

## The We The People Agenda for 2022

### We The People - PA

WE THE PEOPLE is a campaign of, by, and for all the people of Pennsylvania. Our goal is to create an inclusive society that protects and advances the dignity of everyone no matter whether they are Black, brown, or white; native-born or immigrant; Asian or Latinx; poor or rich, and live in cities or suburbs or rural areas.

Pennsylvanians face a dramatic choice in 2022. The Republican controlled legislature has embraced an agenda that threatens to undermine our democracy and restrict the rights of voters, to eliminate the right to have an abortion, and to redistribute income from working people to the ultra-rich owners of corporations. It use false claims to divide us on the basis of race, ethnicity, and religion so that it can pursue an economic agenda that benefits the rich and powerful instead giving the rest of us the opportunities we need to thrive.

We The People believe in a different path—one that recognizes the common interest of all Pennsylvanians, no matter what we look like or where we live, no matter where we were born or how much we have or where we work.

All Pennsylvanians work hard, take care of their families, and contribute to their communities. But we also all need and deserve the opportunities that only government can guarantee.

We deserve the freedom to choose our path in life, including in making intimate decisions about who to love and marry and when to have children.

We deserve protection from discrimination on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, or national origin.

We deserve opportunities to make the most of our abilities, in both good and bad times. All of our children deserve a good education from preK to post-secondary education and worker training. All of our families deserve help in affording the necessities of life that make it possible for us to work hard and contribute to our communities, including food and housing, child care, senior care, and health care. We seek universal policies that provide these opportunities to everyone.

We deserve to work in an economy that is not rigged to benefit the ultra-rich and wealthy corporations. It's time to limit the power of wealthy, politically connected corporations to pay taxes at a lower rate than workers and small businesses; to get hand-outs from the government, and to hold wages down for workers and prices up for everyone including small businesses.

We deserve safe communities in which we are protected not just from criminal but also state violence.

We deserve healthy communities and a healthy environment.

A government that provides these opportunities to every Pennsylvanian will give each of us the opportunity to work hard not only for ourselves and our families but for the members of our community. And it will create an economy in which prosperity is shared by all.

We The People are ready to work together to create a Pennsylvania that meets these goals. But to be effective we need a robust representative democracy, one in which voting is easy, encouraged and secure, one in which every legitimate vote is counted; one in which the outcomes of elections are respected by the losers; one in which the three branches of government obey the separation of power and stay in their proper lane; and one in which the process of drawing electoral districts gives people the ultimate control over who is elected not the other way around.

The Republican-controlled General Assembly has threatened to undermine each of these features of our representative democracy.

The pandemic has shown us we must act together to protect ourselves and overcome long-standing economic injustice. We worked together to get results from the federal government against Republican opposition. As a result, our schools are re-opened with better funding, the virus retreated, our economy staged a rapid recovery, and now we are seeing the post-pandemic inflation receding as well.

We need a state government that does its part as well recognizes that we rise or fall together. Lifting up working people helps small businesses and aiding small businesses helps working people. Ensuring that immigrants can contribute to and benefit from a growing economy helps native born Pennsylvanians just as much as supporting native-born Pennsylvanians helps immigrants. Helping families care for their children enables parents to go back to work. And giving our kids a good education generates the creative and productive workers of the future.

Yet for too long, the Republican-controlled legislature continues to serve the interests of corporations and the rich, ignores our common interests and tries to divide us on the basis of what we look like, where we worship, or what we look like.

We The People of Pennsylvania won't be divided. We will work together for a government that serves all of us, with no exceptions.

Here we state our core goals. Elsewhere we provide detailed policy prescriptions.

## I. A FAIR RETURN FOR OUR WORK

Pennsylvanians all work hard but too many don't get a fair return for their work. Because some politicians have tried to divide us, too many work long hours for wages that don't allow them to support their families. And too many small, community-based businesses are suffering and need protection from large corporations that over charge them.

WE THE PEOPLE call for policies to protect and reward workers to ensure that everyone—with no exceptions—can secure a fair return on their work and give their kids a better life in the future by

- removing the barriers that prevent Pennsylvanians from joining together to form unions to negotiate for better wages, benefits, and safety in the workplace and creating worker-management councils in sectors of the economy that are not yet organized.
- ensuring that every worker has paid family leave and sick days;
- making it possible for undocumented workers to secure the driver's licenses they need to get to work;
- creating a living wage for everyone—a \$15 minimum wage that increases with the cost of living, an end to the sub-minimum wage for tipped workers, an end to the preemption of local minimum wage laws, and strong enforcement of minimum wage laws;
- supporting local worker- and community-based businesses that protect and pay their workers fairly.
- fixing our unemployment system so that it helps all who lose their jobs while encouraging the temporarily unemployed to get the training they need to get better jobs at higher wages.

## II. A GREAT EDUCATION FOR ALL

Because politicians have set some of us against others, Pennsylvania does not ensure every child—regardless of their income level, their learning styles or abilities, the color of their skin or nation of origin—can secure an education that excites and stimulates them and that prepares them to make the most of their lives, not just to benefit themselves but all of us.

So WE THE PEOPLE call for every child to receive an an equal education for all once it ends by

- increasing state funding for childcare, pre-K, and K-12 public schools and fully desegregating our schools so every child gets a superior education and rising property taxes don't impoverish working people;
- making tuition affordable at community colleges and at our state colleges and universities, ensuring students can earn a degree without going deep in debt while relieving the student debt of those who are currently over-burdened by it;
- investing in career and technical education, job training, and apprenticeship programs that are critical to the future of our children and our economy.

### III. HEALTH, SENIOR, AND CHILD CARE FOR TO ALL

Some politicians have encouraged us to ignore our common vulnerability to illness and disease, and the need to care for children and seniors, that sometimes make it impossible for us to work and thrive.

So WE THE PEOPLE call for policies that ensure that that everyone, no matter their race, income, or immigrant status, can go to a well-trained doctor or a hospital with the best equipment and every family can care for their children or seniors by

- creating state regulations that ensure no one is denied health insurance or is required to pay more if they have a pre-existing condition, as well as limit the profits of health insurance companies.
- ending our dependence on employer-based health care by creating a public option for health insurance in Pennsylvania.
- ensuring that every family can secure affordable child care.
- guaranteeing that every senior can retired with dignity, whether in their own homes or that of their children or in healthy and secure retirement communities.

### IV. AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ALL

Some politicians have lifted up developers and builders while communities are set against one another. Some people can easily find affordable homes while those with low and moderate incomes, as well as many people of color and immigrants, both documented and undocumented, spend too large a share of their income to put a roof over their head.

So WE THE PEOPLE support protecting both homeowners and renters by

- creating eviction diversion programs and a “good cause” eviction requirement in every county; fully funding fully funding the state’s Homeowner Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program (HEMAP) and creating a statewide rental assistance program for tenants.
- substantial new investment in housing for the homeless, in affordable housing, and in programs to help homeowner, landlords and tenants make currently substandard housing livable.
- changing zoning laws to encourage the development of affordable housing in gentrifying urban communities and the suburbs.

## V. MAKE SURE EVERYONE PAYS THEIR FAIR SHARE

We have let some politicians split us from one another so they can cut taxes for the rich and corporations again and again even though that does nothing to create jobs, increase investment, or foster growth. Our tax system asks working people to pay too much—especially those who are Black, brown, or immigrants, both documented and undocumented—and lets corporations and the rich pay too little. That's not only unfair but it prevents us from raising the funds we need to invest in our future.

WE THE PEOPLE insist that everyone pays what they owe for our common needs by

- taxing wealth fairly by creating a state-wide tax on intangible wealth and limiting real property taxes to a reasonable share of family income;
- enacting the Fair Share Tax which raises taxes on profits, capital gains, dividends, and estates and reduces taxes on wages and interest; use the proceeds of the Fair Share Tax and the Intangible Wealth Tax to cut income taxes for 65% of Pennsylvanians by a third.
- ending tax loopholes so that large multi-state and multi-national corporations start paying taxes to the state
- creating an anti-poverty tax credit that prevents families from being taxed into poverty.

## VI. ENSURE PUBLIC SAFETY FOR ALL

Black and brown people know what the rest of us have shamefully ignored for too long: violence is endemic in their communities and is not just a product of criminals but, too often, of the police themselves. Some politicians use the threat of crime to divide us and justify rapidly growing police forces as they cut the critical services that can reduce violence. And police forces that lack the appropriate training, supervision, and support sometimes treat marginalized people as threats, and too often injure and kill Black and brown people, people who are experiencing homelessness; people experiencing trauma; and people living with developmental, physical, or mental disabilities.

WE THE PEOPLE BELIEVE that the safest communities are not those with the most police—although appropriate levels of policing is needed—but that have the most resources. We are committed to ensuring that Black Lives Matter by

- investing in Black and communities to repair the damage that our legacy of slavery and racism has created;
- creating strong citizen oversight of law enforcement agencies that establishes training and mental health standards, that has investigatory and disciplinary power, that provides an independent review process for police officers that harm civilians, and that eliminates all legal and contractual barriers to police accountability;

- enacting legislation that strictly limits the use of deadly force; prohibits methods of detaining citizens likely to lead to injury and death; and requires officers of the law officers to report the misconduct of their peers and protects them when they do so.

## VII. PROTECT OUR RIGHTS

Fundamental rights that we have long take for granted are being threatened by extremist political movements. So we reassert our fundamental rights which require:

- banning discrimination in securing public or private goods and services on the basis of our race, religion national origin, sexual orientation or identity.
- allowing everyone to make fundamental decisions about their lives, including whether to have children, without the interference of the state.

## VIII. EVERY VOICE MUST BE HEARD AND EVERY VOTE IS COUNTED

For too long, we have allowed some politicians to make our very democracy an object of division because they know that when every voice is heard and every vote is counted, the power of WE THE PEOPLE will overwhelm the money of their corporate sponsors.

So WE THE PEOPLE seek to eliminate barriers that prevent everyone—especially Black and brown people and those with low incomes—from playing a role in shaping our government now and in the future by

- sending every voter a postage-paid mail-in ballot.
- ensuring that early voting locations and ballot boxes are widely available.
- allowing voters to register on Election Day
- ending the partisan and racial gerrymandering of legislative districts.
- limiting the influence of money in our politics.

## IX. OUR VISION

In the past, we have achieved great things when grassroots community groups, advocacy organizations, labor unions and engaged Pennsylvanians have worked together to bring us higher wages, strong unions, public community and four-year colleges, civil rights, and more. We created a vibrant economy and a strong middle class. But our work was not complete because women, Black and brown people, and immigrants were never fully included in our politics or economy or treated fairly by the police. And in recent years we have allowed economic inequality to grow unchecked while police forces expand.

It's time for us together to secure what we all need: an inclusive community and economy.