

## **Official Blount County Democratic Party Platform 2025-2026**

The following positions, henceforth referred to as “the Platform,” are the guiding principles of the Blount County Democratic Party (“BCDP”), as well as its elected officials and candidates for elected office.

### ***Purpose***

This document is provided as a public expression of the beliefs and policy positions guiding the actions of the Blount County Democratic Party. BCDP also fully supports the platform of the Democratic Party at both the state and national levels.

### ***Preamble***

We, the Blount County Democratic Party, are committed to preserving and expanding the rights of all people in our community:

- To pursue economic opportunity free from exploitation;
- To receive high-quality health care without fear of impoverishment;
- To exercise the right to vote free from disenfranchisement and intimidation;
- To reside in communities that are peaceful and secure;
- To live freely, with dignity, and without discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, gender expression, national origin, or disability;
- To speak freely and openly with elected officials and with one another; and
- To access and enjoy the abundant natural beauty of Blount County.

BCDP believes that the below positions are essential steps toward maintaining and expanding these rights. To ensure that community resources are stewarded in a responsible fashion, BCDP regularly reviews its policy positions to ensure alignment with community values, best practices, and up-to-date evidence.

### **Access to Firearms**

1. The right to bear arms is guaranteed to us by the Bill of Rights to the Constitution and shall not be infringed; however, no right is unfettered, and every right carries a heavy burden of responsibility.
2. Public policy should protect the right to bear arms while regulating its impact on the safety and security of others.
3. The purpose of a gun is to kill; it is for this reason that individuals who carry a personal firearm are instructed never to draw their firearm unless they are prepared to kill. This power requires a heavy burden of responsibility, and requirements for owning a firearm 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. Gun safety measures must be strengthened by enacting Red Flag Laws.
5. The adoption of stand-your-ground laws leads to increases in gun violence (including firearm-related homicides) and gun theft, while having little to no impact on crime rates. As such, they are bad policy and should not be adopted.

### **Civil Rights**

1. The freedom of all people from discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in employment, public accommodation, voting, schools, and other areas is a fundamental safeguard of liberty.
2. Enforcing and expanding laws to combat discrimination against individuals with disabilities, whether visible or invisible, is an important function of local government and a worthy expression of the freedom of which all are deserving.
3. Discrimination on the basis of age should be rooted out where possible, and all individuals in Blount County should be free to participate in public life without barriers.
4. All individuals are guaranteed the right to Freedom of Speech under the Bill of Rights to the U.S. Constitution. However, freedom of speech does not include speech whose purpose is to incite imminent lawless action.
5. Although constitutionally protected under the First Amendment, speech which incites hatred on the basis of a protected category is incompatible with proper civil or official conduct and is roundly condemned by the Blount County Democratic Party.

### **Criminal Justice**

1. The preservation of law and order is a pillar of safe, healthy communities.
2. Community engagement with law enforcement is crucial to developing a policing which is built upon respect and understanding.
3. To prevent re-offense and promote re-integration into the community, carceral policies should be avoided where rehabilitation and remediation of harms against the community is possible.
4. Blount County should discontinue the practice of housing state and federal prisoners on a long-term basis in the County jail.
5. Eligible felons have a right to regain identification papers, driver's licenses, and voting rights.
6. The possession of small amounts of marijuana for personal use should be decriminalized

### **Economy**

1. The rights of businesses to pursue free enterprise in compliance with local laws and regulations are the bedrock of the American economy.
2. Entrepreneurship is a good which enhances our community and should be incentivized through sound local policies.
3. Local government plays a critical role in ensuring economic prosperity by attracting businesses which create dignified, well-paying jobs.
4. Access to reliable, secure, affordable high-speed internet forms one of the foundations of economic success in the 21st century and should be promoted by local government.
5. Taxation is a privilege given to local government and should be wielded carefully and with full transparency to promote a high standard of living for all Blount Countians.

### **Education**

1. All children, without exception, are entitled to high-quality public education.
2. Public schools should receive funding which is equitable in nature.
3. Public schooling should promote the integration of children from various backgrounds and ways of life.
4. Programs to remove public funds from public schools, including voucher programs targeted toward wealthy and urban private school populations, have no place in an education system which prioritizes excellence and achievement for all students.
5. Education, which is a good in its own right with respect to the personal, intellectual, and mental well-being of all individuals, is a primary driver of economic success and should be targeted toward preparing students to enter the workforce.
6. Children should be safe from abuse and violence of all kinds, and all available measures should be taken to prevent abuse and violence at the hands of those who wish to cause harm.
7. The practice of banning books is incompatible with a society founded on the principles of free speech and free expression.
8. Educators and support staff should be paid fair wages commensurate with the foundational role they play in supporting the development of young people.
9. Public school staff should be diverse, reflecting the diversity of the student populations they support.
10. School boards and administrations should strive to implement best practices for student development free from political agendas or ideological crusades.

### **Employment**

1. Everyone is entitled to a safe, dignified work environment and high-quality employment.
2. All workers should receive a liveable wage.
3. All workers are entitled to the right to organize their workplace free from intimidation or retribution, in accordance with federal law.

## **Environment**

1. Public lands are a benefit to the community and are to remain publicly-owned in perpetuity.
2. The people of Blount County are entitled to clean air and clean water.
3. Climate change is an existential threat to our world and to our community. Additionally, new technologies and updated methods for agriculture, energy production, and other environmentally-related industries which combat climate change also pose significant first-mover benefits, allowing Blount County to position itself as a leader in sustainable energy practices. Thus, these practices should be incentivized at the local level.

## **Governance**

1. Market failures, including failures to provide public goods and failures to correct externalities, form the justification for government intervention.
2. Where government intervention is justified, this intervention should be carried out in the most cost-effective and transparent manner possible.
3. Government officials, in their capacity as representatives of the people by whom they are elected and/or appointed, are to act in a manner commensurate with their roles. To that end, government officials should pursue policies that are supported by evidence and best practices.
4. Government officials have a fiduciary duty to their constituents.
5. Government officials should be held to the highest standards of integrity, fully disclosing conflicts of interest and recusing themselves when appropriate.
6. Government operations should be transparent and accessible to all citizens. To this end, all government operations and information should be digitized and made available to the public, where feasible.

## **Housing**

1. Housing is a human right<sup>1</sup>.
2. The moral, economic, and societal costs of homelessness are far greater than the costs of preventing and remedying homelessness. As such, it is the responsibility of governments to work with appropriate agencies to both prevent individuals from losing housing and to help individuals experiencing homelessness to find stable housing.
3. Responsible, forward-looking housing policy is a necessity to ensure that:
  - a. Future generations of Blount Countians will be able to afford to live in the area in which they were raised, if they so choose; and
  - b. The rural/suburban character of Blount County is preserved and protected from suburban sprawl.

## **Immigration**

1. Immigrants are overwhelmingly an asset to the communities in which they choose to live.
2. Local law enforcement is not responsible for federal immigration enforcement.
3. Refugees and immigrants without a criminal background should be provided a clear path to citizenship.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

### **Infrastructure**

1. Local government should pursue measures which support the maintenance and improvement of existing infrastructure, including roads, bike and walking paths, the electrical grid, and sewer systems.
2. Greater integration of low-emission energy resources into the electrical grid should be a priority of local government.
3. Public utilities are to be used for the good of the public and shall not be privatized. Privatization of utilities leads to the establishment of private monopolies, to increases in cost, and to decreased service provision.
4. Equitable solutions for sharing the burden of cost for the use of utilities and public infrastructure between commercial and residential users are essential for ensuring that companies pay their fair share for utilities use without disincentivizing free enterprise.

### **Public Health**

1. Public health policy and decisions should be guided by scientific best practices and medical expertise.
2. Public health decisions should be adapted to local needs and updated regularly to reflect current needs.
3. Medicare coverage is a right for all those entitled thereto.
4. Medicaid expansion is a crucial tool in the fight against poverty and inequity in our society.
5. High-quality, affordable medical care should be non-partisan and available to all residents of Blount County.
6. Medical facilities should be clean, cost-effective, efficient, and serve the purpose of “doing no harm.”
7. Personal choice forms the basis of all healthcare decisions and must be respected by healthcare providers. Personal choice, being based upon correct and factual information, entitles individuals to correct and unbiased medical information.
8. Substance use disorders are a medical condition and should be directed to treatment rather than being criminalized.
9. Initiatives to address addiction issues must include education, prevention, and treatment.
10. Mental health is a public health crisis. Services should be community-based, local, and readily accessible.

### **Public Safety**

1. Public safety officials must work with community stakeholders to identify key safety concerns and establish goals that reflect local values.
2. Public safety must provide reliable and responsive services that meet the needs of the community.
3. All public safety efforts must commit to equality, diversity, and inclusion without any bias.
4. Public safety officials have a fiduciary duty to demonstrate sound financial management of public resources to their constituents.
5. Public safety officials should be held to the highest standards of integrity, ethical conduct, upholding honesty, fully disclosing conflicts of interest and recusing themselves when appropriate.
6. Public safety personnel must strive for personal and professional excellence while fostering an environment of trust, fairness, and support.
7. Public safety operations should be transparent and accessible to all citizens to build trust and provide information when needed. To this end, all public safety operations and information should be digitized and made available to the public, where feasible.

### **Social Welfare**

1. Social Security is this nation's most effective poverty-fighting tool and should never be privatized or have benefits schedules reduced.

### **Voting Rights and Accessibility**

1. Voting is a fundamental right and responsibility of all citizens
2. The government must ensure equal access to the ballot box for every citizen.
3. The State of Tennessee should seek to improve and expand ballot access for eligible voters.
4. The State of Tennessee must accept a broader means of identity for individuals who may never have had or have no way of obtaining a birth certificate.
5. The Voting Rights Act is a foundational piece of legislation, and all of its provisions work toward ballot access and electoral equity for Americans and should thus be preserved in perpetuity.
6. Felons who have paid their debt to society should have their voting rights restored equitably and affordably.
7. Voting machines must be accessible to all voters, and each vote that can be independently verified, protected, and maintained should be counted.
8. The integrity of elections must be protected by using and maintaining paper to confirm the tally and the actual vote.
9. Voting locations must be accessible to all, and any change to polling places should be accepted by the community.

## **Blount County Democratic Party Values**

- Sustainable Economic Growth
  - Policies favoring steady, long-term growth should be prioritized over opportunistic attempts at short-term and/or unequally-distributed gains.
- Stewardship of Natural Resources
  - Living among the vibrant natural beauty and bounteous resources of East Tennessee and the Great Smoky Mountains Natural Park both entitles us to hearty enjoyment of these treasures and makes us responsible for protecting them for future generations to enjoy.
- People-Centered Decisionmaking
  - At the local level, input from the community and transparency in decision making is crucial to ensuring that government is always acting in the best interests of the people.
- Defense of Civil and Constitutional Rights
  - Vigilant defense of the rights granted to all people regardless of race, color, sex, gender, religion, national origin, and disability safeguards life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all individuals.
- Safe Communities
  - Protecting all people—from children to the elderly—from threats to life and well-being is a sacred duty of government officials and employees.
- Opportunity For All
  - Providing all residents of Blount County with the necessary preconditions for economic success, including education, healthcare, housing, high-speed internet, and well-maintained public infrastructure ensures that people of all ages can thrive.