

# BLOUNT COUNTY DEMOCRATIC PARTY

## 2021 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 citizens but especially for 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 citizens of Blount County. BCDP fully supports the Democratic Party Platform.

### **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 citizens are safe and secure; where economic opportunity abounds; where honesty, integrity, and fact prevail; where everyone votes and every vote counts; and where power and authority reside in its people.

We believe that all persons, regardless of race, faith beliefs, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender and/or gender identity, national origin, disability or other factor of the human condition, are innately equal. We believe that acts of discrimination and intimidation are wrong and must be opposed by our political, social and economic leaders and institutions. We abhor recent events that have threatened the safety, security and freedom of selected groups of citizens.

### **OUR POSITIONS**

#### **Healthcare**

1. Health care is a right to which all citizens are entitled.
2. Initiatives to address addiction issues must include, education, prevention, treatment, interdiction and control of the source suppliers.
3. We believe that addiction is a health issue and that individuals should be directed to treatment rather than the criminal justice system.
4. Blount Memorial Hospital is a critical community service that must be preserved and strengthened. The failure to expand Medicaid by the state is a major cause of BMH being in

danger of downsizing or closing. The Board and management of BMH must continue to improve adherence to the highest standards governance and ethical practices.

5. Services for an aging population are in need of enhancement and expansion.
6. We believe that there is enough evidence to support the use of marijuana for medical purposes with special reference to Traumatic Brain Injury and Chronic Pain.

### **Benefits and Coverages**

1. Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (Social Security) must be protected and preserved as a “contract with Americans”.
2. Medicare coverage must be preserved and expanded.
3. The State of Tennessee must expand Medicaid. Through its failure to expand Medicaid, the State is denying medical care to thousands of Tennesseans and causing the closure of rural hospitals.
4. .

### **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 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce including, technical, vocational and academic programming.
3. Compensation and benefits in our public-school systems should be competitive, especially for teachers, in order to attract and keep highly qualified staff.
4. The make-up of the public-school work force should be diverse and offer students an opportunity to meet mentors who are both alike and different from themselves.

### **Equality**

1. We oppose all discrimination which is based on a factor of the human condition.
2. We expect our public and private institutions, and 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, public or private, to defend the rights and equality of all citizens.

### **Economy**

1. We support the continuation of an expanding employment base for all skill and education levels.
2. We support a living wage for all positions, working toward a minimum of \$15 per hour.
3. We believe that the minimum wage for tipped employees should be adjusted consistent with changes to the basic minimum wage.
4. We support the reduction of taxes on staples such as food and feminine hygiene products.
5. We recognize that tourism is a major element of the county economy and we support the protection of the GSMNP and other natural resources.
6. We support the growth and revitalization of current downtowns and business parks to include mixed residential and commercial use that is pedestrian friendly.
7. We support the growth of small businesses and entrepreneurial opportunities.

### **Immigration**

1. We believe in a safe and secure environment for individuals and families.
2. We support initiatives and programs that allow individuals to seek legal status.
3. We believe that local law enforcement is not responsible for immigration enforcement, except in cases of felony conviction.
4. We support a clear path to citizenship for DACA recipients.

### **Refugee Status**

1. We believe that refugees have proven to be assets to the communities in which they are located.
2. We urge the State of Tennessee to “opt in” to refugee relocation if a choice is required.

### **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 otherwise 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.

### **Local Government Operations**

1. Local government must implement highest level of 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 and business relationships; and strict adherence to recusals. (nepotism)
3. Local government should institute the highest level of financial practices, internal controls and external examinations.
4. The local county government workforce should be diverse and reflect to make up of the community.
5. Local government must adhere to the highest standards of openness, transparency and public participation.
6. Local government must maintain tax levels that are competitive and attract both new business and residents.
7. County government must resolve the overriding debt burden that plagues both county government and Blount Memorial Hospital.

### **Infrastructure**

1. We support the improvement of existing roads over 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 with respect to alternative mass transit development.

### **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 our economy. County government must proactively work for their protection and allocate the resources necessary to do so.
3. The county should prioritize recycling in all its internal practices and expand options for the public.
4. The County should prioritize the use of alternate and renewable energy resources.
5. The County government should apply adequate and appropriate resources to resolve the critical issues of homelessness and a shortage of affordable housing.

### **Voting Rights and Accessibility**

1. We believe that voting is a fundamental right and responsibility of all citizens and that government has an overriding responsibility to assure the highest level of access to the ballot box.
2. We support the liberal early voting practices of the State of Tennessee and encourage the state to seek ways to improve and expand ballot access.
3. We believe that the State of Tennessee must accept a broader range of “proof of personhood” for individuals who may never have had, or have no way of obtaining, a birth certificate.
4. We believe that felons (as noted above) who have paid their debt to society, have their voting rights restored in an equitable and affordable manner.
5. We believe that voting machines must be accessible for all persons and that vote counts can be independently verified, protected and maintained.
6. We believe that the integrity of elections must be protected through the use and maintenance of paper to document the actual vote and the tally.
7. We believe that all voting locations must be accessible for all citizens.

### **Fair and Equitable Redistricting**

1. We oppose partisan gerrymandering regardless of which political party controls the process.
2. We believe that redistricting should include at least the following criteria when new district lines are drawn in response to the census; equal divisions by population, partisan fairness, racial and economic equity and fairness, compactness and election competitiveness.

### **Employee rights and benefits**

1. We believe that the right to organize is fundamental.
2. We believe that elected and appointed officials are duty bound to remain neutral in any and all disputes, negotiations and other contacts between labor and management.
3. We believe that government at all levels must abide by the principle of a living wage and enact legislation to that effect within its jurisdiction.
4. We believe that the State of Tennessee should enact its own minimum wage in accordance with the principle of a living wage.

### **Access to Firearms**

We believe that no “right” is unfettered and that every “right” carries a heavy burden of responsibility. We support public policy that protects a “right” but also well regulates its impact on the safety and security of others. We believe that common sense legislation including but not limited to; universal

background checks, rational limitations on type, and capacity of firearms, and where they may be possessed best serve the public interest.

Adopted March 12, 2020

Revised per Resolution 1-2021 March 11, 2021