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Cherry Hill Democratic Committee Appoints New Members: Nearly One Year After Their Election, CHDC Finally Cleared To Fill Vacancies

Cherry Hill, NJ – Yesterday the Cherry Hill Democratic Committee (CHDC) formally welcomed 14 new members: Kristen Affrime, Gail Donner, Greg Gagarin, Marie HenselderKimmel, Mohammed Jawaad Hussain, Tooba Hussain, Jess Karpiak, Jay Lassiter, Ken Lee, Julius Martinez, If it m Laura Napolitano, Martha Stem, Tracey Thomasey, and Caroline Wong.

“The Cherry Hill 3” – the original three elected CHDC members elected June 2025 with 62 percent of the vote, earning a majority vote across 90% of the voting districts – had been prevented from meeting or conducting business, including filling 71 vacancies due to a lawsuit initiated by the Camden County Democratic Committee (CCDC) and CCDC Chair, State Senator Jim Beach.

Nearly a year later, on Friday April 17, the Appellate Division unanimously ruled in CHDC's favor and ordered the lower court to dismiss the lawsuit. On Monday April 20, the CCDC's emergency request to the Appellate Division to stay the decision was denied.

"We are thrilled to be able to start the work the voters elected us to accomplish a full ten months ago," **said Rena Margulis, CHDC Vice Chair.** "We intend to bring to Cherry Hill what every county other than Camden has: representation based on voting district. Instead of a top-down Committee dedicated to the interests of the Norcross machine, we will be a bottom-up Committee bringing representation to the Democratic voters of Cherry Hill, who are tired of living under the thumb of the machine."

The CCDC sought to force the elected members to fill the vacancies with candidates who lost the June 2025 election on the CCDC slate. An analysis of the CCDC candidates showed widespread disparity in representation by voting district – with over-representation in some quarters of the municipality, and zero representation in large swaths of the municipality.

"Across the state, voters are asked to fill two committee seats per election district. That is a safeguard to ensure proper, local representation across the municipality. But CCDC forces voters to select candidates at-large, creating a problem of their own devise. CCDC, and the County Clerk, removes voter choice, forcing voters to select a slate of 74 seats with a single oval, while forcing good-faith candidates to recruit and run together on a 74-seat slate," **said Kate Delany, President of South Jersey Progressive Democrats.** "Once they lost at their own rigged game, they litigated to change the rules after the election. We feel vindicated that the courts protected the election results and protected democracy."

"When we were elected to office, we immediately took our task seriously, and published an open, transparent community-wide call for nominations and applications to join the CHDC. We were thrilled to receive about 80 interest forms from extraordinary community leaders interested in stepping up to serve. We even received interest from losing CCDC candidates, who we promised we would not discriminate against in the vetting process. Today, nearly one year later, we can finally return to business and fill these vacancies. The strength of the biographies and backgrounds of the community leaders speaks for itself," **said David Stahl, CHDC Chair.**

"I'm gobsmacked that CCDC would refuse to bring these extraordinary community leaders on," **Stahl** added.

The CHDC will be appointing more members on a rolling basis. Brief bios of the appointed candidates follow.

Kristen Affrime, Cherry Hill Voting District 6. Kristen is a Locustwood resident who lives on the west side of Cherry Hill. She has been involved in calls for democratic reform in our county Democratic party for a long time. Some of the political issues Kristen is particularly committed to include Labor, Human Rights, Environmental Protection, and LGBTQ+ rights.

Gail Donner, District 16. Gail has been a resident of the Willowdale section of Cherry Hill since 1978. She is married and has two adult children who went through Cherry Hill public schools (Bret Harte, Beck and East). Over their school years, she volunteered as a classroom aide and in the library at Bret Harte and served on several community committees at East. She has been a member of Willowdale Swim Club almost as long as she has lived in Cherry Hill, serving on the Board and as President. She retired as Executive Director of Congregation M'kor Shalom in 2013 and is currently a member of Congregation Kol Ami and is a co-chair of their Adult Education Committee. She is a member of the

core committee of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism – New Jersey and has advocated with them on a non-partisan basis for legislation in Trenton. She is also a member of the Southern New Jersey chapter of the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, which “fosters a network of Muslim and Jewish women who, guided by common values, mobilize our larger communities to cultivate a more pluralistic, equitable, and democratic society.” Throughout her life she has been committed to protecting our civil rights and providing strong public education, affordable housing, and sufficient food, clothing and shelter for all.

Greg Gagarin, District 26. Greg is a Wexford Leas resident who looks forward to facilitating openness and transparency in local politics. Greg hopes to bring in young leaders who will run for, lead, and further our values in elected office in Camden County. Through canvassing and social media, Greg would like to broaden public awareness of the goals of the CCDC and SJP.

Marie Henselder Kimmel, District 46. Marie is a retired ObGyn who practiced in Camden County for 24 years and has been a Cherry Hill resident since 1990. Since her professional retirement, she has been active in citizen advocacy focused on increasing the influence of every American in our government. From 2017 to 2025, Marie led the New Jersey chapter of American Promise, a national nonprofit working to regain the power of limiting money in politics by a constitutional amendment. Since 2024, Marie is the leader of NJ Voters Want More Say, an Indivisible chapter that worked in the Fair Ballot Alliance, and she currently is active in defense of democracy on the national and local level.

Mohammed Jawaad Hussain, District 19. Jawaad is a pediatrician who has served Camden County for over a decade. He has spent his career advocating for the wellbeing of children and families, not just within the walls of the doctor's office, but also in schools, homes, and workplaces. He has lived in Cherry Hill since 2016, and all his children proudly attend the Cherry Hill Public Schools.

Tooba Hussain, District 38. Tooba is an attorney and community organizer who was born and raised in New Jersey to two hard-working immigrants. Tooba serves as Co-Chair of Cooper River Indivisible's Policy and Legislation Sub-Committee, a Board Member of a non-profit healthcare organization, and a member of Cherry Hill Muslims. Her pro bono work spans prisoners' rights, immigration defense, and eviction defense. Tooba graduated from Rutgers University Camden with honors before obtaining her J.D. from Georgetown University, where she was an Editor on the Georgetown Law Journal.

Jess Karpiak, District 35. Jess is a Barclay Farms resident and has lived in Camden County for most of her life. She is the proud mother of two Cherry Hill West students. She became a passionate advocate of social justice while studying social work at Bryn Mawr College. As a concerned citizen, she is a proponent of environmentalism, education, universal healthcare, women's rights, and is an ally to the LGBTQ+ community. She is honored to work with the South Jersey Progressive Democrats and hopes to promote equity and transparency in the Camden County Democratic Committee.

Jay Lassiter, District 35. Jay is best known for his work legalizing gay marriage and for reforming New Jersey's outdated cannabis laws. Jay is also one of New Jersey's most prominent HIV and drug policy experts. A writer and campaigner by trade, Jay lives in Cherry Hill's Hunt Tract/Barclay neighborhood with his partner Greg and their cat Wolfgang.

Ken Lee, District 25. Ken is a resident in the Windsor Park section of Cherry Hill for about two years, but he frequented Cherry Hill growing up and has lived in South Jersey for his whole life. He attended Rowan University just to stay in South Jersey. Ken is an Assistant Engineer, works as an assistant coach for Jersey Juniors Volleyball Club, tutors high school math and physics, and currently is also the chairperson of the LGBTQIA+ subcommittee of Cooper River Indivisible, a grassroots organization that

advocates for progressive policies locally, statewide, and federally. Ken is a hard advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights, the environment and saving our wildlife in New Jersey, and for immigrants, as he is the son of two immigrants.

Julius Martinez, District 1. Julius was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. Throughout his life he has been dedicated toward social justice causes including teaching with Breakthrough Collaborative, Jump Start and Teach for America. In 2014 Julius was able to join the March on Washington with NYC Justice League walking over 250 miles on foot from NYC to Washington DC. His political activism includes advocating on behalf of students and teachers and the crossroads of that work in the community. Working as a college organizer on Hakeem Jeffries' first congressional democratic primary, he learned first hand what it is like to be politically active and engaged. Upon graduating from Brooklyn College, Julius moved to Philadelphia to teach. He has since become an Assistant Principal and resides with his family in Cherry Hill. For the past two years Julius has also been battling leukemia, and he has undergone a successful bone marrow transplant. Julius is a proud progressive and wishes to see the national and local democratic parties stand up and back the principles and people it often claims to represent.

Laura Napolitano, District 10. Laura is a college professor, wife and mother of two. She was born and raised in New Jersey and has resided in Cherry Hill for the last 11 years. She believes strongly in the role of public institutions to serve the common good.

Martha Stem, District 26. Martha is a 30+ year resident of Wexford Leas, a business development professional, and community advocate with a passion for civic engagement. With a background in sales, marketing, and small business consulting, she has spent her career building relationships and helping organizations grow. In 2017, inspired by Barack Obama's call for everyday citizens to step up and serve, Martha ran for Camden County Democratic Committee. She is a founding member of the South Jersey Progressive Democrats and has supported local organizing through digital outreach and community engagement. Martha believes in informed, active participation and is committed to serving her community with energy and integrity.

Tracey Thomasey, District 35. Tracey has a masters in social work and a masters in law and social policy. She has worked in child advocacy for most of her career. She is pursuing a doctorate in social work while working as full time faculty at a liberal arts college in PA. Social work is, at its core, political. Most of her career was spent advocating for children and families. Now, she teaches up-and-coming social workers how to empower others to find and use their voice.

Caroline Wong, District 17. Caroline has been a resident in the Kingston community of Cherry Hill for over 30 years. An active participant in the community, she previously ran for Camden County Democratic Committee. Prior to relocating to Philadelphia for graduate school, she worked with the South Rowan Anti Poverty Program as a community organizer. Caroline is the retired Senior Associate Director of the Master of Science in Social Policy Program (MSSP), current Director of SP2's Pipeline for Promise Program, and a lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice. She has worked as a licensed social worker for over 20 years. Her practice experience has included work with immigrants, entrants, asylees, and refugees, both in the United States and overseas through domestic abuse counseling, family counseling, and crisis intervention.

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