



# **OUR VALUES AND PLATFORM** **WHERE WE STAND TOGETHER!**

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**THE COLUMBIA COUNTY DEMOCRATIC COMMITTEE'S (CCDC) PLATFORM** sets forth a fiscally responsible agenda that is inclusive, fair, and respects the dignity and value of all persons. The government's role is to promote and protect the common interest. The cooperation, unity, and empowerment of its Democratic members and friends leads to a stronger citizenry and community. This platform serves to right the injustices that residents of Columbia County, New York State, and America have experienced for far too long.

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**OUR VALUES** serve to drive actions under six broad themes: *Rights and Opportunities, Health and Safety, Climate and Living Environment, Infrastructure, Better Government, and Education*. Each theme details specific local, state, and/or national issues that impact the quality of life of Columbia County residents. This platform is by no means comprehensive, but rather serves as a beginning of how the CCDC can make a difference in helping our neighbors and improving our county.



## RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### **Jobs and Economic Security for All:**

To ensure a more secure future for America's workers and a stronger national economy, the federal, state, and local governments should create and/or stimulate new jobs, based on infrastructure, health, education, training needs, and new industries.

### **Protecting Women's Health Care Rights:**

Women have the fundamental right to decide all health choices that involve their bodies. The principles of *Roe v. Wade* should not be eroded.

### **Guaranteeing Civil Rights:**

Columbia County celebrates the diversity of its population of many races, religions, ethnicities, sexual orientations, physical and cognitive abilities, ages, gender, and immigration status. We must strongly oppose all discrimination, bigotry, and intolerance based on people's differences. Any tactics that stoke fear and violence, emboldening hate groups, must be immediately opposed and countered by activities that promote civility.

### **Criminal Justice Reform for All:**

The criminal justice system should be fair and just while simultaneously ensuring the safety of individuals. Reform is needed to end the over-representation of peoples of minority backgrounds and mandatory sentencing incarceration, raise the age of criminal responsibility to 18, enact new intervention programs for the treatment of non-violent young adult offenders, end the cash bail system, ensure equal pay for assistant public defenders and assistant district attorneys, and create collaborative justice programs that take into consideration the complex issues that affect both victims and the accused. Additionally, reform must build trust between law enforcement and the community through specialized police training, engage youth in healthy behaviors through collaboration between community programs and school personnel, lift barriers that prevent formerly incarcerated individuals from successfully reentering society, and establish effective models of drug courts and other diversionary

programs to offer non-violent offenders the opportunities for rehabilitation.

**Protecting LGBTQ Rights:** Federal and state non-discrimination laws must protect persons who identify as LGBTQ to guarantee equal rights in all areas and provide protection from abuse.

**Protecting Worker's Rights:** All workers should be paid a livable wage, afforded family leave, protected from wage theft, covered by fair labor standards, afforded safe and harassment free work environments, have equal protection under the law, and have the right to organize into unions and collectively bargain.

**Voter Reform:** Each citizen's constitutional right to vote must be protected to ensure maximum voter participation. Voter reforms at the national level, including early voting, automatic registration, same-day registration, and no-fault absentee ballots, are necessary, as is ensuring the security of all elections. Any attempt to suppress citizens' right to vote should be immediately challenged. The broken campaign finance system must be fixed.

### **Veterans and Military Service Members:**

This nation has a moral responsibility for our veterans, reservists, National Guard members, and wounded warriors, as well as to the families and caregivers who support them. Programs should continue to provide essential educational benefits, job training, and services for chronic homelessness and mental health issues, including suicide. The Veterans Administration must be fully funded so that all veterans, including the 4,400 veterans in Columbia County, receive the care that they earned and deserve.

### **Creating a New Immigration System:**

This nation's founding as a country of immigrants has defined its character and history, and this legacy should be celebrated. Recent barbaric and horrifying federal policies that allow the use of cages; the separation of children from their families; and the deprivation of proper hygiene and bathroom facilities, food, and shelter; must be condemned. Children should

never be used as a tool against a class of people and immediate action should be taken to reunite them with their families. Congressional legislative action is needed to change the current quota system, stop the use of local law enforcement to enforce non-criminal immigration violations and/or to deny due process to persons because of their immigration status, establish a legal process to completely assimilate immigrants already living in and contributing to their local communities, and afford due process to those fleeing violence in their native countries.

### **Ensuring a Dignified Life for Seniors:**

A comprehensive system is needed in Columbia County to ensure all seniors live an independent, safe, and healthy life in their homes or other living arrangements, and to accommodate their changing needs as they age. Local government should provide leadership and oversight, and help identify financial resources for well-funded, essential, community-based services to assist the county's aging population. The Medicare Act should be amended to include long-term health care services, and the Older Americans Act should be reauthorized to continue federal support for critical nutritional, transportation, and employment training services. Enhanced programs and services are needed in the county's judicial system to address the immense problem of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

### **Protecting and Expanding Social Security:**

Social Security is the primary means of support for a significant number of seniors in Columbia County. Any attempt to cut, privatize, or weaken Social Security, including actions to raise the retirement age, diminish benefits by cutting cost-of-living adjustments, or reduce earned benefits, should be opposed. Having a local Social Security office in the county is a vital resource to its citizens.

### **Affordable Housing and Homeownership:**

The lack of available, affordable housing and skyrocketing rents have prevented many people from becoming homeowners or finding habitable rentals. County and town governments should use the Columbia

County's 2017 Housing Needs Assessment Report to develop and implement a responsive plan, including pursuing public and private funds to increase the supply of affordable housing.

County government should seek state and federal resources to assist people most in need of affordable housing.

### **Closing the Racial Wealth Gap:**

The economic inequality problem is even more significant when racial and ethnic disparities in wealth and income are considered. Congress must enact legislation to eliminate systemic discriminatory barriers to wealth accumulation and improve opportunities for people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds to achieve sustainable homeownership, provide for greater diversity in federal and state contracting practices, incentivize and expand access to retirement investment programs, and increase opportunities for quality jobs and education.

### **Growing Small Businesses and Jobs:**

County government should support and attract small businesses by improving the county's infrastructure, such as broadband, roads, and affordable housing; encouraging education and training opportunities; and advocating for and seeking state and federal programs and funding to assist local businesses start and grow.



## **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

### **Securing Universal Health Care**

**for All Citizens:** Health care is a right, not a privilege. Health care policies should put all people before corporate profits. Neither fear nor immigration status should be barriers that impede access to health care. Legislation must guarantee universal health care insurance for all Americans with the elimination of unaffordable premiums and burdensome out-of-pocket costs, as well as the option for those 55 and over to enroll in Medicare. Mental health care should be provided on parity with physical health care, including the epidemics of substance abuse and gun violence.

Federal legislative, investigative, and prosecutorial actions should cap the

amount that Americans pay out-of-pocket every month on prescription drugs. Congress should require Medicare to negotiate lower prices with drug manufacturers. Federal policy should end surprise billing and other practices that lead to out-of-control medical debt. Legislation should be opposed that would privatize or phase out Medicare and reduce the funding of, and block granting, Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.

### **Combating Drug and Alcohol**

**Addiction:** Increased incidence of drug and alcohol addiction in Columbia County has created a need for quality care, treatment, and intervention, including adequate mental health services and an inpatient detox facility. The county's Opioid Epidemic Response Plan should focus on the continued gaps and needs of those affected. County leaders should pursue increased funding to support effective drug and alcohol support and assistance programs, such as Chatham Cares 4U, as well as model programs and services that support those in recovery. Government leaders should support increased access to evidence-based, age-appropriate, and locally tailored prevention and treatment programs, including school-based drug education and community-based peer mentorship programs.

### **Responsible Gun Ownership:**

The Second Amendment guaranteeing the right of gun ownership is part of the fabric of our community. Common sense federal laws are needed to keep all members of our community safe, including laws requiring universal background checks on gun purchases, increasing penalties for people who use illegal guns, and banning assault weapons to the public. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention must have the authority and resources to study gun violence as a public health issue. Local law enforcement officials must have the legal authority to search for and remove all guns from the homes of, or possession of, persons against whom an Order of Protection has been issued.

### **Supporting Community Health**

**Centers:** Community-based health centers, including mental health and family planning, should be expanded in Columbia County. They provide critically important prevention and treatment in underserved communities, preventing unnecessary and costly trips to emergency rooms. County government should create a comprehensive strategy to increase the pool of qualified, well-compensated primary health care professionals.



## **CLIMATE AND LIVING ENVIRONMENT**

### **Cleaner Environments and Energy:**

The climate crisis is the defining challenge of our time. Clean air and water are basic rights of all residents. County and local governments, businesses, and community leaders must work together to tackle local climate issues. Bold efforts are needed to produce more electricity from clean energy sources, reduce energy waste, modernize our electric grid, encourage vehicle electrification, and reduce carbon footprints. Other efforts should support "smart communities" – efficiency standards to reduce carbon pollution and expanding clean energy research and development. Local governments should pursue public and private investments to support eco-friendly businesses and create jobs for county residents.

Columbia County's natural resources, including public lands, lakes, waterways, and forested areas, must be protected. Public and private collaboration is essential in ensuring policies and investments that will maintain access to public lands, and strengthen protections for our natural and cultural resources, while harnessing the immense economic and social potential of our public lands and waters. Farmers must be enlisted as partners in promoting conservation and stewardship.

### **Solid Waste Management:**

The choices we make in what we buy, how we use it, and how we dispose of it has a significant impact on solid waste management. New technologies and innovative approaches for reducing, reusing, and recycling solid waste are needed to meet the future goals of Columbia County's Solid Waste Management Plan

(SWMP). County government should amend its SWMP to focus its efforts on a landfill diversion program. It should be transparent, optimize public and private engagement, aggressively pursue public and private funding to support innovation and up-scaling cost-effective approaches, establish clearly defined goals and objectives to measure progress, and expand educational and outreach programs to inform and engage county residents in all facets of solid waste management.

## ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ INFRASTRUCTURE

**High-Speed Broadband:** High-speed internet connectivity is a key necessity for 21st century economic success, education, health care, public safety, and social mobility in Columbia County. County-level leadership should pursue a reliable and affordable broadband build-out, enact broadband requirements for new construction, and appoint a county employee to act as a resource and coordinator of the county's broadband effort. All households in the county must have access to high-speed broadband, increased internet adoptions, and access to anchor institutions providing free public Wi-Fi. The New York State Comptroller's Office should conduct a state audit of broadband access, and a statewide plan should be developed based on the audit's findings.

### **Investing in Rural Communities:**

The county's rural and agricultural economy should be strengthened by advocating for policies and increased federal and state funding to support the next generation of farmers, especially farmers who engage in environmentally sustainable agricultural practices. Programs should be encouraged to protect and enhance family farms, as well as expand local food markets and regional food systems. Agricultural workers deserve fair and just protections. Rural

water, sewer, and broadband infrastructures should be improved to make rural businesses more competitive.

### **Improving the County's**

**Infrastructure:** Federal, state, and local governments should make major investments to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure by updating and expanding our transit, passenger and freight rail lines, and airports. In addition, they should be building 21st century energy and water systems, modernizing our schools, and expanding high-speed broadband. These fiscally responsible and necessary investments will help create secure, good paying, middle-class jobs and boost economic growth.

## ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ BETTER GOVERNMENT

**Good Government:** County and town governments should function efficiently, fairly, and in a transparent manner. Government officials should engage the public during government meetings and comply with New York State's Open Meetings Law, ensuring meeting agendas and all related information are electronically available in timely advance of all government meetings.

**Making Taxes Fair:** A tax system must ensure all Americans, businesses, and corporations pay their fair share of taxes. Tax breaks to wealthier people as a strategy to improve the economy do not work and are unfair. Congress should eliminate loopholes that allow companies to dodge their tax responsibilities and change the tax code to fairly spread the cost of government across all taxpayers.

### **Trade That is Fair and Benefits**

**Workers:** Trade agreements should be periodically updated to examine how they profit large American and foreign corporations, while at the same time

ensuring that they protect workers' rights, labor standards, the environment, and public health. Future trade agreements must be negotiated to ensure that our trading partners do not undercut policies protecting American workers or the environment, and that they do not impose new costs on consumers, farmers, or businesses.

## ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ EDUCATION

### **Quality Early, Elementary, and Secondary Education for All:**

Quality education is a basic right, and a strong public education system is an essential feature of our democracy. Public education programs should be adequately funded so all students are prepared for post-secondary opportunities and civic participation. Funding should not be diverted to private school voucher programs. All children ages three and four should have access to high-quality, well-funded, early childhood programs. Good educators, support professionals, and specialized staff are essential for students to meet high academic standards, and are deserving of professional respect.

### **Access to Affordable College**

**Education:** College degrees or post-secondary certification programs are increasingly required for well-paid jobs. The high cost of these programs has resulted in staggering student loan debt or in putting a degree out of reach for many students. To reduce student debt, government policies should be established to refinance loans at the lowest rates possible, expand access to income-based repayment, and provide eligible students opportunities to attend public colleges tuition free.

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**General Information:** [info@columbiacountydemocrats.org](mailto:info@columbiacountydemocrats.org)  
**Issues Committee:** [issues@columbiacountydemocrats.org](mailto:issues@columbiacountydemocrats.org)  
**Mailing Address:** PO Box 507, Ghent, NY 12075  
**Headquarters Address:** 3 Railroad Ave, Chatham, NY 12037  
**Website:** [www.columbiacountydemocrats.org](http://www.columbiacountydemocrats.org)  
**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/columbianydem](http://www.facebook.com/columbianydem)