

SWPPA Candidate Questionnaire

The PA 32nd Senate District faces many challenges as it relates to its aging population. This district has a higher-than-average age, relative to the Commonwealth. This is a concern as more individuals within this region are becoming eligible for retirement, less young people are remaining local to fill these positions, and fixed incomes are not going as far as they once could. To compound these worries, as the population in this district decreases, so does funding for programs designed to ease the burdens of our most vulnerable citizens. These concerns, in part, influenced my decision to run for the PA Senate and are issues that I wish to address as Senator.

Please find my responses to your questions below.

Very truly yours,

Sydney Hovis

Question 1 — Lottery Funds

“The Pennsylvania Lottery... Benefits older Pennsylvanians every day.” If I close my eyes, I can still hear the jingle clearly in my head, accompanied by the sound of my grandmother’s pressure-cooker pot ticking and the smell of her pork chops hanging in the air. My grandparents never missed the nightly number, to the point that as a child, I thought that the lottery benefits older Pennsylvanians because they so faithfully played it. My Pappy had to explain that the lottery tax revenue in fact funded these senior programs. At the age of nine or ten, this was my first real understanding of the symbiotic and cyclical relationship between state revenue and social programs.

In recent years, our legislature has demonstrated a willingness to “tighten the purse strings,” without regard to this impact on social programs or public wellbeing. This thinking has proven to be detrimental across the board, especially as our programs, on the whole, have been stressed as a result of the pandemic. Rather than reduce access to necessary and essential programs for seniors and vulnerable populations across the Commonwealth, I would seek to increase revenue streams and invest in our future so that we can fully fund and expand all necessary programs.

Question 2 — Protection of Seniors

As a teenager, I spent a good deal of time volunteering at local nursing homes. Knowing that many seniors in care facilities have little to no visitors is a heartbreaking reality. The neglect and abuse of elderly is as diabolical as it is in the case of a child. However, while we have services and protections for children, we don't have the same levels of support and protection for our senior community. To provide for children, in Pennsylvania we have a program- the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program— in which an individual who is trained follows the child's case as it progresses through the care system.

I believe that a version of this program should exist for our senior population. To protect our aging population, an independent appointed individual, who does not have access nor benefits from the subject, receives training on signs of abuse and can advocate on their behalf during important decisions. This court appointment can also protect seniors from the mental and emotional abuses of family members who would subject them to harsh treatment for speaking out or on behalf of their own interests. These advocates are typically volunteers and are expected to check in at specific intervals. While certain social programs are to provide levels of this protection, we know that this is not always enough to stop abuses from taking place in an overburdened situation.

My mother is a county clerk responsible for filing guardianships. In hearing how often abuse goes unnoticed, I would be agreeable to make it easier to expand trust funds for elderly and freezing assets, given particular circumstances.

Finally, I believe that we can implement requirements to pass a background check and submit clearances to work within certain capacities in the sector, even without implementing lifetime bans on specific employees.

Question 3 — Workforce Demographics

In light of these challenges we face (particularly in regard to my district and southwestern Pennsylvania) as a result of our aging population, we must develop strategic, long-term approaches to our workforce development and staffing shortages. The pandemic only exacerbated existing problems which our current elected officials are, thus far, trying to solve utilizing outdated solutions.

These problems cannot be easily addressed without a robust set of policies aimed toward revitalization of such declining regions. Strategies for resolving these issues include

access to affordable and expedient education and training programs, attractive local housing options, and enhanced community amenities.

We have also witnessed throughout the pandemic that the workforce has changed dramatically such that employees now expect not just a handsome salary, but an employer that recognizes the humanity of its employees and a work environment that is safe and respectful. As a state Senator, I would not only advocate for fair compensation, but also work to protect the rights of employees to collectively bargain and receive workplace benefits that may not be monetary in nature. This additional level of compensation is particularly important when it comes to industries, such as nonprofits, where the salary alone cannot provide as lucrative an opportunity.

Question 4 — LGBTQ+ Concerns

LGBTQ+ issues are matters of significant concern to me and as a Senator in the General Assembly, I shall work tirelessly to ensure that all Pennsylvanians are treated equally and equitably and that no person shall be denied access to a job, housing, public accommodation, educational opportunities based upon their status as a member of the LGBTQ+ community.

I believe that it is imperative that in this Commonwealth, whose roots were have a deep connection to the concept of tolerance, that enacting legislation that would bar discrimination is vital. Our own Constitution provides, “All [people] are born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent and inalienable rights, among which are those of enjoying and defending life and liberty, of acquiring, possessing and protecting property and reputation, and of pursuing their own happiness.”

Those words are clear and are not ambiguous. Every person in this Commonwealth must be afforded the dignity of their humanity. Our legislature recognized that the rights due every person must, naturally, extend to persons who seek to live in the state and enacted laws that would bar discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodations and more. It, previously, afforded protection to persons based upon race, gender, religion, age, disability status and national origin. It is long past due that we extend the same protections to persons based upon their being a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Persons in this community are disproportionately impacted by issues such as poverty, food insecurity, mental illness, suicide and much of that stems from the hostile culture and situations in which such persons are forced to endure. As such, it is vital that the

Commonwealth enact legislation that will provide protections for members of the LGBTQIA+ community.