

2022 Texas Candidate Questionnaire

For candidates running for statewide positions, Texas House of Representatives, and Senate, please complete questionnaire below. Submit a completed electronic copy by Monday, January 3, 2021, to be considered for endorsement in the 2022 Democratic Primary.

Candidate Name *

Lee Merritt

Office/District Sought *

Texas Attorney General

Please share any experience that illustrates your understanding of and interest in the needs of the LGBTQ+ community in your District/Role sought.

In addition to attending several gay pride parades across Texas, I have worked extensively with the LGBTQIA+ community through my involvement with other progressive organizations. Many of the organizations I work with address intersectional issues that concern the LGBTQIA+ community. For example, many of the activists I have worked with for racial justice are also advocating for Black queer and trans people. The #MeToo advocates I have collaborated with address sexual violence against the LGBTQIA+ community. Finally, I have partnered with the ACLU and HRC to oppose right wing extremist groups that threaten the livelihoods of LGBTQIA+ people.

I understand that LGBTQ+ Texans are facing a rising amount of challenges such as the banning of transgender people from sports as implemented in House Bill 25, policies such as Senate Bill 1311 that penalizes physicians that provide transgender minors with puberty blockers, gender-affirming surgeries, or hormone therapy, the unconstitutional sodomy law that remains part of the Texas penal code, the penalization of transgender people that use the bathroom that corresponds with their gender identity, and HIV-specific criminal laws that disproportionately target LGBTQ+ people. These are only some of the threats currently faced by LGBTQ+ Texans and I will not only advocate for their civil rights as Attorney General, but continue to stay informed on these issues, work closely with LGBTQ+ people and organizations, and promote DEI in my campaign.

As an organization affiliated with the Texas Democratic Party, Stonewall Democrats of Dallas will only endorse candidates who affirm an affiliation with the platform and policies of the Texas Democratic Party. Do you make such an affirmation? What is your previous voting history?

Yes. I have always voted in alignment with the democratic ballot based on the fact that the candidates reflected the principles that I felt is reflective of the type of leadership needed for the desired office.

Please list some of your qualifications and experiences pertinent to the office you are seeking:

I am uniquely qualified to run the office of Texas Attorney General because I have spent my legal career doing the work of the “people’s lawyer” running one of the leading constitutional firms in the country. I have worked alongside the leading social reform organizations in our country – using the law to engineer social change. My work has been recognized by Our Revolution, NAACP, ACLU, Innocence Project, National Bar Association, SPLC, and National Urban League. As an attorney and organizer, I have helped serve Texans during times of crisis, injustice, and tragedy.

I have represented families in executive conferences with the President of the United States, in session with the United States Senate and before the United Nations. In Texas, I served as Bernie Sander’s State Chair as well as on the Biden-Sanders transition team and as a delegate to the 2020 DNC. In the last 12 months, I have volunteered with the ACLU to advocate for justice for Ronald Greene. Additionally, I have volunteered with the Innocence Project and Roc Nation to serve countless families in coordination with the NFL Players League.

Once you are elected, what are some of your plans specific to your office's responsibilities?

My first priority is to protect voter rights and fight to ensure all Texans can participate in the political process. Republicans have disenfranchised 4 million new Texans through gerrymandering, and the AG continues to intimidate Black and Brown voters through politically motivated prosecutions. In order to combat this, I will use the Americans with Disabilities Act to fight for more accessible voting, which would lead to 24 hour voting stations, drive through locations, and increased mail-in ballots. Additionally, I will oppose restrictive voter ID laws that disproportionately harm Black and Brown communities, the elderly, people with disabilities, rural voters, and people who live in low-income areas.

My next priority is to protect public education: republican efforts to defund public education must be opposed by the people’s lawyer. I will support local control for decisions concerning public safety and health in reliance with science and medical professionals, support access to educational resources that school boards choose, and challenge where there is interference on the state level on constitutional grounds. As a former teacher, I will always be on the side of educators and local control concerning issues impacting the classroom.

Additionally, I will protect women’s reproductive rights, which are threatened more and more each day. Keeping abortion safe and legal protects the lives of millions of women and one of my top priorities in my campaign is fighting for a woman’s right to choose. Women deserve to be respected and protected by the Constitution, including the right to privacy and personal autonomy.

How would you showcase your endorsement by Stonewall Democrats of Dallas if received? Would you include the endorsement in your campaign media?

Yes. I would include this endorsement on my website, social media, and various campaign marketing materials.

When elected, how will you recruit, retain, and create a friendly environment for LGBTQ and LGBTQ-friendly staff?

I will continue to promote DEI in my campaign by looking at existing corporate models that are ensuring DEI, especially in their approach of recruiting and hiring diverse talent, developing their abilities, and retaining them on the team. Throughout this process, I will continue to measure progress by using dashboards to review processes and using analytics to evaluate both the progress we have made and the areas where we can continue improving.

Would you be willing to appoint a liaison to meet with the LGBTQ community on an ongoing basis? If not, why?

Yes. The rights of LGBTQ+ Texans are threatened more and more each day and it is important for me to make connections with these communities so I can better address their issues and support them.

Will you have a non-discrimination policy for employment and protection of LGBTQ residents and protection based on sexual orientation or gender identity? If not, why?

Yes. Allowing any kind of discrimination based on sexual or gender identity is a violation of the LGBTQIA+ community's fundamental constitutional rights, and I want to continue to make my campaign welcoming to LGBTQ+ people. I will continue to invoke the 14th amendment to advocate for basic civil liberties and protection of the LGBTQ+ community.

If applicable to your office, how would you lead or support state legislation and/or constitutional amendments pertaining to: A. LGBTQ Couples adopting and providing foster care?

LGBTQIA+ foster or adoptive parents deserve the same rights as heterosexual and/or cisgender parents, and denying them this is a violation of their civil rights. I would wholeheartedly advocate for and support a law and/or amendment that provides LGBTQ+ couples with the same rights and protections of their heterosexual and/or cisgender foster or adoptive parents. As the Attorney General, my support of the legislative process is to provide the legal justification to support such laws.

B. Supporting the repeal of the sodomy law that was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court?

A practice used in many states is to assemble an expert legislative revision commission that can review Texas Penal Code 21.06 as well as other outdated laws. Putting together a commission such as this is imperative to abolishing draconian and unconstitutional laws like Texas Penal Code 21.06 that have no place in our government.

C. Supporting safe schools for LGBTQ students?

As a former educator, I understand the importance of making classrooms an inclusive and welcoming space for everyone, particularly vulnerable students that face more discrimination than their peers. Making sure that students and teachers alike are informed about gender identity and sexual orientation is crucial in ensuring LGBTQIA+ students feel safe in schools, which are frequently unsafe for them because of restrictive school policies concerning transgender students' right to use the bathrooms that align best with their gender identity, a disregard of bullying and discrimination from students and teachers alike, the banning transgender students from school sports, and the lack of education about homophobia and transphobia.

D. Supporting the repeal of the Texas Marriage/Civil Union Amendment?

Obergefell v Hodges ruled that same-sex couples had the fundamental right to marry. Along with that right is the assurance that same-sex couple marriages are afforded the same benefits as heterosexual marriages. Unlike the current Texas GOP leadership who asked the court to clarify that Obergefell does not include a "command" to public employers regarding employee benefits, I would instead use the AG office to encourage and enforce public employers benefit extension to same-sex couples.

If applicable to your office, how would you address the recent passage of H.B. 25 regarding Transgender Student Athletes ability to participate based on their gender assigned at birth.

The gender someone is assigned at birth is not an indicator of their athletic performance and this policy does nothing but further justify discrimination against trans people and damages the mental health of trans youth. As Attorney General, I will aggressively pursue unjust discrimination cases such as this.

If applicable to your office, how would you address S.B. 8, the state's Abortion Bill, including private citizen's ability to report anyone involved in supporting report?

I am strongly opposed to Texas' abortion ban and I believe it is a violation of women's basic constitutional rights. To accomplish this, I will codify the rights provided by Roe vs. Wade and coordinate an agreement with the DOJ concerning the unconstitutional provisions of SB8.

What specific ideas do you have and/or what current legislation would you support to improve our state economy and address the income inequality and growing poverty rate in Texas, especially as respects recovery from COVID19?

Economic injustice is rising in the United States, especially because of the COVID-19 pandemic that has deepened these inequalities. We must send resources like business loans, grants, jobs, healthcare and counseling to help heal disenfranchised communities, notably ones that are primarily low income and/or primarily consist of people of color. I will fully support programs that promote more participation of minority-owned businesses in both government and public-sector contracts.

If applicable to your office, how would you lead or support efforts to provide better funding for health care and better health care options for all Texas residents?

Since Texas has the highest rate of uninsured people in the entire country, championing healthcare is one of the most important issues I plan to address. I am ready to advocate for expanding Medicaid, which would create hundreds of thousands of jobs for Texans and lower the cost of private insurance for everyone. The increase of healthcare inequality because of the COVID-19 pandemic makes this inequity even more dangerous, which is why I am committed to advocating for Medicaid and Medicare for All.

If applicable to your office, what specific ideas do you have to overhaul the Texas Power Grid?

We saw just how disastrous conditions can get when our leaders refuse to put the time, energy, and funding into our power grid: hundreds of lives during this year's winter storms that could have been prevented. We need to create accountability for the power grid by strengthening our power grid and addressing climate changes causing these life-threatening weather events such as the winter storms that have devastated many communities across Texas. Although most of the steps to fix the power grid must be done by the state legislature, I will use the AG office to ensure enforcement of any existing laws, regulations, and contracts that would help ensure a secure power grid.

If applicable to your office, how would you lead or support legislation restoring previous funding for HIV prevention in Texas including access to PrEP?

I will strongly advocate for expanding government-administered health programs such as Medicare and working to have more insurance plans to cover HIV treatment. In order to prevent the spread of HIV, more people need to be educated on not only what HIV/AIDS is and safe sex practices, but educating them on how to apply this information. This will also help remove the stigma against people living with HIV/AIDS. However, we cannot stop at education: people also need easier access to condoms and dental dams, free HIV testing and PrEP, increased access to clean needles, and trauma-informed care from medical professionals. All of these are public services and should be publicly funded. Additionally, I fully support the modernization of criminal laws to eliminate HIV-specific criminal laws and the infliction of harsher sentences to prosecute people with HIV.

If applicable to your office, how would you lead or support legislation addressing reparative/conversion therapy in Texas?

Conversion therapy is a violation of the fundamental rights of LGBTQ+ people and is a cruel and dangerous practice that should be completely prohibited. I will wholeheartedly support a state law that would entirely prohibit conversion therapy and use my office to the best of my abilities to push for such a law.

If applicable to your office, what are your ideas for immigration reform in the state level?

Texas has a responsibility to uphold the commitments our Country has made to the international community concerning immigration and asylum. As Attorney General, I will employ the office to support federal efforts to maintain safe borders and a humane asylum seeking process. Under Republican leadership, Texas has fallen into a cycle of abuse of immigrants and countless violations of human rights and International treaty violations at our border. It is the responsibility of the state government to contest these policies on a state level while listening to border communities in the search for strategies that work. This includes conducting immediate investigations on unfair conditions and mistreatment in detention facilities, fighting against private immigration centers, allowing access of overseers and media members in immigration facilities, and providing more resources such as additional judges, attorneys, translators, and social workers at our borders. Additionally, we must help "feeder nations" provide reliable asylum-seeking processes at home.

What could the state do to improve COVID19 reponse and to prepare for the next pandemic?

Since the effects of the pandemic affect the most disenfranchised communities, the government must conduct surveys and investigate which neighborhoods are the most vulnerable so we can concentrate support where it is most needed. We must also increase our number of free testing sites: it is nearly impossible to get COVID-19 test on short notice, especially if you are someone who works and does not have time to wait for hours to get tested. Since financial constraints prevent many people from having protection against COVID-19, the state must also provide several free at-home tests and high quality PPE each month. Additionally, Americans need supplemental unemployment benefits, a student loan pause, child care and financial support for any time off they may need to take due to exposure to COVID-19. All decisions concerning public safety and health must be in reliance with science and medical professionals, and the government must promote transparency and accountability in their policies concerning COVID-19.

Would you lead or support legislation to require mandatory sexual harassment and Equal Employment Opportunity training similar to the resolution passed in the U.S. Senate that requires Senators, staff, and interns to complete that training each session and submit certification to be published online that their office' fulfilled the requirements?

Yes. The prevalence of sexual harassment and lack of Equal Employment Opportunity harms millions of people across the country. Training is the first step to ensure a safe work environment. In addition, I will ensure the AG office is an environment where all employees understand sexual harassment is not accepted.

What are your ideas to respond to evidence of climate change?

We are currently witnessing a global climate emergency, which is the greatest threat facing our planet. The effects of this are particularly damaging in Texas, where we are facing rising sea levels, intensifying hurricanes, failing electrical infrastructure, a decrease in water resources, and dangerous rising temperatures that affect not only our generation, but many future generations to come. I will advocate for the implementation of the Green New Deal, which would not just protect the environment: the millions of jobs it creates would be a crucial step towards addressing economic inequality and addressing the environmental racism and classism that disproportionately affects people of color and low-income communities.

If applicable to your office, how would you address voter suppression in Texas and work to expand access to voting by eligible voters?

I will challenge voter suppression laws on behalf of Texas voters using, inter alia, the Americans with Disabilities Act ADA— which provides reliable safeguards for disabled voters that could benefit the entire Texas population. This includes the implementation of 24 hour polls and mail in ballots to ensure voters' voices are heard and reflected in elected leadership. As the next Attorney General, I will bring back the Voter Protection Unit that will ensure that all Texans, specifically the African American and underserved communities, have the same reasonable accommodations that allow them to participate in the voting process without bias.

In your opinion and applicable to your office, what needed to happen in the past redistricting cycle?

We must fight to reform redistricting laws and ensure that the process is non-discriminatory and not based on political affiliation or faction, advocate for nonpartisan commissions to redistrict, and implement transparency regulations. We must also fund census count efforts and outreach to maintain communities of interest, especially in underserved communities that are more difficult to reach.

Is there anything in your past or background that has not been covered by the previous questions that might – without careful explanation – cause our organization to reconsider or withdraw our endorsement of you?

No

How long have you been a current member of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas? If you are not a member, will you pledge to join before the endorsement screenings? If no, why not?

I am not a member of the Stonewall Democrats of Dallas but I pledge to join before the endorsement screenings.

I'm seeking an endorsement from the Stonewall Democrats of Dallas for the 2022 primary election.
(Please type name) *

Lee Merritt

This form was created inside of Stonewall Democrats of Dallas.

Google Forms