

# League of Women Voters

## Voters' Guide for District 37 Democratic Primary 2021

The Voters' Guide questionnaire and letter of invitation to our Candidates' Forum was emailed and mailed to each of the candidates on April 24, 2021 with a deadline date of May 10th. Below please find two questions we asked of each candidate. In alphabetical order, please find candidate responses, which we asked to be limited to 500 words total, in addition to their response to the biographical information we requested.

Besides sending to attendees of the Candidates Forum held on May 26, this guide will also be posted on the League of Women Voter's non-partisan, election information site, [Vote411](#). It will also be posted on the Facebook pages of LWV Teaneck, LWV Northern Valley and LWV of Bergen County.

### **For State Senate Candidates**

**1(a). What laws/legislation that you sponsored are you most proud of? Which ones have been the most effective?**

### **For State Assembly Candidates**

**1(b). What aspects of your background make you uniquely qualified to represent District 37?**

### **For All Candidates**

**2. In the next two years, NJ will be undertaking legislative redistricting in response to the 2020 Census. What specific reforms to the apportionment process do you support to make it more independent, transparent and equitable?**

**The candidates' responses follow unedited and in alphabetical order:**

## **STATE SENATE CANDIDATES**

**Valerie Vainieri Huttle, 485 Highview Road, Englewood, NJ**

**Years residing in Bergen County:** Over 35 years

**Occupation:** Funeral Director

**Education:** B.A. English, Fairleigh Dickinson University

**Family:** Married to Frank Huttle, mother to 2 daughters, Alexandra and Francesca, grandmother to Jackson Anthony

**Community Involvement:**

- Served on the Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders 2001-2007
- Served as Bergen County's first female Freeholder Chair 2003-2004
- Serving in the General Assembly, 2006-Present

- Deputy Speaker of the General Assembly, 2015-Present
- Chair, Assembly Aging and Senior Services Committee, 2020-Present
- Chair, Assembly Homeland Security and State Preparedness Committee, 2018-2019
- Chair, Assembly Human Services Committee, 2010-2017
- Vice Chair, Assembly Labor Committee, 2018-2019
- Vice Chair, Assembly Transportation Committee, 2012-2013
- Ex-Officio Member, NJ State Council on the Arts, 2006-Present
- Member of the New Jersey-Israel Commission
- Member of the New Jersey State Interagency Coordinating Council, 2020-Present
- Previous Member, New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect
- Previous Board Member, Bergen PAC
- Previous Board Member, Adler Aphasia Center
- Previous Board Member of Shelter Our Sisters
- Previous member, Highlands Taskforce

**1(a).** Something that I am the most proud of regarding my legislative career is that I don't have just one landmark achievement. As District 37's Assemblywoman, I have fought for real, actionable change - authoring the nation's strongest laws to curb greenhouse gas emissions, combat human trafficking and prevent bullying in schools. I am also proud to have authored landmark legislation to prevent abuse and neglect in group homes, ensuring that our loved ones with disabilities are safe and cared for. I am also proud to have authored New Jersey's historic laws to advance LGBTQ rights, championing the passage of the State's landmark law to advance transgender rights as well as New Jersey's historic law to require schools to provide LGBTQ-inclusive education in their curriculums.

Most recently, I authored New Jersey's sweeping reforms to reform our long-term care system in the wake of COVID-19. These measures included legislation to improve how nursing homes and other facilities respond to outbreaks, such as COVID-19, including advancing protocol for infection control. Additionally, I authored legislation to provide facilities with critical funds to purchase PPE and other essential equipment to keep our frontline heroes safe. And, in response to visitation restrictions, I authored New Jersey's innovative law to prevent social isolation amongst nursing home residents, requiring facilities to purchase technology to keep residents connected with their families during times where visitation is restricted.

As District 37's Assemblywoman, I love writing policies that impact the lives of my constituents. To me, the most rewarding part of this job is that I get to hear from members of my community how their lives have been changed due to my work. Whether it is hearing from families that their child was finally comfortable going to school because of my Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights or hearing from families that their children are safer in group homes because of the Stephen Komninos Law, it is truly rewarding to hear how I have touched the lives of many.

**2.** Historically, New Jersey's apportionment commission is overwhelmingly white and male. New Jersey's apportionment commission should reflect the diversity of our state and it certainly shouldn't be controlled by party bosses and partisan politics. I support Fair Districts NJ's plans for a more equitable and transparent apportionment process, including making all resources and data

public, holding public hearings to ensure community input, and adhering to clear-line drawing rules established by non-partisan reform best practices.

### **Gordon Johnson, 387 Murray Avenue, Englewood**

**Years residing in Bergen County:** I grew up in Englewood and then made my life in Englewood

**Occupation:** Retired

**Education:** B.S. from St. Thomas Aquinas College in Social Science and Criminal Justice, and an M.A. from Seton Hall University in Administration and Supervision

**Family:** I have a wife, 3 kids and 4 grandkids

**Community Involvement:**

- Served in the US Navy Reserve and was deployed to Operation Desert Storm and Operation Joint Endeavor
- Served as Undersheriff and Sheriff in Bergen County
- Served over 20 years with the Englewood Police Department
- Former Englewood Councilman
- Current Assemblyman in the 37th legislative district

**1(a).** I am most proud of A3716 of 2007. I was a coprime sponsor and Chair of the Assembly Law and Public Safety Committee when it moved forward. It stopped the death penalty in NJ.

The second is A1678 of 2015. I was the first prime sponsor. It lowers the legal requirement for offenders to have post conviction DNA testing which may lead to them being exonerated of their crimes. It allows the courts to force the police to inspect and approve labs and to check DNA samples against the national database. The purpose is to see if the DNA belongs to another person who may have actually committed the crime. Also, private labs may be able to conduct more DNA testing or using a smaller sample to produce evidence exonerating the offender. The Innocence Project was involved with this bill.

**2.** For redistricting reform I am interested in public hearings, allowing the public access to submit maps, making social justice/race representation a required criteria when approving maps, and better preserving communities of interest. As a side note, while it is disappointing that only one member of the committee is a woman, I am proud that that woman is from Bergen County.

## **STATE ASSEMBLY CANDIDATES**

### **Lauren Kohn Dayton, 15 Laurel Avenue, Tenafly**

**Years residing in Bergen County:** 9 years

**Occupation:** Councilwoman for Borough of Tenafly, Attorney - Solo Practitioner with law firm Lauren M.K. Dayton, and Mother

**Education:**

- Cornell University, School of Human Ecology, Major in Policy Analysis & Management
- Emory School of Law, Juris Doctorate

**Family:** Married to Dr. Jeffrey Dayton; two daughters – Emily (Age 11) and Abigail (Age 8); cat and dog; Parents and Siblings all in Bergen County

**Community Involvement:**

- **Tenaflly Pride** – member of Pride committee to raise tolerance and awareness of LGBTQ diversity, sexual orientation and gender identity
- **Northern Valley Greenway** – advocate to develop six town linear green space bike and walk path for health and wellness
- **Tenaflly Cares** – participate in meal delivery to seniors and families to combat food insecurity while supporting Tenaflly downtown business
- **Women’s Empowerment Democratic Organization (WEDO)** to increase women in government and politics
- **Stanton Strong** – advocate for women’s rights and reproductive choice
- **Temple Sinai of Bergen County** – synagogue member; Rabbi selection committee; past Early Childhood Education class parent and book fair chairperson
- **Kaplan JCC on the Palisades** – Rubin Run participant – raises money for individuals with special needs; Lavish Lunch participant – raises money for seniors and senior programming at the JCC
- **The Community Chest**– invited speaker at Young Women Leadership event
- **Women for Progress** – Member to support and advocate for progressive issues, such as gun control, equality for women, and human rights
- **Maugham Elementary School** - past Home School Association Secretary, led Teacher Appreciation Week, Book Fair Chairperson, Class Parent
- **Tenaflly Softball Coach** – for past six years

**1(b).** My life has been dedicated to public service and the pursuit of justice. I majored in Policy Analysis and Management from Cornell University, which is the empirical examination of public policy and solutions. I learned to critically examine evidence and utilize multivariate data to evaluate the economic, social and ethical impact of public policies on individuals, families and communities.

Afterward, I earned my Juris Doctorate from Emory School of Law, where I then embarked on a legal career representing clients in New York and Georgia for labor and employment, commercial litigation and immigration and asylum. As an attorney, I have represented a variety of clients seeking fair business deals, improved workplace conditions, civil rights violations, and those seeking to make a better quality of life from other countries.

I have had the honor to serve as Tenaflly Councilwoman and Council President, where I am responsive and accountable to residents. Currently, I am working on the unfortunate realities our residents are facing during and after this pandemic. I am passionate about serving my community and have remained steadfast in responding to concerns and resident calls dealing with health emergencies, loss of jobs, economic hardship, and food insecurity.

Leadership takes more than voting on the issues; it takes the ability to delve into the issues and find realistic solutions that will make a difference in the quality of our diverse residents’ lives. My experiences provide a strong basis to legislate for the residents of District 37 in the Assembly.

2. The legislative redistricting process must promote fair and effective representation of varied viewpoints at all levels of government and ensure public access to voting, elections and representatives.

The Apportionment Commission must become representative of the diverse population within the State. New Jersey must reestablish rules to ensure more minorities and women from differing communities are part of the discussion, as these are established and growing populations within NJ. There should be laws requiring diversity, inclusion and equality in choosing Commission members.

All Commission actions must have transparency and accountability; therefore, all meetings should be open to the public, not just at select times. This process must include public comment, public studies and input, and hearings with ample time for debate so that voters have an opportunity to be heard by the Apportionment Commission.

Residents need access to public transportation to directly reach local offices for representatives. This ensures viewpoints are heard, considered and debated from all community members, while reducing electing extreme representatives who only cater to a microcosm of residents or political interests.

There can no longer be Apportionment Commission members who sign any pledge of loyalty to one party or interest group. If so, that member must be removed and a new member appointed by a bi-partisan nomination process. The Commission must be responsible and accountable to the entire voting population of the local, state and federal representatives. More changes are needed to ensure fair redistricting, but these improvements will help reform the process to establish fair government.

### **Shama Haider, 136 Stonehurst Drive, Tenafly**

**Years residing in Bergen County:** I have lived in Tenafly for 39 years.

**Occupation:** Retired

**Education:** Received Bachelor's degree from the University of the Punjab in Pakistan

**Family:** I have a two kids and three grandkids

**Community Involvement:**

- Former two term Councilwoman in Tenafly
- Current Chair of the Tenafly Municipal Democratic Committee
- Currently serve as the Mayor's Alternate to the Tenafly Library Board
- Former Chair of the Home and School Association of Tenafly
- Former President of the Tenafly League of Women Voters
- Former Chair of the Tenafly Planning Board
- Former Chair of the Tenafly Environmental Commission
- Former Chair of the Tenafly Business Development Committee
- Former Trustee of the Tenafly Nature Center
- Was a gubernatorial appointee to the NJ Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee of the State of NJ

- Former member of the Bergen County Commission on the Status of Women
- Former member of the Bergen County Human Services Committee

**1(b).** I have spent the nearly 40 years I've lived in Tenafly dedicating myself to the betterment of my community, as you can see from my record of community involvement. I have a proven record of effective, progressive leadership, and I would be the first Muslim legislator in the history of the New Jersey statehouse.

**2.** For redistricting reform I am interested in public hearings, allowing the public access to submit maps, making social justice/race representation a required criteria when approving maps, and better preserving communities of interest. As a side note, while it is disappointing that only one member of the committee is a woman, I am proud that that woman is from Bergen County.

### **Ellen Park, 116 Pershing Road, Englewood Cliffs**

**Years residing in Bergen County:** 12 years in Englewood Cliffs

**Occupation:** Assistant Vice President at an insurance firm

**Education:** I received my Bachelor's Degree from NYU and my law degree from Hofstra University

**Family:** I have a husband and two kids

**Community Involvement:**

- Former Councilwoman in Englewood Cliffs
- Former member of the PTA
- Currently involved in the Englewood Cliffs Little League

**1(b).** I have spent the nearly 12 years I've lived in Englewood Cliffs dedicating myself to the betterment of my community, as you can see from my record of community involvement. I have a proven record of effective, progressive leadership, and I would be the first Korean American woman in the history of the New Jersey statehouse.

**2.** For redistricting reform I am interested in public hearings, allowing the public access to submit maps, making social justice/race representation a required criteria when approving maps, and better preserving communities of interest. As a side note, while it is disappointing that only one member of the committee is a woman, I am proud that that woman is from Bergen County.

### **Gervonn Charise Romney Rice, 84 Bogert Street, Teaneck**

**Years Residing in Bergen County:** 59

**Occupation:** Teaneck Preschool Program's Parent Liaison

**Education:** Teaneck High School Graduate

Bachelors of Science in Commerce from Rider University

**Family:** Married 30 years in August, 3 adult sons

**Record of Community Involvement (bullet points only):**

- Teaneck Historic Preservation Board
- PTO President at Bryant School
- PTO Council President
- Executive Board of Special Parents of Teaneck
- 9-year Teaneck Board of Education Trustee, 4 years as Vice-President
- Appointed then elected to Town Council in 2016
- Responsible for establishing Teaneck as a Stigmas Free Town
- Town Council's Board of Education Liaison
- Youth Advisory Board Liaison
- Age Friendly Teaneck Health and Social Engagement Task force member
- Member of the NAACP
- Organized annual Voter Registration Drives with Community Organizations
- Member of Jack and Jill of America Associates
- Member of the Teaneck Democratic Municipal Committee
- 2017 Graduate of Bergen Leads
- 2018 Mother of the Year Awardee by Bergen County, NJ Chapter of The Links, Incorporated
- 2019 Graduate of NJ Partners in Policymaking
- Board Member of *Never Alone Again* Domestic Violence Resource Center
- Member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., Bergen County Alumnae Chapter

**1(b).** I am uniquely qualified to serve and represent the 37th District because as an elected official for the last 14 years, I have the experience and understanding of what it means to represent a diverse community and ensuring the various voices converge into legislation that embodies the constituents of this district. Serving my Township has prepared me to serve at the State level additionally, I have always availed myself of every educational opportunity at the state level of governance by attending annual Board of Education and Municipal League Governance Conferences. As a Bergen LEADS graduate, I became well acquainted with our County governance and agencies. Working with non-profits like Center for Hope and Safety, and *Never Alone Again* Domestic Violence Agency and now the BOE has given me a unique perspective on; Women's rights and health care needs; sexual assault; Mental Health- removing stigma and educational issues- such as accessible and free high quality preschool and community college. I care passionately about these issues, I do more than just show up, as Assemblywoman I would work to move legislation to protect these vulnerable populations.

**2.** To start, I worked diligently to share the importance of completing the Census to ensure an accurate count of as many residents as possible. We need to continue to educate our community about the importance of the Census for 2030.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of the League of Women Voters for their support of the Fair Districts' statement regarding the Apportionment Commission. I am in total agreement with the many valid points of concern that have been raised and the suggested legislative reforms that have been proposed.

The fact that there are only two women, no women of color, and no Latinx members on the committee demonstrate lack of representation and independence within our system. There is a problem when people of color comprise over 45 percent of New Jersey's population, yet the Apportionment Commission is dominated by white men.

I am in full support of the suggestions by Fair Districts New Jersey that include:

- Make all map-making resources and data public and allow multiple methods for public submission of maps.
- Make all map drafts public, allow for public input on any proposed map prior to approval, and require redistricting reports justifying all map-making decisions.
- Protect communities of interests through ample public hearings and robust and meaningful public input.
- Adhere to ranked order clear-line drawing rules established by nonpartisan redistricting reform best practices designed to protect "one person, one vote" and prevent boundary line manipulation for political gain.
- Adopt a racial equity provision that reinforces the Voting Rights Act to protect the voting rights and voting strength of communities of color.

# **NJ PRIMARY ELECTION DAY**

## **Tuesday, June 8<sup>th</sup>**

### **Polls Open 6<sub>am</sub> to 8<sub>pm</sub>**

## **DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!**

*This Voters Guide has been prepared by the League of Women Voters/Teaneck and the League of Women Voters/Northern Valley, a nonpartisan group of local residents making sure that eligible voters have information on all candidates and the opportunity to exercise their right to vote. The League of Women Voters works to improve our government; study local, state and national issues; and engage all citizens in the decisions that impact their lives.*

For more information on LWV membership, please contact us at  
[lwvbergen@gmail.com](mailto:lwvbergen@gmail.com).