

Capital Region Stands Up State House and Senate Candidate Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions by midnight on Monday, March 16th. Capital Region Stands Up will post the answers from all candidates on our website and share with our members and mailing list through email and Facebook.

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1. As a member of the PA General Assembly, what would you do to lower drug prices for Pennsylvanians?

As a person working for the people in the 87th Legislative District, I would support legislation like HB1042 and HB568. HB568, The Pharmaceutical Cost Transparency Act, would make it so pharmaceutical companies would have to report on prices charged, cost associated with production, clinical trials, advertising, and manufacturing. I believe that we must hold these companies accountable for putting profit margins above human life. 1 in 4 people in the United States report trouble affording medications and I know we have people having difficulty here in the 87th. I remember having to budget my son's medications and how difficult it was every month, especially when the medications changed. If we can lower prices for non-patented medications by 53% to qualify for the bulk buy program in China, then we should be slashing prices here.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-drugs/drugmakers-slash-prices-to-be-eligible-for-chinas-bulk-buy-program-idUSKBN1ZH05M>

2. Do you support work requirements for Medicaid recipients? Why or why not?

No, I do not support work requirements. I believe we cannot demand or enforce anything when each individual faces different barriers. Does the person applying take care of a sick loved one or have children at home? Does the person have a car or is public transportation available? Do they have the gas money to attend training? I believe a better approach is to connect each individual with the resources and training needed and help them to a place of economic stability. That can be done if we start asking our income maintenance case workers at DHS to identify the barriers faced by individuals, connect those recipients with the resources needed, and report to legislators and agency officials which areas we need to improve in the commonwealth. It is important to note that a minimum wage earner age 19-64 that is working 40 hours a week would qualify for Medicaid and shows the need to increase minimum wage in PA and make insurance affordable for agencies and companies to provide.

3. As a member of the PA General Assembly, how would you balance the critical importance of meeting PA's goal for carbon reduction (26% by 2025 and 80% by 2050 as measured against 2005 levels) with the creation of good paying jobs that are claimed by the energy sector?

I believe we need to give subsidies to clean energy industries such as solar power and wind along with industries working on manufacturing electric cars, buses, and electric railway systems. These industries, as well as the projects on our infrastructure, will help with the creation of good paying jobs as we cut down on carbon emissions.

4. The first bill amending the State's Human Relations Act barring discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations based on gender identity and sexual orientation was introduced in 1976. PA still does not have a law on the books that accomplishes this. What action would you support to ensure protection of our LGBTQ community?

I think it is sad that here I am fighting for a bill that was introduced the year that I was born. For 43 years LGBTQIA+ individuals have been asking for the same basic human rights as others. I spent the last 5 years learning about gender and sexuality to be the best ally possible for people in the community. What started my passion for LGBTQIA+ legislation was my sister. She is a medically retired US Marine who I watched recover when she was injured while deployed in Iraq. I was appalled when I heard she could lay her life down for this country but was not protected by her country. I was heartbroken when the church we attended preached hate as my entire family sat in the pew. All I could think about was that my sister is the most selfless person that I know, she is kind, she is a good person, she is strong and faithful. I would not be part of a place of worship like that or be silent while elected officials ignore so many in PA. I am grateful for the welcoming churches but am still sadly disappointed in our elected officials. I have learned so much over the past 5 or so years, but the main thing is that we are all people and the gender identity or sexual orientation of others has nothing to do with anyone else. Exactly like the faith of a person, the skin color of a person or the economic income of a person. When we try to assign a different value to human beings, we lose, and I feel we should be displaying this in our laws. I will continue to support comprehensive protections in PA. The much-needed legislation would include gender identity and sexual orientation to statewide protected classes and increase education for community members.

5. When you become a state legislator, what specific steps would you take to attempt to improve the ethical rules in the PA General Assembly?

We need to put guidelines and limits on what is spent in a campaign cycle. Even the playing field so that candidates can spend time talking to residents and not raising money. That way votes are in favor of people and not swayed by money to favor industries or businesses that donate large sums of money in elections.

6. In recent years, the General Assembly has attempted to constrict women's reproductive rights. What is your position on this important issue?

I believe what a person does with their body is their business.

7. What are your plans for improving basic education in this state? Should the rules for funding charter schools be changed?

I would like to see the state and federal governments increase funding. What is needed in the education system is increased mental health resources, as well as increased social workers, teachers, and supports for our children. We need administration, board members, faculty and employees of the public education system to be trauma-informed. We need transparency and accountability from our schools and guidance and oversight from from the Dept. of Education. I know the importance of charter schools to some families so I will start with the oversight and accountability in charter schools and then look at funding. My question would be if a public school is funded, would they be able to provide what was missing to begin with?

8. State government support for tuition at state-supported and state-related institutions ranks among the lowest in the nation, helping to push the cost of attending public colleges up 66% in the last 15 years, after adjusting for inflation. Indeed, PA ranks number 1 in the nation for highest student debt. High tuition costs have also resulted in a decline in attendance of low and middle income students. How would you address this conundrum?

We need to remove the barriers for the people seeking secondary education and increase state support, the lack of which is holding state institutions back from providing an education that is affordable. We need to start with investing in state universities, community colleges, and community-based trade schools. We can offer low interest rate loans for people who attend these higher education institutions, improve the fair funding system for K-12- so that students are prepared for the next level of education, provide loan forgiveness opportunities for educators and mental health professionals, and offer lower interest rates to those struggling with the burden of school loans today.

9. Should this state have stronger gun safety laws? If you agree what would you do?

Yes, without a doubt. I would support legislation for universal background checks and the sales of all firearms through licensed gun dealers. I would support gun safety courses for gun owners and for family members in the same home with guns and suicide safety precautions. I would also support legislation that would remove firearms from those convicted or charged with domestic abuse.

I would also be thorough with any legislation that is for school safety. I think it is ridiculous that we passed Act 67 without making sure the important NASRO training was available to security or school resource officers by 2/2020. Following Act 67, Act 49, we extended the important training deadline until Fall 20/21. I think it is irresponsible to have legislation of this scale without the proper components secured to keep kids safe and protect the security in schools.

10. Children who grow up in high-poverty neighborhoods where 30% or more of the households have income below the poverty level live with toxic stress caused by financial hardship and fear of violence. Chronic stress in children has been linked with diabetes, heart disease and stroke later in life, as well as depression, suicide and teen pregnancy. An Annie E Casey Foundation study found that 323,000 children in PA live in high poverty neighborhoods – 12% of our children. If elected, what legislation would you promote that could begin to address these issues?

I would promote fairly and adequately funded schools that are trauma-informed and are properly staffed. All children have the right to free and appropriate education, and we are not providing that to all kids. I would support legislation for tuition reimbursement for mental health professionals and educators, so that we have the professionals to fill the positions that are needed. Increased mental health/behavioral/developmental supports will benefit all our children, not just the children living below the poverty level. Investing in after school programs, programs to fight food instability, and accessibility to medical care will also reduce the effects of poverty on children.

11. The PA County Commissioners Association has repeatedly called for restoration of an \$84 million cut to mental health funding made in 2012-13 by then Governor Tom Corbett. Indeed, funding for mental health services has been virtually flat-lined since 2007-08. Meanwhile, more than 21% of those who need mental health services in PA can't get them. There are long waits for visits to psychiatrists and therapists. Few schools have social workers on staff that can address the significant mental health needs of children. What would you do to improve access to mental health services in the Commonwealth?

In 2009 a report for policy makers expressing the need for increased mental health services was ignored. According to the CDC's National Vital Statistics Report between 2007 and 2016 the suicide rate for persons aged 10-19 increased by 56%. We are already behind and this is an issue that ripples through many areas of the commonwealth. I would support efforts for mental health funding in counties and look to increase the number of counties that have mobile crisis. I would invest in mental health supports in schools and support tuition reimbursement for mental health professionals who stay in PA and practice. Mental health and treatment for substance use disorders should be treated like any other medical treatment or emergency. We need to invest in crisis training for 1st responders and police officers in order to keep all people safe. We also need improvement in this area for our veterans and family members. We need to catch up in order to help those living with an impairment to their mental health and breakdown the stigma that is attached to seeking help.

12. Despite boasting the highest gas tax in the country, and highways that are perpetually under construction, Pennsylvania still finishes 35th in the nation for the overall cost-effectiveness and condition of its highway system, according to a report by the Reason Foundation. Researchers found that overall, the state finished 25th for its overall fatality rate; 46th in structurally deficient bridges; 35th in traffic congestion; 32nd in urban Interstate pavement condition, and 32nd in rural Interstate pavement condition. What would you do to address these pressing infrastructure needs?

I believe it is time that the businesses that are using our roads need to start to pay their fair share of taxes. A severance tax on natural gas will also help us invest in infrastructure that will withstand the effects of climate change coming our way. We should research the best materials to use and look at projects that will provide jobs as we transition to clean energy and invest in increasing clean energy public transportation and railway to relieve some pressure off of our roadways and bridges.

13. What do you see as the 3 most important issues for your district?

Education, Healthcare, Climate Change and Environmental Protections

Candidate Name *

Nicole Miller

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