

BLOUNT COUNTY DEMOCRATIC PARTY

2024 PLATFORM

INTRODUCTION

Definition

This Platform is a formal set of positions supported by the Blount County Democratic Party (BCDP). It is offered as a policy guide and a statement of core values for all as exemplified by our Blount County Democratic candidates.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to express the ideas and beliefs of the Blount County Democratic Party as they relate to specific issues that impact the people of Blount County. BCDP fully supports the Democratic State and National Party Platforms.

PREAMBLE

The Blount County Democratic Party is working to create a community: where anyone can affect positive change that values its diversity; where truth is freely spoken to power; whose people are safe and secure; where economic opportunity abounds; where honesty, integrity, and facts prevail; where everyone eligible votes and every vote counts; and where power and authority reside in its people.

We support inclusivity, so we believe that all persons, regardless of race, faith beliefs, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender or gender identity, national origin, disability, or other factors of the human condition are innately equal. We believe that acts of discrimination and intimidation are antidemocratic and must be opposed by our political, social, and economic leaders and institutions.

OUR POSITIONS

Healthcare

1. We believe everyone, without exception, should have access to all aspects of healthcare services.
2. A full-service hospital and our medical community are assets to be preserved.
3. Services for an aging population should be enhanced and expanded.

4. We believe there is evidence supporting the use of marijuana for medical purposes, not just hemp-based CBD oil.
5. We believe everyone should have access to medically accurate information.
6. We believe in one's right of choice in making personal healthcare decisions.

Public Health

1. Public Health policy and decisions should be guided by science and medical expertise.
2. Public Health decisions should be flexible and related to conditions and facts in the local community.
3. Public Health must be non-partisan.
4. We believe that addiction is a public health issue and that individuals should be directed to treatment rather than the criminal justice system.
5. Initiatives to address addiction issues must include education, prevention, and treatment.
6. We believe that mental health is a public health crisis. Services should be community-based, local, and readily accessible.

Benefits and Coverages

1. Social Security (Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance) must be protected and preserved.
2. Medicare coverage services must be protected and preserved.
3. The State should allow Medicaid expansion. Failure to accept Federal funds effectively denies medical care to thousands of Tennesseans.

Education

1. Performance and funding equity should exist among all public school systems in the County.
2. Public schools must prepare young people for the 21st century workforce including technical, vocational, and academic programming.
3. Compensation and benefits in our public school systems should be competitive, especially for educators, to attract and keep highly qualified staff.
4. The makeup of the public school workforce should be diverse and encourage students to meet mentors who are both alike and different from themselves.
5. School boards and administrations must be free of partisan politics and their election must be non-partisan.
6. Communication among and between school boards, administrators, staff, students, parents, and the community must be open, tolerant, and regular.
7. We stand with readers everywhere in the fight against censorship through book challenges, restrictions, and bans.
8. We are concerned that funneling State tax dollars to privately-held schools will undermine the already precarious quality of K-12 education.
9. We oppose school voucher programs. Parents may choose vouchers but schools choose students; subjective discrimination is allowed. Most voucher students are already

attending private schools or are home-schooled. In states with school voucher programs sub-prime failing or profit-grabbing pop-up schools become the default.

Equality

1. We oppose all discrimination which is based on a factor of the human condition.
2. We expect our public and private institutions plus elected and appointed officials to proactively and publicly stand for the equality, acceptance, access, and admittance of all people regardless of factors of the human condition.
3. We expect all organizations, institutions, agencies, and groups, whether public or private, to defend the rights and equality of all.

Economy

1. We support continuing an expanded employment base for all skill and education levels.
2. We believe that everyone should be paid a living wage.
3. We support eliminating taxes on staples such as food and personal hygiene products.
4. We recognize that tourism is a major element of the County economy, so we support the protection of the GSMNP and other natural resources.
5. We support the growth and revitalization of current downtowns and business parks to include mixed residential and commercial use that is pedestrian friendly.
6. We support the growth of small businesses and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Immigration

1. We believe in a safe and secure environment for all individuals and families.
2. We support initiatives and programs allowing individuals to seek legal status.
3. We believe local law enforcement is not responsible for immigration enforcement.
4. We support a clear path to citizenship for DACA recipients and long-time spouses, with their children, of U.S. citizens.
5. We know that refugees have proven to be assets to the communities in which they are located.

Criminal Justice Reform

1. We urge Blount County to discontinue the practice of housing state and federal prisoners on a long-term basis in the County jail.
2. We believe that eligible felons have a right to regain identification papers, driver's licenses, and voting rights.
3. We believe in the decriminalization of small amounts of marijuana. The State remains determined not to legalize marijuana as long as it remains prohibited at the federal level.

Local Government Operations

1. Local government must implement the highest standards and best practices regarding integrity, honesty, truthfulness, and accuracy in government operations. Decisions and actions must be fact-based.

2. Local government must implement the highest level of conflict of interest practices and policies, including disclosure of family or business relationships; and strict adherence to recusals.
3. Local government should institute the highest level of financial practices, internal controls, and external examinations.
4. Local government workforce should be diverse.
5. Local government must adhere to openness, transparency, and public participation.
6. Local government must maintain competitive levels of taxation to attract and retain new businesses and residents.
7. Local government websites and other digital communications methods should comply with the highest standards of openness and transparency, be ADA compliant, and be designed to provide the public with user-friendly access and encourage civic participation.
8. Local government should apply adequate and appropriate resources to resolve the critical issues of homelessness and the shortage of affordable housing.

Infrastructure

1. We support the improvement of existing roads, including traffic calming designs and reworking intersections, above expansion of Interstates and other major roads.
2. We support an expansion of pedestrian and cycling lanes and pathways throughout the County that will connect to other counties.
3. The County should participate in regional and State planning for development.

Digital Equity and Inclusion

We believe that all individuals, organizations, and communities should be able to access current and future information technology, fully participating in our society, democracy, and economy. This includes, but is not limited to, access to:

1. Secure and affordable high-speed internet.
2. Internet devices that are current and accessible to meet user needs.
3. Training in digital technology and quality technical support.

Quality of Life and the Environment

1. We believe that the County must protect the nature of our rural, suburban, and small urban development in its planning and zoning policies and procedures.
2. The GSMNP and all other public lands are cornerstones of our environment and economy. The County government must proactively work for their protection and allocate the necessary resources.
3. The County should prioritize recycling in all its internal practices and expand options for the public.
4. The County should prioritize alternative and renewable energy resources.
5. Democrats believe climate change is real; an existential climate crisis. Government must enact environmental protection laws and policies to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and combat other threats to our planet.

Voting Rights and Accessibility

1. We believe that voting is a fundamental right and responsibility of all citizens; the government must ensure the highest level of access to the ballot box, including mailed-in voted ballots.
2. We support the early voting practices of the State and encourage the State to seek ways to improve and expand ballot access.
3. We believe that the State must accept a broader means of identity for individuals who may never have had or have no way of obtaining a birth certificate.
4. We believe that felons, who have paid their debt to society, should have their voting rights restored equitably and affordably.
5. We believe that voting machines must be accessible to all voters and that each vote count can be independently verified, protected, and maintained.
6. We believe that the integrity of elections must be protected by using and maintaining paper to confirm the tally and the actual vote.
7. We believe that voting locations must be accessible to all.

Employee Rights and Benefits

1. We believe that the right to organize is fundamental and should be protected.
2. We believe elected and appointed officials are duty-bound to remain neutral in disputes, negotiations, and other contacts between labor and management.
3. We believe that all government levels should abide by the “living wage” principle and that the State should enact that legislation for a minimum wage.

Access to Firearms

1. We believe that no right is unfettered and that every right carries a heavy burden of responsibility.
2. We support public policy that protects a right while regulating its impact on the safety and security of others.
3. We believe that legislation should include, but not be limited to, universal background checks, gun owner licensing and training, an assault weapon/large capacity magazine ban, waiting periods, a strong concealed-carry law, community violence intervention funding, lost and stolen firearm reporting, eliminating dangerous aftermarket accessories or modifications, and storage provisions to best serve the public interest.
4. We demand gun safety measures be strengthened by enacting Red Flag Laws.

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