nation or globe?

Teaching our young people the importance of financial literacy is a vital life skill. Having a basic concept of finance has been shown to greatly increase your chances of financial stability. A lack



of financial knowledge leads to making uninformed decisions. Creating a curriculum to educate students will help them have a brighter future.

Looking at the current landscape shows we have much to do. Investing in our current and future workforce is a paramount plank of the Philadelphia Platform in 2023-24.

- A recent study stated that when adjusted for cost-of-living, the minimum wage in Philadelphia is \$6.69, 4<sup>th</sup> lowest out of 79 cities<sup>1</sup>.
- If the minimum wage had kept pace with economic productivity, it would be nearly \$26 an hour<sup>13</sup>.
- Minimum-wage earners are disproportionately “nonwhite or Hispanic, young and lacking a college degree,” and 57% were women<sup>1</sup>.
- Philadelphia ranks the second lowest among the 15 largest cities country in labor force participation— in some parts of the city it is as low as 65%<sup>1</sup>.
- By 2030, 600,000 Philadelphians (or 39% of the population) will not have the skills to secure the types of jobs available in Philadelphia<sup>14</sup>.
- 550,000 adults in Philadelphia or nearly 50% of the adult population lack the tools like literacy, computer skills, and credentials to succeed in the workforce<sup>14</sup>.
- 27.4% of adults over 25 have bachelor’s degrees, and the geographic variation of educational attainment is extreme – Center City it is 75% and over, large parts of North, Southwest, West and Northeast Philadelphia is below 25%<sup>1</sup>.
- The United States ranks No. 14<sup>th</sup> with 57% of US adults are financially literate<sup>15</sup>.

### **Vision & Goals**

Support the current labor force by providing resources that allow them to continue to work and live in Philadelphia. Also, supporting young people so they can pursue family-sustaining jobs with a living wage, regardless of their level of education.

In the 2023-24 the Philadelphia Delegation will focus on:

- **All Pennsylvanians** – Anyone working in the Commonwealth deserves to make a livable wage.
- **Parents** – make sure parents, especially women, can send their children to affordable, high-quality childcare and remain in the workforce.
- **Young people** – All young Philadelphians, starting in middle school, must be equipped with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce starting in school.

### **Policy Priorities:**

The Philadelphia Platform in 2023-24 calls for investments directly into the labor force. Increasing the state minimum wage, subsidies to child-care, and giving students the skills they need to succeed.

- 1) *Raise the minimum wage to at least \$15.*
  - a. All states bordering ours have a higher minimum wage. We need to increase the states minimum wage to be competitive.
- 2) *Access to quality, affordable childcare.*
  - a. Incentivize employers to fund childcare for their employees by splitting the cost with the state and providing tax credit incentives to employers who participate.
  - b. Expand access to high-quality per-K for children.
  - c. Having childcare facilities publicly advertise their Keystone Stars
- 3) *School-Industry Partnerships – School-based pre-apprenticeship programs in partnership with business leaders, will empower young students to pursue new careers with the right skills.*
  - a. Partnerships can exist at individual school-to-individual business level, school district-to-industry partnerships, multiple school districts-to-chambers of commerce.
  - b. Involvement includes community colleges and workforce investment boards.
  - c. Grants to partnerships support the hiring of staff, purchase of equipment and software.
  - d. Educate and encourage Philadelphia workforce development community and partners – including Chambers of Commerce, Community Colleges, the School District, Philly Works and organized labor – to take full advantage of funding through PA Smart.
  - e. Ensure that Department of Labor and Industry properly publicizes and promotes funding opportunities to Philadelphia stakeholders and encourage significant allocation of these funds to Philadelphia workforce.
  - f. Delivering localized programs in schools to ensure that students have a curriculum that prepares them for the local job market (citation)
- 4) *Increase the number and quality of apprenticeship programs using state contracting and grant programs to incentivize this increase.*
  - a. Whether for RACP, CFA or other state grants, or via state contracting, require bidders and applicants to provide apprenticeships to the community served by the project.
  - b. Use robust Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) in all state grantmaking and contracting.

- 5) *Creating a Financial Literacy curriculum for all high school students to be able to break the cycle of poverty.*
  - a. Establish a personal finance course requirement for students taking effect with the 2025-2026 school year.

## Philadelphia Platform

### *Plank 2 – Strengthening our Democracy*

#### **Introduction**

Abraham Lincoln described our democracy as a “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” That is how our democracy continues to grow: by being of the people, by the people and most importantly for the people. Those elected to serve in the Commonwealth must take measures to make sure that it works for the people. The World Bank states that good governance is a pre-requisite for poverty eradication<sup>16</sup>. Good governance can be measured in terms such as: accountability, stability, effectiveness, and control over corruption. The theory being if government cannot maintain itself how can it effectively govern and provide for its citizens. There are a variety of ways that members can restore public confidence to assure that our democracy is functioning efficiently.

As public servants, we are elected to represent our constituents and promote the general welfare of our districts. Every elected official must make a similar promise to serve faithfully and carry out the responsibilities of their office with integrity. This is difficult to do when facing criminal sentencing. We must update policy so that elected officials are only reimbursed for expenses incurred instead of the current flat rate practice. The current system can sometimes pay thousands of additional dollars to legislators on top of their salaries. Modern technology makes the requirement of submitting receipts a miniscule burden – a burden worth the cost of restoring the public’s trust in the General Assembly’s handling of its financial affairs.

November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020, four days after the election, was when Pennsylvania finally announced the votes were finished being counted<sup>17</sup>. The untimely delay in counting votes damaged Pennsylvania’s national image. When mail-in voting was passed in 2019, there was no way for the legislature to foresee this problem. Knowing what we now know, we must take steps to correct it by allowing municipalities to count mail-in ballots early.

Finally, we must provide better civics education and curriculum in our schools so that students graduating can be prepared to be active members in our society. They must know the responsibilities of citizenship. This includes voting, jury duty, and working the polls on election day. All the things that this democracy needs to continue to grow and become better.

With all of this in mind, maintaining and improving Philadelphia and Pennsylvania’s Democracy is an essential part of the 2023-24 Philadelphia Platform:

- Democratic Values are essential to successful economic development<sup>18</sup> and has been shown to be a driving factor in increasing GDP per capita growth<sup>19</sup> (Angrist et. Al 2013), and reducing economic inequality<sup>20</sup>.

- As Corruption levels decrease in a governmental body, investment is more efficient and more equitable; taxes are used more effectively<sup>21</sup>.
- Corruption has been proven to have a negative effect on equity in power—resulting in a negative relationship between Corruption and Social Equity<sup>22</sup>.
- A 40 year study by Forbes from 1976 to 2016 found that the Philadelphia region is the Seventh most Corrupt municipality in America<sup>23</sup>; Pennsylvania was the sixth most corrupt state (measured from 1976-2018)<sup>24</sup>.
- As trust in the government increases, both crime and corruption decrease ([Wike and Holzwart 2008](#)).

## Vision & Goals

The Commonwealth cannot focus on stemming poverty if it cannot effectively govern itself. We must provide greater transparency and accountability to earn the constituent's trust.

In 2023-24, changes to policies should focus on these areas:

- **Continue to improve our governance:** passing laws that assure greater accountability will improve our ability to serve our constituency.
- **Improve upon transparency:** providing the constituency with increased opaqueness around campaign funds, and more enumerated per-diems for elected officials.
- **Empower our citizens:** improving civics education we will empower the younger generation of Pennsylvanians to voice their perspectives.

## Policy Priorities

The Philadelphia Platform in 2023-24 highly recommends putting policies in place that make our Commonwealth more transparent and accountable. When government is fair and effective its citizens want to be active and engaged.

1. *Requiring elected officials to resign upon conviction.*
  - a. Passing legislation that forces a person who has been convicted to resign from office.
  - b. This will provide greater accountability. As public servants, we have been elected to represent our constituents and promote the general welfare of our districts. This cannot be done when facing criminal sentencing.
2. *Per-diems for elected officials being reimbursed only for expenses incurred*

- a. The current practice of flat rate per diems can sometimes pay thousands of additional dollars to legislators on top of their salaries.
  - b. Modern technology makes the requirement of submitting receipts a miniscule burden – a burden worth the cost of restoring the public’s trust in the General Assembly’s handling of its financial affairs.
3. *Implementing laws mandating increased campaign finance transparency*
4. *Keeping our elections timely and secure by allowing for early counting of mail-in and absentee ballots and enhancing penalties for intimidation at the polling place.*
- a. Passing legislation that will allow municipalities to start counting ballots as early as a week prior to the election.
5. *Civic education classes for high school students*
- a. Creating a curriculum to increasing students’ understanding of basic government so that they are better prepared to be engaged citizens in our democracy.

## **Philadelphia Platform**

### *Plank 3 – Housing*

#### **Introduction:**

The typical recommendation when you are looking to purchase a home or rent an apartment is to spend no more than 30% of your income on housing. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development set this standard in 1981 and considers anyone who spends over that amount to be cost-burdened<sup>26</sup>. In September of 2020 the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) issued a temporary national moratorium on most evictions to curb the spread of COVID-19. This action was unprecedented and helped numerous families stay in their homes during a public health crisis. It prevented them from ending up in a crowded shelter or on the streets. The moratorium was eventually overturned by the Supreme Court in August of 2021<sup>27</sup>. When someone is evicted, it can make it more difficult to find housing since most landlords are not willing to rent to someone with an eviction record. By limiting rent increases and increasing income limits for rebates we can assure that people have the resources to remain in their homes.

Moreover, we must make sure that low-income tenants and homeowners have access to legal assistance. Sometimes a tenants can be evicted through no fault of their own. They can also be threatened with evicted to keep them from demanding safe and sanitary housing conditions. We can even the playing field by increasing funding to legal organizations who offer aid to low-income tenants and homeowners. These organizations can help with landlord-tenant disputes, tangled titles, and eviction sealing. We must create equal accountability between landlords and tenants.

“Research shows that increasing access to affordable housing is the most cost-effective strategy for reducing childhood poverty and increasing economic mobility in the United States.”<sup>28</sup>. We need to increase the amount of affordable housing by incentivizing contractors to build them.

Lastly, urban blight can make people feel disconnected from their community. A study by the Penn Institute for Urban Research found that blight is linked to toxic stress. This stress can take a toll on an individual triggering fight or flight responses and increasing cortisol levels<sup>29</sup>. If we want to build safe, engaged communities we must address blight in our neighborhoods. We cannot allow for properties to stay abandoned and vacant lots to become short dumping sites. We must invest in these communities and promote growth.

Like other large cities, Philadelphia’s housing crisis is clear:

- 69% of cost-burdened households in Philadelphia have incomes below \$30,000 a year<sup>30</sup>.
- 22% of households in Philadelphia are severely cost-burdened, spending 50% or more on housing costs<sup>30</sup>.
- Average rents in Philadelphia have increased by 8.5% over the last year. “Prior to the pandemic it took two-plus years for average rents to increase by \$100.”<sup>31</sup>.
- For every 100 people who need affordable housing in Pennsylvania, only 42 will get it.
- As of 2015 there were over 40,000 vacant lots in Philadelphia<sup>30</sup>.

### **Vision & Goal**

The Commonwealth must ensure healthy and productive living space by increasing protections to tenants, affordable housing, and access to legal assistance.

In 2023-24, changes to policies should focus on these areas:

- **Access to affordable housing** – whether that be through new builds or increasing assistance to renters and homeowners
- **More protections for tenants** – Provide tenants education on their rights as tenants while also expanding them.
- **Increased funding for legal assistance** – low-income families and seniors do not always have the means to fight unfair practices. Additional funds to legal organizations that help with eviction sealing, tangled titles, and landlord-tenant disputes.
- **Beautifying neighborhoods** – Our citizens deserve clean, safe, and habitable communities. We need to prevent blight from happening in our communities by addressing abandoned properties and short dumping sites.

### **Policy Priorities**

The Philadelphia Platform in 2023-24 recommends that we put policies in place that make it easier for tenants to stay in their homes, increase affordable housing and address blight in neighborhoods. We must support our citizens by making sure that those who work in Philadelphia can live in Philadelphia if they wish.

1. *Placing a limit on rent increases statewide.*
  - a. Not everyone can or wants to own a home, however, renting has become increasingly unpredictable. Some landlords have been taking advantage of the high-priced real estate market by increasing rent prices.
2. *Building and creating more access to affordable housing.*



- a. Increasing incentives to developers to build affordable housing.
  - b. Increasing funds to PHA so that more citizens can have access to affordable housing.
3. *Re-write the landlord-tenant act to include more protections for renters.*
4. *Increase funding to legal organizations to aid low-income citizens with housing problems such as:*
- a. Eviction sealing
  - b. Tangled titles
  - c. Landlord-tenant disputes
5. *Addressing blight in neighborhoods*
- a. Designate funds to improve infrastructure throughout Pennsylvania.
  - b. Help communities who want to clean or green up abandoned lots.

## Philadelphia Platform

### *Plank 4 – Health & Wellness*

#### **Introduction**

Good health is the foundation of an engaged citizenry. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that health is not just an individual problem it concerns all of us. Those in poor health cannot effectively work or provide for their families. Pennsylvania should be doing much more to support health and wellness than it currently does. Surrounding states can serve as a model of what to focus on – and what to avoid – as the Philadelphia Delegation bolsters its public health platform. The Commonwealth’s record on abortion rights, paid parental leave, and mental health and substance abuse treatment are all due for reassessment.

According to the United Nations, family planning is considered a human right. It also plays a vital role in reducing poverty<sup>32</sup>. In 1973, the decision of *Roe v. Wade* granted women the right to safe, legal access to abortion. The decision ultimately made it more accessible for women to obtain higher levels of education and stay in the workforce longer<sup>33</sup>. However, this right is now being threatened across the nation. Fourteen states have enacted legislation that either severely restrict or criminalize abortion<sup>34</sup>. The Philadelphia Delegation will continue to fight to not only keep abortion legal but to pass legislation codifying *Roe v. Wade* and provide protections for non-Pennsylvanians seeking to access health care.

According to UNICEF, 40 out of 41 high- and middle-income countries provide at least eight weeks paid maternity leave and 31 provide leave to non-birthing partners. The United States is the only country that does not provide either<sup>35</sup>. Young couples who are looking to start a family have more options now than they did before. New York, New Jersey, and Delaware all have some form of partially paid parental leave<sup>36</sup>. What is to keep them in Pennsylvania when three states along our border offer this benefit? The Commonwealth must be on the side of workers and families by enacting parental leave. In addition, we must look to provide more protections to Pennsylvania families, like paid family leave and expanded healthcare access.

Even prior to the pandemic, the mental health services industry was already lagging behind. Back in 2013 state lawmakers cut the county mental health agency budget by 10%. It reduced state funding to “county-delivered behavioral and mental health services by \$84 million.”<sup>37</sup>. Now, with more people than before looking for mental health care, the industry is still struggling to keep up with demand. For almost ten years the funding for county mental health programs was stagnant. It wasn’t until the 2022-2023 budget that there was an increase in funding of \$42 million<sup>38</sup>. While this is a step in the right direction, we need to continue to invest in these critical services for Pennsylvanians.

We cannot look at mental health without looking at the connection between it and substance abuse. The CDC includes mental health issues as a High-Risk factor for substance use in teens<sup>39</sup>.

These two issues cannot always be treated separately -- we must make sure we are providing health professionals with the tools they need to treat them together.

According to the PA Department of Corrections almost one-fourth of the prison populations has some sort of mental illness<sup>40</sup>. While we do not dispute that those convicted of violent crimes should face consequences, this does not mean we can neglect the role of mental health in their actions; we must provide the necessary treatment to rehabilitate these individuals and reduce recidivism.

Furthermore, this should not be something we only look at once that person is already incarcerated. The city of Philadelphia is currently running a pilot program that pairs mental health professions with 911 operators to help assess whether a call is related to a behavioral health crisis. The program also trains officers in crisis intervention so that they are more capable in de-escalation techniques<sup>41</sup>. This type of training allows officers to better understand the situation they are walking into and improves the chances of a nonaggressive conclusion. The commonwealth should pledge additional funds to these types of programs so they can have implemented them statewide.

Looking at the data below it is clear that the policies we have in place need to be re-worked to better benefit Pennsylvanians.

- 49% of women seeking abortions are poor, that is over three times the national poverty rate of 12%<sup>42</sup>.
- “Women who seek abortions overwhelmingly lack access to paid maternity leave or affordable childcare<sup>42</sup>.”
- 93% of low-wage workers have no access to paid family leave<sup>43</sup>.
- When fathers have access to paternity leave it increases the mother’s ability to go back to work full time and increases the household income <sup>44</sup>.
- Within Philadelphia County, more than 20.8 percent of adults (18 and older) have been diagnosed with a mental health condition <sup>45</sup>.
- In top counties in the U.S. the ratio of the population to mental health providers is 360:1. In the city of Philadelphia, our ratio lags behind at 470:1. However, that is much better than the Commonwealth’s rate of 600:1<sup>45</sup>.
- 29.1% of PA’s prison population has a mental health problem, with nearly 10% seriously mentally ill; and in Philadelphia roughly 17% have a serious mental illness. There is also a higher recidivism rate in the severely mentally ill prison and jail population. (Pennsylvania Department of Corrections<sup>46</sup>.
- More than 1 in 5 people shot by police have mental illnesses<sup>47</sup>.

## **Vision and Goals**

The Commonwealth has a duty to make sure its people have access to the health care that they need to be productive citizens.

In 2023-24, investment and policy should focus on:

- **Continued access to abortion** – Access to safe, legal abortion is a right that every woman should have. The Commonwealth will uphold that right for all Pennsylvanians and anyone seeking to access the health care in our state.
- **Parental leave** – To keep young families in Pennsylvania we must offer competitive family leave policies.
- **Mental health access** – Expanding access for all Pennsylvanians by increasing the number of providers in schools, providing financial assistance for those wishing to work in underserved areas, and increasing funding to mental health providers and organizations.

### Policy Priorities

A healthy and accommodated workforce leads to greater productivity and creativity. The Philadelphia Platform in 2023-24 should focus on putting policies in place to support all Pennsylvanians.

1. *Continued abortion access to all Pennsylvanians, including providing freedom from persecution for those seeking assistance from out of state.*
  - a. Pass legislation that would codify abortion access in Pennsylvania.
  - b. Pass the Women’s Reproductive HealthCare Compact – This legislation would find ways to work with neighboring states to protect and defend reproductive rights. It would also prevent investigations of reproductive healthcare services, disclosure of records, and negative licensing actions.
2. *Paid parental leave for new parents.*
  - a. The Commonwealth must work with employers to create a policy around paid parental leave.
3. *Expanding mental health resources to all Pennsylvanians, especially children.*
  - a. Support the education and training of mental health professionals.
  - b. Increase availability of psychiatric beds and mental health care in hospitals, crisis centers, and other treatment facilities for those experiencing mental health problems.
4. *Divert those with mental illness from our jails and prisons into the medical treatment programs they need.*

- a. Give counties the tools they need to measure and track the prevalence of the severely mentally ill in their jails.
5. *Partnering police with mental health professionals to assist on calls.*
- a. Provide grants to implement more co-responder teams between police and mental health professionals to divert people from prison and into treatment.
  - b. Creating a Behavioral Health Response Unit staffed with personnel, crisis counselors and peer specialist to assist on these calls.

## **Philadelphia Platform**

### *Plank 5 – Criminal Justice & Public Safety Reform*

#### **Introduction**

The prevalence of illegal guns in Philadelphia is a public safety crisis. They are falling in the hands of teenagers with increasing frequency, who are using them against fellow teens and adults alike. Though it is impossible to count how many illegal guns are circulating on the streets of Philadelphia the ubiquity and availability of guns is threatening our neighborhoods, our families, and our young people.

Moreover, our communities (and our workforce) are being held back by too many Philadelphians of working age being either behind bars, on parole/probation, or burdened by a criminal record. The reasons for this are many. No one disputes that violent criminals need to face consequences. But in looking at pretrial, parole and probation, and the harsh juvenile justice system we see three areas where the Commonwealth can take meaningful steps to keep people out of the corrections system, contributing positively to their families, communities, and their economy.

The evidence compelling these policy priorities is clear:

- 2020 thru 2022 have had the highest amount homicides our city has seen in a decade. In both 2021 and 2022 there were over 500 people killed<sup>48</sup>.
- According to the Philadelphia Inquirer nearly 1,800 people were shot and survived in 2022<sup>49</sup>.
- In that same article they reported that in 2021 there were 70,878 background check applications for a gun permit. That is over 6 times the number of applications received in 2020<sup>49</sup>.
- In the last twenty years the number of people on parole has nearly tripled from less than 11,000 in 2001 to over 32,000 in 2021<sup>50</sup>.
- Pennsylvania has the 4<sup>th</sup> largest parole and probation population in the country<sup>50</sup>.
- It costs around \$16,000 to educate a child, but almost \$250,000 to incarcerate that child for a year<sup>51</sup>.

These reform areas not only help reduce prison and jail populations statewide, but also allow more Philadelphians and Pennsylvanians to remain in their communities, where they can contribute to the local economy and support their families.

#### **Vision & Goals**

The Commonwealth must look at the entire picture of the criminal justice system and make needed adjustments that keep guns out of the hands of criminals and inject fairness and compassion into the process.

In 2023-24, investment and policy should focus on these areas:

- **Illegal Guns:** Give law enforcement at the state and local level the tools they need to eradicate the scourge of illegal firearms from our streets.
- **Bail Reform:** Reduce bias – explicit and implicit – from the pretrial process by removing financial considerations from bail proceedings.
- **Parole & Probation Reform:** Support proper funding for probation and parole officers while piloting community-based treatments and rehabilitation for those on probation or parole.
- **Juvenile Justice Reform** – When a child is in trouble, imprisonment should not be the first (or only) response. We must try to divert children from going into the system as much as we can, keeping them with their families and in their communities.

#### **Policy Priorities:**

The Philadelphia Platform in 2023-24 around criminal justice and public safety targets two core areas: providing resources to law enforcement to tackle illegal guns and reforming the system to keep violent offenders behind bars and keep the less dangerous, reformed, and mentally ill out of the criminal justice system.

- 1) *Gun Violence – Declare a public health epidemic around guns and provide resources to all levels of law enforcement to eradicate them from Philadelphia.*
  - a. Working with the Attorney General’s office, ATF, city and state police, and local district attorneys, the Commonwealth must implement a coordinated strategy to get these guns off our streets and out of the hands of criminals.
  - b. Declare a public health epidemic – draw resources and attention to this crisis.
  - c. Coordinated strategy – State and local law enforcement design and implement a targeted strategy.
  - d. Funding – provide law enforcement with the resources they need to do effectuate this strategy.
  - e. Add additional police officers to the city numbers so that they can enforce the laws that are already on the books.
  - f. Pilot and implement preventative measures that help de-escalate and deter gun violence.
  
- 2) *Bail reform – Pass comprehensive pretrial reforms that remove financial considerations and minimize bias in pretrial sentencing.*

- a. Determine what legislative changes are needed to reform bail process in Pennsylvania – constitutional or legislative, if any.
- 3) *Probation and Parole – Provide additional funding to reduce caseloads of probation and parole officers while implementing best practices to reduce probation recidivism.*
- a. The current system needs to be updated, modernized, and made more flexible.
  - b. Pass Senate Bill 14 of 2020 that updates probation policies.
  - c. Increase funding to probation and parole officers and to counties to lessen caseloads for officers and improve outcomes.
  - d. Implement community-based treatment and programs rather than monitoring to reduce recidivism, such as Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS)
  - e. Allow those serving a life sentence to appeal for parole.
- 4) *Dignity for Incarcerated Women – Institute new structures and procedures that bring fairness and compassion to women – particularly new mothers.*
- a. Establish a new committee for women and girls under the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.
  - b. Provide free feminine products to women, including but not limited to sanitary napkins, sanitary wipes, and ibuprofen.
  - c. Allow primary caretaker parents to make a free weekly call to a child.
  - d. Offer parenting classes for primary caretakers serving sentences under 10 years.
- 5) *Improving the Juvenile Justice System by investing in rehabilitative solutions and community treatment for children.*
- a. Automatically sealing records of juveniles at a certain age.
  - b. Invest in Community-based solutions to keep them in their homes and community.
  - c. Increasing funds so that all youth have access to legal counsel.
- 6) *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania must pay its constitutionally mandated allotment for county courts and corrections, as ordered by the PA Supreme Court. Allegheny vs. Commonwealth (1987) found that the Commonwealth is required by law to fund counties' common pleas court system, but the city is still paying the bill.*
- a. The City of Philadelphia has been picking up the tab for the court system for too long when it is the state's responsibility to pay.



## **Philadelphia Platform**

### *Plank 6 – Infrastructure & Climate Readiness*

#### **Introduction**

The City of Philadelphia faces a variety of infrastructural challenges. The priorities for this session begin to address core needs for our transportation system, our schools, and readiness for the future.

This past summer, numerous Philadelphia public schools had to close early because they lacked air conditioning. Only 43% of the School District's buildings have central air, that is up from 27% in 2017 but still far from being finished. Local media has also revealed the toxic levels asbestos and mold to which school children are exposed in decrepit buildings. In total the Philadelphia School District has \$4.5 billion in deferred maintenance now, and that number will grow to \$8.7 billion in the next ten years<sup>52</sup>. The time is now to right this ship and provide a better experience for our students and teachers.

While SEPTA expend much of the Act 89 funds on long-overdue maintenance, repairs, and system upgrades, the Commonwealth must position it to make the big system improvements and investments that support a growing economy, population, and ridership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Act 89 funding mostly has gone to help make much-needed repairs, upgrades, and maintenance to the system<sup>53</sup>. While SEPTA is working on the KOP rail extension, large projects like extending the Broad Street Line to the Navy Yard, are not close to realization.

\$145 billion dollars – that was the price tag in 2021 in disaster spending according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Climate change is occurring, and we must make sure our infrastructure is in the position to withstand these oncoming changes. It is also important to reevaluate our current standards for state-owned buildings, they are often inefficient in their energy consumption<sup>54</sup>. It could save the commonwealth money by retrofitting and weatherizing these buildings.

Further, we must do more to transition our energy portfolio to more renewable energy sources: Pennsylvania currently ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> out of the 50 states in renewable energy consumption as a share of state total consumption. Pennsylvania retains the ability to dictate the Energy Portfolio Standards through the Alternative Energy Portfolio Standards Act—most recently updated in 2020, mandates that 18% of electricity sales come from alternative energy sources, and 0.5% from solar energy. This was increased over-time as part of a 15-year schedule, which gradually phased in more green energy—this phase expired in 2021<sup>55</sup>. Pennsylvania must reintroduce legislation that will continue to mandate diversification in its energy portfolio: increasing renewable energies percentage share.

## Vision & Goals

The Commonwealth must ensure that the infrastructure of the Philadelphia region has continued investment modernize our infrastructure to become comparable to other major US cities.

In 2019-20, investment and policy should focus on these areas:

- **School buildings:** Establish secure funding stream so that public school buildings not only receive much needed maintenance but also improvements that make them fantastic learning environments for Philadelphia's public-school students and teachers.
- **Mass transit:** Support funding
- **Preparing our infrastructure for Climate Change:** There is no denying that the climate is changing. More intense storms, hotter summers, and changes to weather patterns. We must ensure that current infrastructure is able to stand up to these new challenges and have policies in place for new construction.

## Policy Priorities:

The biggest capital infrastructure priority of the Philadelphia Platform in 2023-24 will be Philadelphia's public-school buildings. For these areas, this Platform includes prioritizing incentives, research, and enabling legislation to set the table for the larger scale investments down the road.

- 1) *School buildings – Start a comprehensive rebuilding program for Philadelphia public schools, addressing deferred maintenance, safety, and vital upgrades.*
  - a. Pass a sustainable, substantial funding increase for school building improvements against which the Commonwealth or the School District can borrow to address \$4.5 billion in deferred maintenance<sup>56</sup>.
  - b. Develop a plan for funding security for building upgrades to school buildings around the state and for years to come.
- 2) *Mass Transit – Support funding stability for SEPTA by allowing for greater local revenue in the capital and operating budgets.* Currently, SEPTA is funded 31% by the federal government, 33% by the state, and only 1.3% locally. The additional 34% of funding comes from capital financing bond revenues<sup>57</sup>.
  - a. Pass enabling legislation to allow counties within SEPTA service area to raise additional revenue to support SEPTA budget and projects.
- 3) *Climate Readiness – We must make sure that the state infrastructure is resilient and able to adapt to the changes in our weather.*

- a. Improving current state infrastructure to withstand the changes to our weather. We must evaluate our current facilities and determine if they are at risk for flooding, vulnerable to extreme heat and have back-up power systems.
- b. Improving our standards for construction so that our infrastructure will last and become more energy efficient.
- c. Re-working the energy portfolio standards so that we can get more of our energy from renewable sources.

The six planks above represent the core of what the Philadelphia Delegation seeks to accomplish in the near future. However, they are not comprehensive. We must also work toward a number of policy changes not discussed above. These include ensuring minimum staffing standards for nurses and other healthcare workers so that we can provide the best quality working conditions and care for patients; allowing undocumented persons and individuals without a Social Security number to obtain a learner's permit and driver's license for the safety of our roadways; and ensuring that housing is not only affordable, but universally accessible for those with disabilities.

Finally, we must not only restore our crumbling schools and transit systems, but our libraries and recreation centers too, and in accordance with the latest sustainability guidelines. For the good of the Commonwealth, the Philadelphia Delegation now calls on all legislators to come together to advance these goals.

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