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LGBT ²⁰²⁶ OUT 100 POWER LIST

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Photo by Danny Green

IT FEELS LIKE WE'RE GOING BACKWARDS ON LGBT RIGHTS

The day after Trump got re-elected in 2024, I began rationing my HIV meds until I had a two-month stash. On some level, I knew his administration would make it harder for certain kinds of people to access healthcare and that's exactly what happened. Trump already came for reproductive health care in his first term. And one of Trump's initial 2nd term priorities was to slash programs like PEPFAR, a Bush-era initiative to provide HIV meds to Africa that's credited with saving 28,000,000 lives. Closer to home, the day we went to war with Iran, nearly 20,000 HIV+ Floridians lost access to their meds because of MAGA budget priorities. Likewise, in 20 states, MAGA lawmakers are keen to limit access to the meds that prevent HIV transmission!

Trump wants to 1) control the outcome of every pregnancy in America 2) remove the tools that prevent/treat HIV and 3) deprive transgender Americans access to healthcare altogether. So, if it feels like we're going backwards on LGBT rights in America, it's because we are.

Meanwhile, in New Jersey it feels like we've been going in circles. While the landscape in NJ is certainly less dire for LGBTs than what Trump envisions, still it's complicated. In retrospect, it feels like after gay marriage arrived, many got drunk on our own success and lost the urgency that this moment requires.

Selfies with the Governor became more important than getting legislation to the Governor.

Guess who didn't stop fighting? Opponents of LGBT rights, that's who.

But here's the good news: organizations old and new are stepping up to advance the cause of LGBT liberty in NJ, and also defend and preserve our hard-earned gains.

The political action we've been waiting for (lobbying, campaigning, a PAC) has arrived and the folks at Pride Action Fund are already raising money and building the networks to protect NJ's LGBT population.

The Trans Rights Coalition of NJ was co-founded by Louise Walpin and they're eager to remind you that the T in LGBT will never be silent. TRC NJ led the charge to protect trans people (and their families) who come to NJ from red states to access reproductive or gender-affirming healthcare.

Organizations like the Atlantic County Queer Alliance, an organization dedicated to nurturing "community among South Jersey's LGBTQIA+ organizations and

individuals" is doing the work in South Jersey. HiTOPS and the Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice are both Princeton-based, but doing amazing work to affirm the entire region's LGBT community.

There is the Pride Center of New Jersey in Highland Park and so many more! The 100 (or so) names below are doing the work to protect LGBT liberty, and I hope you enjoy getting to know them and the organizations they represent!

"I think our community is in one of the largest fights we've ever been in, and what we do as a community of queer people is stand up and band together and join a movement," said Liz Schedl, Pride Action Fund co-founder.

We couldn't agree more.

In an effort to make room for new faces, we won't be including former #1's in this year's edition. Babs Siperstein (RIP) sat atop the inaugural OUT 100 Power List back in 2018. Subsequent #1's include two-time #1 Reed Gusciora, Jeannine LaRue, Andrew Bruck Rebecca Williams, and Nancy Solomon. You won't see them on this year's because (to borrow a sports metaphor) their jerseys have been retired and raised to the rafters of the Power List Hall of Fame.



*Sincerely,
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Congratulations

to all the
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Honorees!**

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1. SEAN HIGGINS



When Mikie Sherrill first ran for Congress in 2017/18, her opponent was Jay Webber, the most homophobic state lawmaker in New Jersey. The race was supposed to be a nailbiter. But when the votes were tallied, Sherrill romped, dispatching Weber by a mile. When Congresswoman Sherrill ran for Governor in 2024/25, pundits again predicted close races, both in the primary and the general elections. And once again, she handily dispatched her rivals, including Jack Chittarelli, who spent the entire campaign demonizing transgender people.

Sean Higgins was on the Sherrill Gubernatorial bandwagon every step of the way, from kickoff through election day, serving as the campaign's Communications Director. But Mr. Higgins, who was previously Ms. Sherrill's Senior Advisor in Congress, was more than just a comms guy: he was also a sounding board and confidante to Ms. Sherrill who, in the end, extended her undefeated streak, this time against an opponent who never shut up about trans people.

After the campaign, Mr. Higgins was the Spokesman for the Transition Team and (after the swearing in) he became Governor Sherrill's Communications Director and Senior Advisor.

Sean Higgins sits atop this year's Power List because of the winning message he helped to craft on the campaign trail, during the transition and as Governor Sherrill's Chief Spokesperson and Senior Advisor.

2. LAURA BUSTAMANTE



Laura Bustamante's meteoric rise to the top of New Jersey politics has been nothing short of amazing. But for anyone who knows her and her immense talents, Ms. Bustamante's ascent is no surprise.

Ms. Bustamante is currently the Chief of Staff for Jersey City Mayor James Solomon. The two go way back: Ms. Bustamante spent 4 years as then-Councilman Solomon's top lieutenant from 2018-2022.

In between stints as chief of staff, Ms. Bustamante spent 3 years with Senator Andy Kim, first as the statewide political director for Mr. Kim's Senate campaign, followed by a transformation run as U.S. Senator Kim's Deputy State Director.

"Laura was crucial in helping my office reach the most vulnerable populations across New Jersey throughout my first year in the United States Senate, and created lasting partnerships that will help our office continue delivering for all New Jerseyans for years to come," Senator Andy Kim told InsiderNJ. "I'm grateful to the foundation that Laura created for our team throughout her time as my Deputy State Director; she was a powerful voice that exemplified our mission of being an office full of public servants ready to help all of our constituents, not just the wealthy and powerful."

Ms. Bustamante is also co-founder of the Pride Action Fund a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization and political action committee (PAC) dedicated to building political power and defending LGBT rights across the Garden State.

3. DON GUARDIAN & LUANNE PETERPAUL



A very small handful* of openly LGBT candidates have ever served in the NJ General Assembly. Currently, Don Guardian and Luanne Peterpaul comprise the entire LGBT legislative state house caucus. Mr. Guardian, a third-term moderate Republican from Atlantic City, and Ms. Peterpaul, a second-term Monmouth County Democrat, are slowly working their way up the leadership ladder, giving them more tenure and more power on the committees they serve.

*This “small handful” includes Tim Euscace who was Out when he arrived. It also includes Reed Gusciora, Joe Roberts, Bill Baroni, and Hazel Gluck, whose Coming Out happened in office or shortly thereafter. Toss in Guardian and Peterpaul and that adds up to 7 openly LGBT lawmakers in NJ’s long history.

That ongoing lack of LGBT diversity among our state lawmakers is probably why pro-LGBT legislation so often languishes in Trenton.

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4. LOUISE WALPIN & MARSHA SHAPIRO



Louise Walpin and Marsha Shapiro made history as the first couple to get legally married in New Jersey history. But that's only a small part of their story.

Ms. Walpin is a media-savvy, results-driven workhorse whose contributions to Queer Liberty are undeniable. Once the face of New Jersey's battle for gay marriage, Louise Walpin is currently one of the most prominent voices fighting the anti-trans rhetoric inspired by the White House.

An advanced practice nurse by trade, Ms. Walpin combined her personal and professional stories to become one of the most effective and consequential LGBT activists in New Jersey history. Currently, Ms. Walpin is the co-lead of WADEIn NJ, a grassroots movement born from the urgent need to protect our democracy and uplift the voices too often pushed to the margins.

Louise Walpin's longevity as a leader in the activist game is made possible by the support of her wife Marsha Shapiro whose (relatively) lower-key approach to activism complements her wife's more firebrand personality. If Louise is at the microphone speaking truth to power, Marsha is probably canvassing the crowd for signatures. And that's what makes them such a good pair, both in activism and in life.

5. AXEL TORRES MARRERO & KATHY AHEARN-O'BRIEN



Axel Torres Marrero and Kathy Ahearn-O'Brien have long been the most influential HIV activists in New Jersey and the region.

The longtime leader at Hyacinth, NJ's largest HIV service organization, Ms. Ahearn-O'Brien has devoted her life to ending HIV/AIDS in New Jersey. Mr. Torres Marrero is currently Hyacinth's senior director of policy, prevention and harm reduction.

Hyacinth's dynamic duo notched a major victory this year spearheading legislation to expand access to medicine known as PrEP and PEP to prevent transmission of STDs including HIV. Yes, you read that right! We have the tools to eradicate HIV and AIDS in New Jersey.

Previous legislative victories for Mr. Torres Marrero and Ms. Ahearn-O'Brien (and their team at Hyacinth) include expanded needle exchange access and decriminalizing HIV transmission, overturning a law that criminalized the sex lives of people with HIV.

6. REGINALD “REGGIE” BLEDSOE



Reggie Bledsoe is the Director of the Essex County Office of LGBTQ+ Affairs, where he advocates for the advancement of LGBTQ residents in Essex County, population 865,000. A trusted lieutenant of Essex Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Mr. Bledsoe uses his considerable clout and platform for the betterment of LGBTQ people well beyond his home base in Newark.

This past year, Mr. Bledsoe has prioritized the fightback against federal intrusion into trans healthcare. He also teamed up with his colleagues in Bergen, Mercer, and Union Counties to create the New Jersey Association of County LGBTQ Offices.

Mr. Bledsoe is also a former member of the Newark Board of Education, New Jersey's largest school district.



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CONGRATULATIONS

TO THOSE RECOGNIZED ON THE INSIDER NJ LIST HERE—AND TO ALL THE ORGANIZERS, VOLUNTEERS, AND LEADERS WHOSE DAILY, OFTEN UNSEEN WORK, DRIVES OUR PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT FORWARD.

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7. ED POTOSNAK



Ed Potosnak was Governor Mikie Sherrill's pick to lead the New Jersey Department of the Environment making him the Garden State's most influential policy maker on issues affecting the environment. Prior to joining the Sherrill Administration, Mr. Potosnak was president of the League of Conservation Voters who went all in for the new governor.

Mr. Potosnak is also a Councilmember in Franklin Township (Somerset) where he previously served as president and member of the school board.

"Ed Potosnak is a proven leader who will be critical in our efforts to protect New Jersey's residents from flooding and extreme weather and remediate contaminated sites. He will bring his experience as a licensed contractor to the department to prioritize cutting through red tape and reducing permitting times. Ed has a strong track record of bringing people to the table to develop solutions that work best for the communities they serve. I look forward to working with Ed, energy and business professionals, and advocates to protect our environment while growing our economy," said Gov. Sherrill.

8. JACKIE CORNELL



One of the most tenured and well-respected political operatives in the game, Jackie Cornell is currently Vice President of Government Relations and Public Affairs at MikeWorldWide, the venerable, politically-influential communications firm, where Ms. Cornell leads MWW's Trenton office.

She previously served as Deputy Director for Human Services for Mercer Council where her brief included mental health, addiction, homelessness, food insecurity, and LGBTQ affairs.

Ms. Cornell's political history is immense, including (but not limited to) the Obama Campaign (where she was NJ state director) followed by her stint as Principal Deputy Commissioner for NJ's Department of Health and her many leadership positions at Planned Parenthood along the way.

Ms. Cornell was also Regional Director for the US Department of Health and Human Services where she worked to implement Obamacare, dropping the number of uninsured in America by tens of millions.

9. BEN DZIOBEK



Ben Dziobek was 13 when he his Uncle Frank died of AIDS-related complications. Mr. Dziobek is too young to remember the darkest days of the AIDS crisis, but his spirit of activism is very much in the mold of ACTUP, an organization of boundlessly courageous and brilliant AIDS activists who channeled their rage into political action.

Closer to home, Mr. Dziobek founded Climate Revolution Action Network (CRAN) to fight climate change with the same ferocity that propelled AIDS activists. This generation has their existential crises to manage, notably a climate on fire, mostly because of companies who got rich by treating the air, land, and waterways like a trashcan. Mr. Dziobek's on a mission to make those polluters pay for the mess they made.

Earlier this year, Mr. Dziobek teamed up with More Perfect Union, a non-profit Emmy-winning newsroom where he's their Campus Community Lead to support and amplify the messages of student activist across the county.

Mr. Dziobek is also a founding member of GenZ for NJ, a PAC devoted to electing the next generation of progressive-minded leaders in New Jersey.

If you see Ben Dziobek in Trenton's halls of power, pay close attention and you'll probably learn something from Mr. Dziobek's brand of media-savvy message discipline.

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10. DAVE PARANO



A longtime New Jersey campaign maestro, Dave Parano helped Governor Mike Sherrill dominate the competition in both rounds of last year's gubernatorial showdown. In doing so, Mr. Parano boosted the prospects of LGBT candidates up and down the ticket all over the Garden State, something he's done numerous times in his long and storied career.

As this went to press, we learned that Dave Parano is the new Executive Director of the NJ Democratic State Committee, a leadership position he was born for.

11. MAGGIE MORAN



Maggie Moran is CEO and Founder of Moxie Strategies a public relations and government affairs firm with New Jersey roots and nationwide reach. You're hard pressed to find a firm more politically connected than Moxie Strategies.

A perennial contender for the top spot on any power list, this year Ms. Moran landed at #11 to make room for up-and-comers, something she's done for the duration of her remarkable careers.

12. KARI OSMOND & JULIA FAHL



The consummate power couple, Kari Osmond and Julia Fahl are two of the brightest lights on NJ's political candelabra. After a long run as Chief of Staff in Trenton (for Reed Gusciora) and later in Washington DC for Bonnie Watson Coleman (where she was one of the only lesbian Chiefs of Staff on The Hill) Ms. Osmond is now the associate VP for Government and Community Relations at The College of New Jersey, her undergrad alma mater.

The former mayor of Lambertville, Ms. Fahl is the Director at Archer Public Affairs, one of the largest, most influential lobbying firms in New Jersey. Ms. Fahl also served on Governor Mikie Sherrill's transition team, a testament to their shared progressive vision for New Jersey.

13. LIZ SCHEDL



Liz Schedl is Executive Director of the Hudson Pride Center, an organization that's bloomed into a regional powerhouse under Ms. Schedl's leadership. Equally comfortable in the activist trenches as she is in New Jersey's halls of power, Ms. Schedl has expanded HPC's influence well beyond its original Jersey City footprint.

Throughout her tenure, Ms. Schedl has been instrumental in raising awareness about LGBTQ+ issues and expanding the Center's services and cultural programs for LGBTQ+ individuals of all ages in Hudson County. Her efforts have also significantly increased diverse funding for the Center through new grant opportunities and fundraising, expanding the reach and mission of Hudson Pride.

Earlier this year marked the formation of the Pride Acton Fund, an organization devoted to defending LGBT rights and strengthening our collective voices in Trenton. Ms. Schedl was named their Executive Director which means you'll be seeing much more of her lobbying skills on display.

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14. JEREMY FEIGENBAUM



New Jersey's inaugural Solicitor General, Jeremy Feigenbaum is the top appellate lawyer for our state in legal cases, mostly at the US Supreme Court. Most recently Mr. Feigenbaum prevailed in the case of Trump vs CASA, which addressed whether lower-court judges have authority to block the enforcement of policies nationwide. A former clerk for US Supreme Court Associate Justice Elena Kagan, Mr. Feigenbaum also argued (and won) the case that untangled NJ from the Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor.

Former NJ Senator Loretta Weinberg said he is the best friend we've ever had in the legislature. "I've known Jeremy since he started as an intern in my legislative office back in 2008," Ms. Weinberg told InsiderNJ. "He uniquely combines brilliance, great integrity, and passion. What a privilege to watch this young man advocate for all of us."

15. JENNIFER WILLIAMS



The first transgender municipal/city council member in New Jersey's almost-400-year history, Jennifer Williams represents Trenton's North Ward with grace and high moral and ethical standards.

The following tribute was written by Micah Rasmussen:

Were it up to both of the state's major political parties, Jennifer Williams would never have been elected to public office at all. The fact that she won in spite of them says everything about her resolve and commitment to serving the city in which she grew up. That's right—the state's first transgender elected official is a member of the city council of Trenton. And a Republican.

Although Trenton's elections are non-partisan, Democratic leaders would prefer to see a party faithful in Jennifer's North Ward council seat. Unfortunately, Republican leaders have routinely denied her resources, too. But that's not to say Jennifer is without allies. She's managed to develop close working relationships with Mayor Reed Gusciora and her council colleagues.

They respect her effective determination to listen to her constituents and represent their concerns. After just four years on council, Jennifer has a lot to show for it: the dedication of a portion of local cannabis tax revenue for urban health disparities, a camera ordinance to make the areas surrounding the city's bars safer, more than 700 broken street light calls responded to, and a memorial of the families affected by Trenton's racial riots of 1968, helping her city come to terms with some of its less celebrated history.

16. CATHY RENNA



A legend in our midst, Cathy Renne has spent the past 30 years helping to craft a fairer, less homophobic media landscape in America. Ms. Renne has long played an outsized role determining how America sees and perceives LGBT people. You could call Ms. Renne the PR agent for Queer Liberty in America and that's only scratching the surface: from the AIDS crisis to the Matthew Sheppard murder, the fight for marriage equality, and upending "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," Ms. Renne has led with conviction and moral clarity.

Ms. Renne is still driving the debate for LGBT rights at her firm Target Cue and as Communications Director for the National LGBTQ Task Force.



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17. VINCENT SOLOMENO



Vincent Solomeno is Governor Sherrill's pick to lead New Jersey's Department of Veterans Affairs. A Battalion Executive Officer in the NJ Army National Guard, Mr. Solomeno previously served the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs in various capacities, a testament to his unimpeachable reputation and high moral and ethical standards. Mr. Solomeno was still in college when Congress overturned "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" legislation, paving the way for LGBT patriots to serve openly. At the time, LGBT advocates predicted it would take a generation for those newly-minted gay and lesbian service members to demonstrate their courage and competency to work their way up the leadership ladder within the military. Vincent Solomeno embodies the promise of that prediction.

And America is fairer and safer because of it.

18. CJ GRIFFIN



CJ Griffin is a partner at Pashman Stein Walder Hayden P.C. and has served as director of the firm's Justice Gary S. Stein Public Interest Center since the Center's founding in 2019.

A self-professed "media and public interest lawyer," Griffin is one of the most talented and influential good-government watchdog lawyers in New Jersey. When former Governor Phil Murphy signed legislation to significantly weaken NJ's public records law (aka OPRA), lawmakers buried their heads ignoring CJ's warnings (many of which have subsequently come true) that killing OPRA erodes government and police transparency in New Jersey.

As usual, we should have listened to CJ Griffin.

19. AARON POTENZA



A tribute by Louise Walpin:

Some of the most consequential advances in LGBTQ+ equality are driven by people whose names are rarely in headlines, but whose work reshapes lives. Aaron Potenza is one of those people. He played a pivotal role in drafting and advancing policies and legislation including, but not limited to, the Student Guidance model policy, LGBTQ+ curriculum legislation, Babs Siperstein Name Change Law, and parity-based insurance coverage for gender affirming care. Aaron is the founder and principal of Potenza Public Strategies consulting firm, which specializes in policy research and analysis, as well as legislative and electoral campaigns for our community. His past positions include Policy Director for GSE and Manager of Strategic Initiatives at the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Violence. He has also served as Chair of the NJ Transgender Equality Task Force. Despite his immense contributions, Aaron remains humble, always emphasizing teamwork and coalition building. He is a devoted husband and loving father to five-year-old twins. Aaron embodies the spirit of ethical leadership and community services and continues in the tradition of his transgender ancestors in being on the forefront of queer liberation. He is truly our unsung hero.

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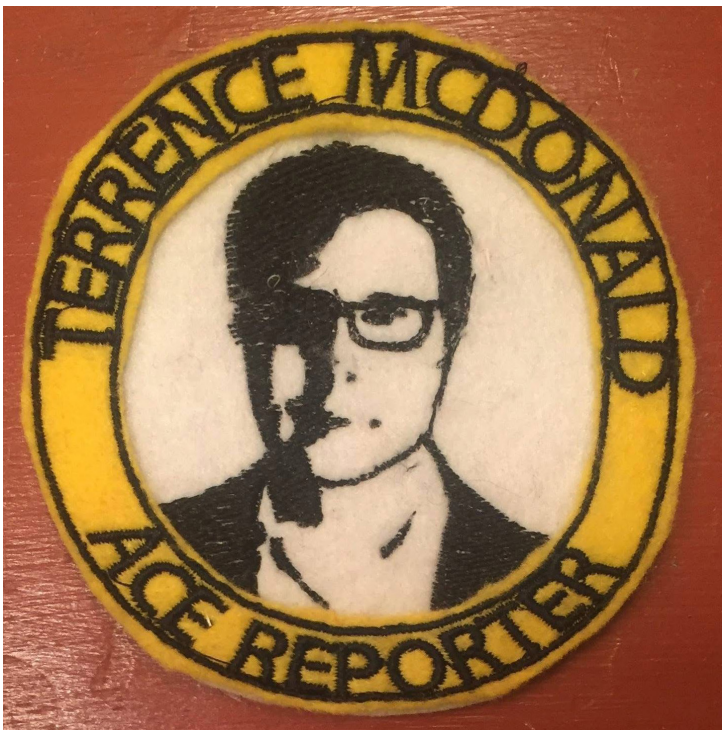
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20. ALONZO S. BLALOCK, A.K.A. PRINCE DEREK DOLL



Alonzo S. Blalock currently runs Newark Pride, one of New Jersey's largest LGBT events. A natural-born consensus-builder, Mr. Blalock is poised for greatness in politics and the arts, where he also strives for greatness. Mr. Blalock was charming and modest about landing on everyone's short list to become Garden State Equality's next executive director. But let's be honest: Mr. Blalock's modesty and restraint (along with his many other considerable talents) is exactly why he was on the shortlist to begin with.

21. TERRENCE T. MCDONALD



One of the most talented and tenacious political reporters in New Jersey history, Terrence McDonald has won so many press awards, that we lost count at 26. We love it when Mr. McDonald, the editor at New Jersey Monitor, uses his decades of experience to ensure sunshine reaches the darkest crevices on NJ politics. After years of reporting just the facts, Mr. McDonald occasionally churns out an opinionated Op-Ed that puts NJ's sometimes dark and farcical chaos into proper perspective.

22. VINCENT VERTUCCIO



A special tribute by Louise Walpin:

Vincent Vertuccio is a New York and Washington, DC-based longtime political operative and organizer, as well as a member of the queer community. Vincent currently serves as a senior strategist for Dr. Adam Hamawy's campaign. Though he describes himself as "a guy in the background," he has helped countless organizations and campaigns strengthen communications, pressure lawmakers, execute nonviolent direct action, and achieve key electoral victories. Since 2025, he and Ella Weber have co-owned Egret Strategies, a full-service political consultancy servicing campaigns, PACs, non-profits, and more. Vincent's experience includes work on progressive local, state, and federal campaigns, including those of Jamaal Bowman and Cori Bush, as well as serving as a communications staffer for Congressman Bowman on Capitol Hill. Vincent has appeared in major national media outlets including the NY Times, The Hill, Politico and more. Vincent's goal is dedicated to fighting for progressive change to combat the rise of fascism.

CO-22. SAM PARKER



Sam Parker was the Chief of Staff for Lt. Governor Tahesha Way and longtime Deputy Chief of Staff for Governor Phil Murphy. Ms. Parker is also a commissioner for the New Jersey Sports & Exposition Authority.

23. KATE TRIGGIANO



It's one thing to wear this many hats. It's quite another to wear them with such aplomb as Kate Triggiano, Deputy Mayor of Red Bank, where she's also a volunteer firefighter and the Democratic municipal chair. Ms. Triggiano also serves on the Advisory Board of American Friends Service Committee's NJ Immigrant Rights Program where she does the Lord's work protecting our immigrant neighbors from Trump's wanton cruelty. A happy warrior by nature, Ms. Triggiano's devotion to community is evidenced by the annual Red Bank pride event she organizes.



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24. BRIELLE WINSLOW-MAJETTE



Brielle Winslow-Majette is the acting Executive Director at Garden State Equality, the largest, most storied LGBT organization in New Jersey. Ms. Winslow-Majette has a lot of the plate and she navigates GSE out of the shadow of her predecessor. It's a tall task and we all need her to succeed.

25. MICO LUCIDE



Mico is the co-founder and Director of the Atlantic County Queer Alliance, an organization dedicated to nurturing “community among South Jersey’s LGBTQIA+ organizations and individuals. Central to this effort is establishing partnerships with new and existing LGBTQIA+ organizations, which allows for cross-collaboration, creates more opportunity to reach the broader community, and ensures responsible stewardship of resources.”

26. FRANCELINE EHRET



Fran Ehret is one of the most venerable and powerful Union Labor figures in New Jersey history. Currently the communications director of CWA-NJ, Ms Ehret, shown here with Governor Sherrill, is the scion of legendary Union leader Frank Forst, who spent 35 years as VP of New Jersey AFL-CIO.

27. ED WENGRYN



Ed Wengryn is New Jersey's Secretary of Agriculture. A holdover from the Murphy Administration, Mr. Wengryn was tapped by NJ Governor Mikie Sherrill for another stint.

"I am pleased to have Ed Wengryn continue to serve as the Secretary of Agriculture in my administration," said Gov. Sherrill. "Ed has a strong track record strengthening New Jersey's agricultural economy, supporting local farmers, and expanding access to locally grown produce. I look forward to working together with Ed and the entire Board so the Department of Agriculture can continue to help combat food insecurity for New Jersey families, empower local farmers, and increase production to lower

grocery costs for our state. We're known as the Garden State for our tomatoes, blueberries, corn, cranberries, and so much more – I am excited to have Edward leading the charge to continue that legacy."

28. ELVIN MONTERO



There aren't many out LGBTQ leaders who are also Latino serving in executive roles on West State Street, but Elvin Montero is among them. He serves as Deputy Executive Director of the Chemistry Council of New Jersey, a leading business advocacy organization representing the state's \$16 billion chemical sector, recently recognized by NJ ELEC among New Jersey's most active advocacy organizations.

Elvin has built a reputation for connecting decision-makers with LGBTQ leaders while supporting organizations and initiatives that strengthen communities. In 2025, Governor Phil Murphy appointed him to serve on the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission Board following confirmation by the State Senate. In 2026, Trenton Mayor Reed Gusciora reappointed him to the Capital City Redevelopment Corporation, where he serves as Vice Chair. Active in civic and political affairs, Elvin also serves on the Executive Board of the Mercer County Democratic Committee and served as Vice Chair of the Mercer County LGBTQ Democratic Caucus.

The background of the entire page is a dense field of stars in various sizes, colored in a rainbow gradient from red at the top to purple at the bottom. The stars are arranged in a pattern that creates a sense of depth and movement.

Congratulations

TO ALL OF THOSE ON THE
LGBTQ POWER LIST!

*“ Our power is not just in being seen,
but in standing together with pride. ”*



PARANO & ASSOCIATES

David Parano

29. ROBT MARTIN SEDA-SCHREIBER



Robt Martin Seda-Schreiber is the proudly bisexual founder & Chief Activist at the Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice, an anti-racist community activist hub at the forefront of intersectional social and racial justice and Queer advocacy. Before establishing the BRCSJ, he created his first non-profit, the Creatures of Awareness Theatre Co. raising money for AIDS support & HIV testing. He then served as a schoolteacher during which he forged the first Gay Straight Alliance in a NJ middle school.

Mr. Martin embodies Bayard Rustin's conviction that "the proof that one truly believes is in action" as he has been at the forefront of intersectional social justice & queer advocacy for decades & continues his meaningful mission at BRCSJ HQ in Princeton, NJ.

Mr. Martin has received numerous accolades including the Martin Luther King Jr. Champion for Justice; Fulbright MF Scholar to Japan; two Senate Proclamations recognizing his service to the community; the NEA's "Social Justice Activist of the Year" and the 2023 Russ Berrie Making a Difference Award.

30. PETRA GASKINS



The Chief of Staff for Senator Joe Cryan, Petra Gaskins is also a second-term Councilwoman in New Brunswick, NJ. Ms. Gaskins had this to say after becoming New Brunswick Council Vice President:

“Beyond grateful for this next chapter in my life, serving as Council Vice President. I am beyond grateful to my colleagues for their vote of confidence, and I want to give a special shout out to every city employee that makes the city run. Your efforts do not go unrecognized. And lastly to our residents, I promise to continue doing my best to serve you and to work to make our city better.”

CO-30. FRANK JOSEPH MORANO

A special tribute by Somerset Commissioner Melonie Marano

Frank J. Morano graduated in 2006 from Seton Hall Law and spent almost a decade of his career with the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office and as a Deputy Attorney General. After entering private practice, Frank got himself heavily involved with the community. He has since served as Chair of the LGBTQ Rights Section of the State Bar Association where he continues to serve as a trustee. He is currently a Director At Large and founding member of QLaw, an affinity bar associated launched in October 2025. He serves as Chair of the Somerset County LGBTQ Democratic Caucus and Vice Chair of the Somerset County LGBTQ+ Advisory Board for the County Commissioners. He was formerly a member of the LGBTQ Outreach Board at the State Theatre of New Jersey, and volunteered his time helping our transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming members of our community with name changes through the Trans Affirming Alliance. In addition to his busy law practice with the firm of Flanagan, Barone, & O'Brien in Bernardsville, he spends any free time he can muster fighting for the rights of the community, even if it is helping one person at a time. Frank works hard to make sure all are treated equally, both under the law, and in their everyday lives.

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31. ANYONE CLOSETED

The closet is a lonely place to dwell.

At a recent Trenton rally for trans rights, Rev. Abigail King of Newark's Episcopal Archdiocese had this to say about 1) life in the closet and 2) those who put us there:

“Those that would oppress and persecute our siblings, our sisters and our brothers, they bear only thorns, thorns that are wet with blood. Not just the blood of people who have faced violence in this atmosphere of hate! Not just the blood of those who've been overcome by despair and harm! But the blood that comes from souls and lives that have been diminished and crushed inside closets that are too small! Every closet door that an LGBT person has been forced behind has blood seeping out from underneath it, the blood that comes with a wounded soul.”

The closet will always be a corrosive and lonely place for LGBT people. We bear witness to that loneliness and pain here.



32. JEANNE LOCICERO



Jeanne LoCicero is one of the most gifted lawyers and free speech advocates in America, traits that serve her fiercely in her role as Legal Director for the America Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey (ACLU NJ). Ms. LoCicero recently received the New Jersey State Bar's Hollenbeck Award, a tribute to her "diligence, competence, and dedication" to the legal profession.

CO-32. PERRY FARHAT



Perry Farhat is Director of Diversity and Inclusion at RWJBarnabas Health System, one of the largest in New Jersey. Mr. Farhat is also the Administrative Director of the PROUD Gender Center of New Jersey and the Babs Siperstein PROUD Center, the first primary care facility in New Jersey specializing in the health care needs of the LGBTQIA+ community.

33. DEAN DAFIS



Dean Dafis is the newly-minted Deputy Chief of Staff at the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs where he previously directed the agency's Division of Housing and Community Resources. In his new role, Mr. Dafis is keen to embrace Gov. Sherril's commitment to strengthening communities through information, innovation, access, opportunity, efficiency, and accountability. Mr. Dafis is also a longtime Maplewood councilman where he previously served as mayor. Mr. Dafis came up short in his run to fill Mikie Sherrill's open Congressional seat, but along the way, he impressed the hell out of a lot of people.

34. DANIELLA MENDEZ



A second-term Councilmember for Dover, NJ's First Ward, Daniella Mendez has been breaking barriers and showing the way her entire career. One of only three openly transgender municipal lawmakers in New Jersey history, Ms. Mendez previously served on Dover's Board of Education.

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35. NEIL ABADIE



Neil Abadie is the co-founder of Pride Action Fund, where he serves as vice-chair.

Pride Action Fund is “a new nonprofit advocacy group aimed at building a powerful voice on queer issues in response to the Trump administration’s aggression toward the community and Democrats who want to blame trans people for the party’s electoral losses,” in the words of gay journalist Terrence McDonald.

Driven by a deep commitment to LGBTQ+ equality and educational equity, Mr. Abadie has devoted significant energy to political advocacy and community leadership. He served eight years on the board of Hudson Pride Center, New Jersey’s largest LGBTQ+ center, and was Ward E Captain for the Hudson County Democratic Organization from 2018 to 2021. He also co-chaired LGBTQ for Biden’s North Jersey team.

36. SHAWN LATOURETTE



A tribute by Ben Dziobek

Shawn LaTourette made history as the first openly gay man confirmed to a New Jersey Governor’s Cabinet, but the significance of that moment was never symbolic alone. From the start, his nomination was met with open homophobia, disinformation, and abuse, including efforts to delegitimize his appointment as “pandering” and coordinated attacks that targeted him and his family. Rather than shrinking under that pressure, LaTourette understood what was truly at stake. His identity was not a qualification, but it was also not a disqualification, and the responsibility he carried was to prove that LGBTQ+ leaders belong at the highest levels of government.

That reality shaped how he led. Serving in a political environment that has not always been welcoming, LaTourette’s visibility mattered not as symbolism, but as evidence that LGBTQ+ leaders can govern with credibility, authority, and excellence.

As Commissioner of Environmental Protection, LaTourette delivered that excellence. He led major advances in environmental justice, climate resilience, and water infrastructure, earning trust from advocates, labor, and communities historically excluded from power. His tenure showed that when leaders from marginalized communities are given the opportunity to serve, they not only rise to the moment but expand who is protected, who is heard, and who benefits from government.

37. RUEBENA SPENCE & MADELINE GALE



Ruebena Spence and Madeline Gale helped to co-found Out Montclair, “a nonprofit organization created to raise awareness and provide support and solidarity for the LGBTQIA+ community of Montclair and surrounding area.”

Out Montclair also organizes and hosts one of NJ’s largest (and increasingly influential) PRIDE celebrations.

A power couple as activists and in life, Ms. Spence and Ms. Gale have both been at this for very a long time. A veteran of ACTUP, Ms. Gale served on the planning committee for the 1993 March on Washington (GOOGLE IT!) and the NOW Women’s Marches in 1992 and 1995. An activist veteran in her own right, Ms. Spence was a key force behind the inaugural Newark LGBTQ+ BIPOC Film Festival.

(NOTE: As this went to press, Out Montclair hit some turbulence and had to postpone this year’s event. We’re keeping an eye out and our fingers crossed!)



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38. AMY QUINN



We're still hoping to one day call her "Madame Mayor" (She's running! Donate! Volunteer!) But in the meantime, Asbury Park's Deputy Mayor Quinn is working overtime to make Asbury Park thrive. As Deputy Mayor, Ms. Quinn has focused her efforts on affordable housing and public safety. Ms. Quinn will long be synonymous with Asbury Park, a town whose renaissance she toiled long and hard to deliver.

39. ANDREW FENWICK



Already a stalwart, Andrew Fenwick is the chief of staff for Assemblywoman Katie Brennan, one of the most pro-LGBT state lawmakers in New Jersey history.

"Andrew is a true public servant and burgeoning operator who wants New Jersey to be an even better place," Assemblywoman Brennan said. "He throws himself into a challenge. And he's a fierce advocate for the community."

40. JO MILLER



Jo Miller is a 2nd-term councilperson from Woodbury, population 10,555, where they represent the First Ward. Ms. Miller is also the first openly transgender elected official in South Jersey history.

41. MIGUEL RIVERA-RIOS



Miguel Rivera-Rios is President of The Pride Center of New Jersey in Highland Park. Previously, Mr. Rivera-Rios served as Pride Center's volunteer coordinator. The Pride Center provides a safe and welcoming space for all individuals who identify as LGBTQ to find support, educational tools, health and education resources, and social opportunities within a community of acceptance. Comprehensive programming in support of this mission includes lesbian, gay, trans and family resources, social groups and free HIV testing.

42. BRIAN HACKETT



Brian Hackett is one of the most influential animal rights activists in New Jersey history. Currently the Director of Government Relations at Associated Humane Societies, Mr. Hackett is often seen in Trenton's halls of power working to protect livestock and companion animals as well as wildlife and their habitat.

43. KADIJAH SILVER



A special tribute by Louise Walpin:

Khadijah M. Silver, Esq (they/them) is the rare leader whose brilliance is matched only by their humanity. Over the past six months, I have had the privilege of getting to know Khadijah as an extraordinary advocate, talented attorney, and trusted friend. Their tireless work with legislators and stakeholders has been instrumental in advancing critical legislation in NJ to protect reproductive healthcare, including care for transgender patients and protection for their providers, which had not moved in the prior 2 years.

Khadijah is currently the Director of Gender Justice and Health Equity at Lawyers For Good Government (L4GG). They have more than 25 years of experience fighting systemic injustice through coalition building, communications, law, journalism, and grassroots leadership. Khadijah previously served as Communications Director at Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund. As a health law and policy journalist, they have bylines in numerous national publications. With degrees in law, public health, and theological studies, they embody service in every sense. Khadijah is an extraordinary human being whose compassion and integrity inspire everyone fortunate enough to know them.

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44. EILEEN DELLA VOLLE



An Ocean County stalwart, Eillen Della Volle served Governor Mikie Sherrill's transition team on the transportation committee. That was a testament to Ms. Della Volle's decades-long career in government service in New Jersey. No stranger to the halls of power, Ms. Della Volle was selected by the Kamala Harris for President Campaign to be Ocean County's delegate to the Democratic National Convention. She currently serves on Brick Township's Board of Adjustment, a quasi-judicial body that handles zoning issues in New Jersey's 13th most populous town and home to nearly 74,000 people.

45. DANIEL J. WEISS



Dan Weiss is Councilmember in West Windsor, population 30,000, in Mercer County. Mr. Weiss is an active booster to HiTOPS, a Princeton-based organization devoted to empowering young LGBTs with sex education and social support.

In this environment, protecting LGBT kids from things like addiction and HIV is a powerful and defiant political gesture. That's what Mr. Weiss and his friend at HiTOPS are doing on a daily basis.

46. EVAN PHALON



Evan Phalon was part of the Ocean Democrats for Progress slate that came up short in their effort to oust the establishment leadership and take over the Democratic party in one of New Jersey's fastest-growing regions. Over 60% of Ocean County's Democratic committee seats remain vacant, and today, there are only 8 elected Democrats in 3 towns in all of Ocean County, which is something Mr. Phalon and his crew were eager to address and amend. Nonetheless, the establishment prevailed. A Beachwood Democrat, Phalon works as a public affairs and social impact consultant focused on government relations and global sustainable development. Locally, he has spearheaded the Ocean County Democrats LGBTQ+ Caucus and Toms River Pride Festival.

47. ALEX AMBROSE



Alex Ambrose is a Policy Analyst at New Jersey Policy Perspective, a progressive-minded think tank with considerable sway in Trenton.

Ms. Ambrose is NJPP's first climate and transportation policy analyst where she helped pass record funding for NJ Transit, secure protections against higher electric bills, and hold corporations accountable for freight rail incidents. Just as likely to roast a politician on Twitter/X as she is to show up to testify on a bill with data-driven research, Ms. Ambrose is known for her social media presence and her ability to break down complex ideas into digestible and accessible content. In fact, NJPP's short vertical videos, which she frequently presents, received two national awards for outstanding video content. A proud queer woman, you'll find Ms. Ambrose serving fierce testimony and mesmerizing in Trenton's halls of power.

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48. ALLISON BLACKSTOCK



A Red Bank native and 2010 Naval Academy grad, Allison Blackstock is communications director for the 11th Legislative District. Ms. Blackstock's pivotal role in last year's NJ Victory Campaign helped propel NJ Governor Mikie Sherrill to a thrilling landslide!

By all accounts, Ms. Blackwood is a political star on the rise!

49. JARED LAUTZ



One of the most trusted voices in Bergen County politics, Jared Lautz was recently appointed to the role of Deputy County Administrator. Mr. Lautz has worked for Bergen County Executive Jim Tedesco and the County Commissioners for over 15 years, working to become an expert on how Bergen County Government can best serve all 960k who call Bergen County home.

50. FRANK MAHOOD



A tribute by Robt Martin:

I often joke that the fabulous Frank Mahood is who I want to be if I ever grow up... At the spry age of 87, Frank serves as one of our most dedicated (& debonair!) Queer Safe-Space Hosts at Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice HQ where he shares his mad art skills as our in-house graphic designer.

Even more inspirationally, this cat has been on the forefront of the struggle for LGBTQIA+ rights since its very inception. He fought for all of us to have the freedom that he himself was denied growing up. A founding member of Gay People Princeton, one of New Jersey's first gay rights organizations, he produced a documentary film with our Center to share this heretofore lost piece of our history.

Still representing in fabulous fashion, Frank (See pic, left) & his partner of 40+ years, Chet Kabara, show up & glow up at LGBTQIA+ events dressed alike & serve every year as quintessential Queer Icons at our BRCSJ Princeton Pride Parade & After-Party.

Frank is the epitome of an extraordinary trailblazer & now in his retirement serves as an even more inspirational role model who we all aspire to be!

51. KATE OKESON



Kate Okeson's contributions to LGBT liberty are immense and if we're being honest, somewhat underrated, especially given her integrity and longevity in the game. A teacher by trade, Ms. Okeson is currently the Executive Director of the Advisory Commission on Advancing LGBTQIA+ Youth Equity and Inclusion at the NJ Department Ed. Ms. Okeson has spent her entire professional life working to make New Jersey schools a safe place for LGBT students.

We can debate library books and school curricula till the cows come home but this much we know: LGBT kids are more vulnerable to drugs and suicide and bullying than other students and that makes Ms. Okeson's work invaluable and lifesaving.

52. RICKY SUTA



Ricky Suta began his political career on the journalist track working for NJ Globe, but it wasn't long before Mr. Suta hopped on Andy Kim's Senate bandwagon where he helped to propel Mr. Kim's historic victory.

An expert on housing policy and consumer protection, Mr. Suta currently works in Senator Kim's DC office doing communication and policy work for the South Jersey Senator who's shaping up to be one of the most transformational and influential politicians in NJ history.

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53. KIM TAYLOR



Service is in Kim Taylor's blood.

A newly-minted Board Member at the Capital Area YMCA, Ms. Taylor also serves on the Discipline Oversight Committee of the Supreme Court of New Jersey, an 11-member body appointed by the court to oversee attorney ethics in New Jersey.

An elder stateswoman of Mercer County politics, Ms. Taylor spent nearly 12 years as a Trenton Housing Authority Commissioner followed by a 15-year stint on the Lawrence Township Planning Board.

54. PAMELA RENEE



A Monmouth County stalwart, Pamela Renee is currently serving her 3rd consecutive three-year term on the Neptune City Council where she has served her neighbors with honor and distinction for nearly a decade.

55. LESLIE FARBER



Leslie Farber is one of the best, most politically connected lawyers in New Jersey. Ms. Farber serves on the Essex County LGBTQ Advisory Board where she previously served as co-chair.

The first chairperson of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights Section of the New Jersey State Bar Association, Ms. Farber also served on the Board of Directors for OUT Montclair.

56. PETER FRYCKI & MARIA “SAM” MARTINO



Peter is the owner/publisher and Maria Martino, is editor at OUT IN JERSEY, both online AND a colorful and glossy monthly dedicated to news, politics, and culture relevant to NJ's vibrant LGBT community.

Still indefatigable after all these years. Peter and Maria have been going strong and hitting deadlines since 2002.

57. GUS PENARANDA



With the entire planet gripped with World Cup Fever, it's good time to celebrate New Jersey's Gus Penaranda's commitment to bring the so-called Beautiful Game of soccer/football to the LGBT community. Few have done more than Mr. Penaranda to increase opportunities for LGBT athletes in all sport.

58. RYAN DUBICKI



A lifelong New Jerseyan, Ryan Dubicki is the Elections Researcher at the Associated Press where he studies the trends on how people vote. We're not here to plug anyone's Twitter handle, but don't wait until election season to follow him there with @DubickiRyan.

As this went to press, Mr. Dubicki got a promotion to AP's Washington DC. bureau.

AMERICA AT A CROSSROADS: STEVE ADUBATO IN CONVERSATION WITH U.S. SENATOR CORY BOOKER



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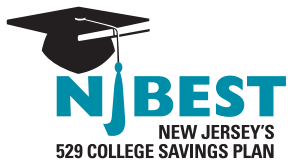


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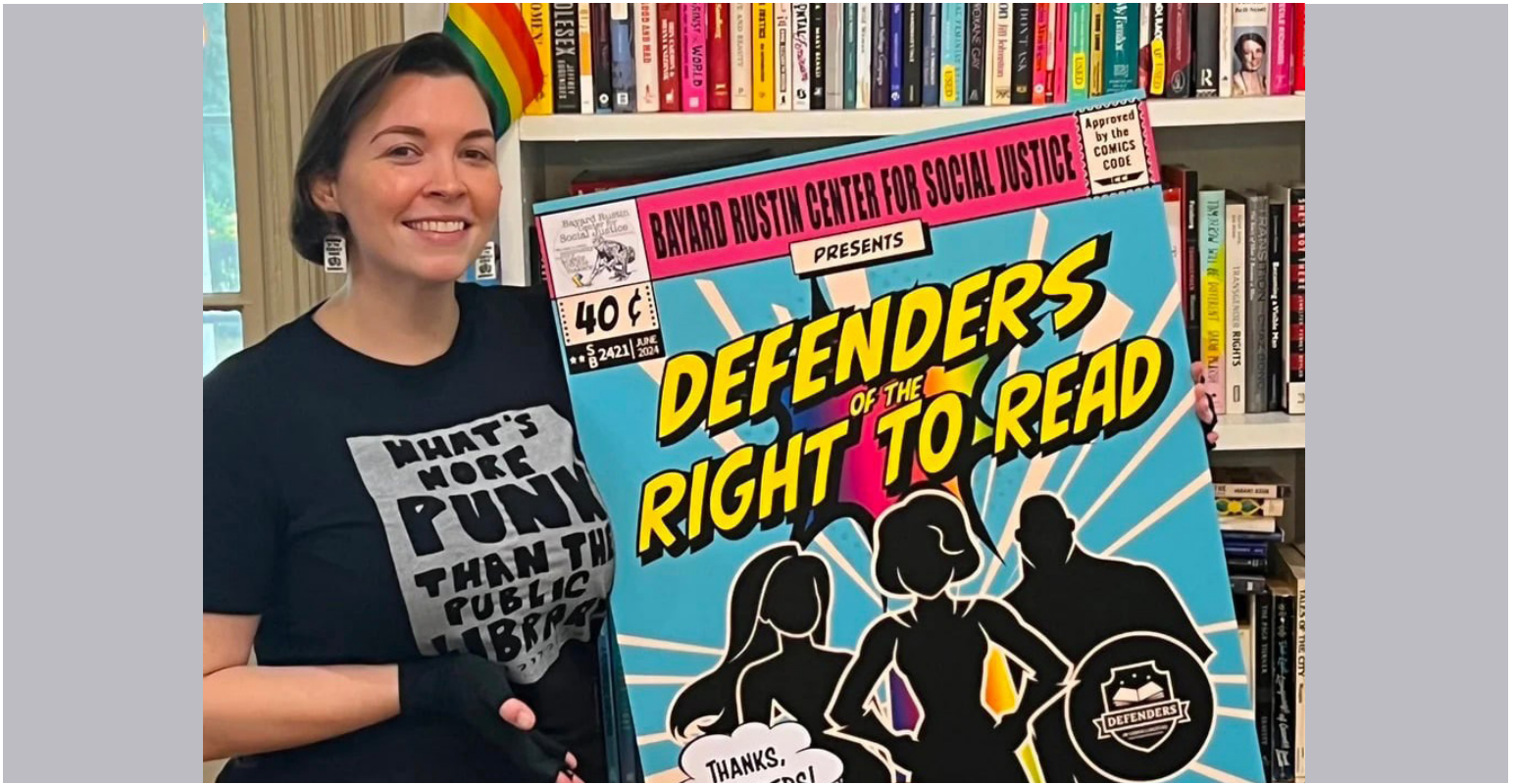


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59. LIZ BEGONIS



A tribute by Robt Martin:

Liz Begonis, the Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice Defender of the Right to Read & Librarian-in-Residence, is ready to stamp out book bans & expose them for the villainous enterprises they really are! Like Barbara “Batgirl” Gordon before her, she works at a library by day: the newly-named “book sanctuary,” Cranbury Public Library. Therein Liz is a true renaissance librarian. She catalogs, runs Teen Services, manages & creates all content for social media, & hosts the Film Club.

She strongly believes all libraries need to be welcoming & safe spaces for all, & her favorite part of each day is fielding questions from kids & hearing them gush about their favorite graphic novels. Liz previously worked as a page at NYPL while majoring in Cinema Studies & Film Production.

Liz’s involvement with the Center began whilst doing outreach for her library’s first Pride Month & now sees her anchoring the BRCSJ Defenders of the Right to Read as well as serving as duly appointed member on Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman’s National LGBTQIA Advisory Board.

60. ANA M. FERNANDEZ



A native of Cuba who came to the United States at the age of 17, Ana M. Fernandez has spent decades nurturing a culture of care-taking in Camden County where she lives. The owner of Stars Adult Day Care Center, Ms. Fernandez is the de facto Director of Government Affairs for Camden's underdogs. At a time when US Senator Andy Kim (D-NJ) is pleading with NJ and the nation to wake up to America's burgeoning crisis caring for our elders and the disabled, Ana M. Fernandez will continue to show the world how it's done.

61. ERIC HOLLIDAY



Eric Holliday is a longtime municipal lawmaker in Bordentown Township, where he also did a stint as mayor in 2024. A retired corrections officer, Mr. Holliday remains devoted to creating more positive relations between law enforcement and the LGBT community.

CO-61. CHRIS CANNELLA



Chris Cannella is an educator, 1st Vice President of the Essex County Education Association (ECEA), and a key leader in NJEA's Rainbow Connections.

62. DR. SARA WASSERMAN



Sara Wasserman is an educator and community organizer at the Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice. The organization is the namesake of Bayard Rustin, one of Martin Luther King Jr.'s top lieutenants who, because of his sexuality, is often written out of the history of Black liberation in America.



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Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare, President Steve Beatty & Vice President Petal Robertson

63. DAVE D'AMICO



Dave D'Amico is a longstanding board member at Garden State Equality, New Jersey's largest LGBT rights organization. A retired Middlesex County Department of Corrections officer, Mr. D'Amico has committed himself to improving relations between law enforcement and New Jersey's LGBT Community.

64. JENNIFER GODOSKI



Jen Godoski is the Manager of Policy and Government Affairs at New Jersey Resources making her an expert in energy policy in New Jersey. A board member at TK, Ms. Godoski previously served as Chief of Staff at the New Jersey Department of Transportation.

65. NICK SCOTTI



A special tribute by Dominic Sama:

In 2021 at the age of 19, Nick Scotti became the youngest person ever elected to the Nutley Board of Education and was reelected in 2024 at age 22, earning top vote-getter with over 7,000 votes. A recent Fordham University graduate, he is a young professional committed to public service and local leadership. As a Trustee, he helps shape district policy and oversight with an emphasis on transparency, accountability, and measurable outcomes. Scotti also has experience in campaign operations, voter outreach, and constituent services across North Jersey. He supports inclusive, welcoming public institutions where every student and family feels respected and represented.

66. FRANK FILIPEK JR.



Frank Filipek Jr. is a long-time Camden County government official who serves as Camden County's Director of Events and Community Outreach. He's the son of Frank Filipek Sr. (RIP) former longtime Mayor of Bellmawr, New Jersey.

67. NATE HOWARD



Nate Howard is one of the brightest young lights on New Jersey's political candelabra. A Princeton grad, Mr. Howard was finance chief for the Sue Altman for Congress campaign where he was also Ms. Altman's Jack of All Trades.

Mr. Howard previously served as chair of the College Democrats of New Jersey at a pivotal and exciting time during Andy Kim's ascent to U.S. Senate. Mr. Howard also helped propel Governor Sherrill into office and served on her Transition Team.

68. ELOY DELGADO



Eloy Delgado represents the 6th Ward on Town Council in Linden, NJ, population 44,000. An educator by trade (he teaches English as a second language), Mr. Delgado is a longtime member of the New Jersey Education Association, where he's held numerous leadership posts.

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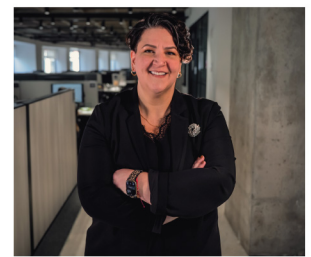
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EVP, Public Affairs



STEVE SANDBERG,
SVP and Managing Director, Public Affairs



JACKIE CORNELL
VP, Public Affairs & Government Relations

MikeWorldWide believes the LGBTQIA+ community
helps build a stronger and more inclusive future for all.

69. ERICA BOLAND



Erica Boland is Senior Manager of Content and Multimedia Strategy at New Jersey Policy Perspective, a venerable progressive think tank.

Ms. Boland has expanded NJPP's digital and social media footprint to include video, leading to back-to-back national awards for outstanding video content. Erica's work has supported campaigns leading to the passage of the Corporate Transit Fee, the elimination of public defender fees on the state level, and protections for New Jersey's immigrant communities. Erica also serves in both the Gender Equity Workgroup and the LGBTQ+ Equity Workgroup with the State Priorities Partnership, with the goal to help the national network of think tanks advance equity in its work.

70. AIDAN DIMARCO



Elected at 19 to Oakland's Board of Education, Aidan DiMarco is a political wunderkind with boundless potential to influence New Jersey politics for the better. The former National Membership Director for the College Democrats of America, Mr. DiMarco is on my short-list to run for State Senator in New Jersey's 6th Legislative District.

71. KYLER DINEEN



Old Bridge native Kyler Dineen always shows up for the fight for his values. Mr. Dineen made national news with his NJ Voters for Church State Separation when Trump's education secretary Linda McMahon came to Colts Neck to push the so-called "America 250 Civics Education Coalition" that targets students and teachers who are transgender and/or not religious. When Mr. Dineen ran for Assembly last year, he got more votes than any Democrat since redistricting.

72. JANINE CASELLE



Dr. Janine Caselle was one of nearly a million who attended the 1993 March on Washington, a seminal event for LGBT liberation at the height of the AIDS crisis. A student teacher at the time, Ms. Caselle declined a request to go on camera for MTV for fear it could kill her nascent career as an educator. Fast-forward to today, Dr. Janine Caselle is currently the principal at Cooper's Poynt Family School in Camden, NJ. That means she's the LGBT role model many on this list never got growing up. At a time when LGBT students and educators are under meanspirited attack, Janine Caselle proves the power of representation.

73. DANIELLE EARLE



A tribute by Madeline Gale:

Bronx, New York, native Danielle Earle is a writer, director, and producer with over 16 years in the film industry and currently serves as Associate Director of Video Production for the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA). She is a proud member of the Writers Guild of America East and an active LGBTQ+ advocate, serving as a past Board Member of the Newark LGBTQ+ Center, Advisory Member of Out Montclair, Advisory Board Member for Garden State Equality, and Committee Member of the Essex County Education Association LGBTQ+ Committee.

In 2024, Earle was recognized by NJEA as an Equality Champion at the Martin Luther King Equity Alliance Conference and received the LGBTQIA+ Justice Advocacy Award from the Essex County Education Association.

Earle is best known for the critically acclaimed LGBTQ+ feature film *Lover's Game*, featured in *Curve Magazine*, *AfterEllen*, *San Francisco Bay Times*, *News 12 New Jersey*, *BronxNet TV*, and more. She has been a guest speaker at Rutgers University, Manhattan College, the School of Visual Arts, and film festivals.

Her upcoming projects include the psychological thriller *"The Haunted Mind of an Insomniac"* and the upcoming release *"New York, My Lover."*

74. CURTIS BASHAW



When Curtis Bashaw ran for US Senate, he came up short against Andy Kim. But in the process, Mr. Bashaw picked up 1,773,589 votes in his losing effort to become the first openly gay man in the US Senate. A businessman and hotelier by trade, Mr. Bashaw is currently running for Cape May Commissioner.

75. JIM MCGREEVEY



Jim McGreevey is the most important and consequential voice in NJ helping ex-prisoners transition to liberty on a path to becoming productive members of society. The structural hurdles in our justice system encourage recidivism and we all pay for that. For example, how many black kids got locked up and forever ensnared in our criminal justice system for smoking weed?

Mr. McGreevey is at his irrepressible best when he's fighting the very systems that fuel that revolving door in and out of prisons. Mr. McGreevey's recent political comeback fell short at the final hurdle, leaving the former governor the time and flexibility to continue with his good works meeting the needs of people getting out of jails and prisons.



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76. AISLING MACDONALD



A tribute by Deputy Mayor Kate Triggiano:

In a time defined by national regression and backlash, Aisling MacDonald has emerged as a steady and strategic presence in New Jersey.

I first met Aisling at the 2025 Red Bank Women's March and Rally, and I am profoundly grateful to have heard her speech. Both her personal story and her work across the state describe a rare individual: resilient, disciplined, and deeply skilled. She possesses a gift for bridging systems, communities, and lived realities with unusual clarity and composure.

Aisling is a Project Manager at Garden State Equality, where she supports the organization's Trans Resiliency work statewide.

Last year, MacDonald was appointed to serve on the New Jersey Department of Corrections Board of Trustees, bringing expertise and rare fluency to civilian oversight spaces.

At a moment in American society when systemic harm leaves too many people navigating institutions alone, leaders who understand both lived consequence and institutional machinery are essential. Aisling is one of those leaders. The fact that she has rebuilt and now operates with such steadiness, fluency and purpose is remarkable. She brings credibility and integrity into every room she enters, and her leadership reflects not only resilience, but strategy. I look forward to the continued impact she will undoubtedly have in the years ahead, and to her receiving the recognition she justly deserves for her work.

77. DENISE HINDS



Denise Hinds is the Associate Executive Director of Good Shepherd Services, where she's spent 4 decades helping vulnerable people with the agency's foster care and child welfare programs, juvenile justice residential programs, as well as supportive housing for young adults.

As the Executive Director of the Newark Film Festival, Ms. Hinds joins a long tradition of LGBT people using art to change the world. Ms. Hinds also serves as Board President for the Newark LGBTQ Center.

78. PHIL MCCABE



An unsung stalwart, Phil McCabe has toiled in the activist trenches for Queer Liberation longer than many on this list have been alive. And since LGBTs disproportionately battle substance abuse, Mr. McCabe recovery story will always be both timely and lifesaving.

79. BILL COURSON



Bill Courson has been active in the movement for LGBTQ+ equality since his high school days and helped to found gay and lesbian student organizations at Brookdale Community College and Monmouth University in the 1970s.

Mr. Courson currently serves on the Board of Directors for OUT Montclair, an organization he co-founded.

80. CARL CONTINO



Earlier this year, Carl Contino took his oath of office and, at 26, became the youngest-ever city council member in Vernon, population 22,500, in deep-red Sussex County. Mr. Contino was joined by his fiancé Jimmy for the swearing in.

“I have no doubt Carl will lead this community with the same thoughtfulness, preparation, and dedication he brings as a teacher and from his time on the Board of Education,” Congressman Scott Gottheimer said before administering Contino’s oath of office. “Through the power of one of our most significant responsibilities, the ability to vote, the Vernon community came together this November to

elect Carl to serve his community and lead New Jersey forward — trusting him to bring his experience, his values, and his commitment to education and opportunity to the Council.”

81. LAURA FENSTER ROTHSCHILD



Laura Fenster Rothschild is the Chief Operating Officer at Isles, Inc, a community development org based in Trenton that's devoted to healthier towns. Based in Lawrenceville, a normal day for Ms. Fenster Rothschild might included fundraising for Congresswoman Analilia Mejia in the morning then dashing to the statehouse to lobby for passage of legislation to protect abortion and trans healthcare.

82. LANA LEONARD



Lana Leonard is News Editor at Out in Jersey, where they mostly cover school boards throughout the state and in Monmouth County. In a world filled with mediocre Substacks, Lana churns out superb content with Under the Desk News.

83. AARON WILLIAMS



Aaron Williams is a newly-minted councilmember in Neptune City. Mr. Williams' greatest legacy might be the Asbury Park Tennis initiative, a charity devoted to bringing tennis to underprivileged neighborhoods in Monmouth County.

A Marine Corps Veteran, Mr. Williams was a longtime Senior Aide in the Executive Branch.

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84. ALLISON CHAPMAN



A special tribute by Louise Walpin:

Allison Chapman (she/her) is a passionate member of the queer community whose behind-the-scenes expertise, organization, determination, and compassion have been essential in advancing NJ legislation protecting reproductive healthcare, including care for transgender patients and shielding in-state providers. As Civil Rights and Health Equity Fellow at Lawyers for Good Government (L4GG), Allison brings extensive knowledge and tireless dedication to the fight for equality.

Prior to joining L4GG, she independently advocated for our community. Her research tracking and analyzing anti-LGBTQ+ legislation has been cited by Reuters, The Washington Post, NBC News, HuffPost, and many others. With a background in engineering, cybersecurity, and healthcare, Allison is among the next generation of transformative leaders. She is entering Rutgers Law School in the Fall; her future impact is undeniable.

85. ROBERT CHARKOWSKY & TERRY WEST



Terry West is the Director of Mercer County's Office of LGBTQIA+ Affairs and a stalwart for queer liberty in New Jersey. Robert Charkowsky is the Coordinator of the Union County Office of LGBTQ Affairs. Mr. West and Mr. Charkowski are two of the most well-respected political operatives in the game.

86. RYAN JIMINEZ



Ryan Jimenez is an Asbury Park-based nightlife and hospitality impresario whose commitment to LGBT liberty is evident in each and every event he produces.

87. TC MCCOURT



Thomas "T.C." McCourt is a New Jersey-based political operative and civic leader based in Dover, Morris County. A Morris County Democratic Committeeman, Mr. McCourt also sits on the Dover Public School Board.

88. DAVID GUIRGIS



An anti-machine liberal with a big brain and even bigger potential, David Guirgis helped usher in the James Solomon-era in Jersey City politics. A social worker and Columbia U. grad, Mr. Guirgis is currently running as a Democratic Socialist for Hudson County Commissioner on an anti-corruption platform.

89. REV. ABIGAIL KING



A leader in Newark's Episcopal Archdiocese, Rev. Abigail King is one of the most persuasive LGBT activists in New Jersey. A soaring orator and brilliant storyteller, Rev. King's activism is grounded in scripture and propelled by courage. If you ever see Rev. King in Trenton's halls of Power, ask them how Jesus would feel about the hostility trans people face on a constant basis.

90. TERRY MCMILLAN



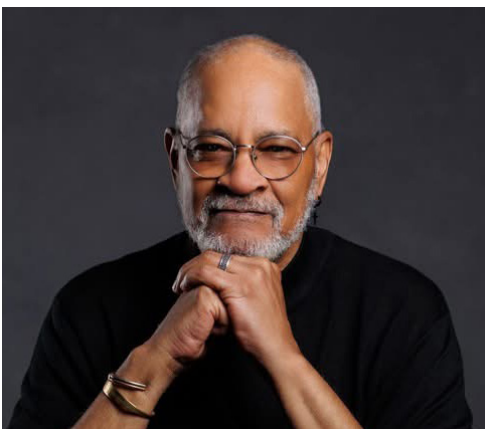
When you say, “queer joy,” we think of Terry McMillan, the intersectional community conduit at the Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice where he works to break cycles of generational violence.

91. KAYLEIGH HENRY



A star of the rise, Kayleigh Henry is Ecology Director for CRAN, the gutsy enviro org, and has defeated not one BUT FOUR (!) data centers coming to NJ to exploit our state. This past year, Ms. Henry led CRAN’s efforts to successfully preserve 835 acres in the Pinelands’ Black Run Watershed.

92. GARY PAUL WRIGHT



Gary Paul Wright was the longtime Executive Director of the African American Office and Gay Concerns in Newark, an innovative HIV education and prevention program in New Jersey’s largest city. Mr. Wright also serves on the Board of Directors at the Essex County Office of LGBTQ Affairs.

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Major funding for NJ Spotlight News and the NJ Spotlight News with Briana Vannozi newscast is provided by:
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the New Jersey Civic Info Consortium, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, PSEG Foundation, the Fund for New Jersey,
RWJBarnabas Health, NJM Insurance Group, New Jersey Education Association, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of NJ, the Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey,
New Jersey Realtors, the Schumann Fund for New Jersey and Wyncote Foundation

93. MICHAEL MATTHEWS



An Ocean County LGBT stalwart, Michael Matthews speaks truth to power and preaches Queer liberty in the reddest, most homophobic region in the state, from Toms River to Lakewood.

94. ANDY BOWEN



Andy Bowen lives in New York City but still plays an outsized role in NJ politics. No one does a blistering OpEd quite like Andy Bowen (and we love her for it!)

95. ALANA BURMAN



Newly relocated to Pennsylvania to work for the Shapiro Administration, Alana Burman spent much of 2025 doing government relations at the Jewish Federation of New Jersey. Our loss is surely PA Governor Josh Shapiro's gain!

96. TRACEY THOMASEY & KEN LEE



Tracey Thomasey and Ken Lee are newly-minted members of the Cherry Hill Democratic Committee. The road to upending the political establishment in Camden County was a long and arduous one. Mr. Thomasey and Mr. Lee (and their squad) repeatedly went to court to beat Senator Jim Beach, a notorious sore loser, to take their rightful seat representing Cherry Hill on Camden County Committee.

97. DAN WARD



As this went to press, Dan Ward of Brick, NJ was elected corresponding secretary for the Ocean County Democratic Committee.

98. IAN MOSLEY



Ian Mosley is a longtime NJ Democratic State Committee member and one of the brightest LGBT lights of the South Jersey political universe.

99. JULIO CEASAR ROMAN III



Recently decamped to Santa Barbara where he leads the Pacific Pride Foundation, Julio Cesar Roman III will always be one of the most effective and consequential AIDS activists in New Jersey history.

100. R.I.P.



We've been doing this list for over 10 years. This year we're holding the final spot for our friends and colleagues from prior lists who are no longer with us.