

Moving on Up: From Registration to Education to Voting

By Attorney Brenda Stallings

We're moving on up... just like George and Weezy. But this time, it's not to the East Side. It's to the polls. And we need everyone packed in the elevator: your mama, your daddy, your cousins, your church members, your frat brothers, your sorors, even that stranger in the grocery store line.

Arkansas ranks among the lowest in the nation for voter turnout. While voter registration rates are reasonable, many registered Arkansans still don't participate in elections. Now, with Juneteenth around the corner, we'll see voter registration booths, festivals, and family reunions. That's a beautiful thing.

But let's be honest: registration is just the ground floor.

We've gotten good at registering voters. We set up tables, show up at festivals, and even knock on doors. But too often, once someone completes that form, we hand them a sticker and send them on their way. That's where we drop the ball.

Because what comes next is what truly matters.

Do they know when to vote? Who's on the ballot? What those officials actually do? Are they aware that local elected leaders—like school board and city council members—make decisions that directly affect their children's education, housing, and safety?

We have to move beyond registration to education and then to activation.

That means carrying pamphlets explaining who's running and why it matters. Sending follow-up texts that say, "Hey sis, early voting starts next week." Giving out your number, or a Google Voice number, so folks can reach out with questions. It means having real conversations and not just about the "what" of voting, but the "who," "when," and "why."

Some folks say, "I don't want to tell people who to vote for." But if you've done the research and believe a candidate is better for the community, say that. We don't hesitate to recommend a Netflix show or a new restaurant. So why stay silent about someone who supports fair wages or public safety?

Let me tell you what gives me hope: I recently spoke with a first-time voter who described how empowered they felt walking into the polling place—how they understood the issues and felt confident casting their vote. The election didn't go the way they hoped, but they had zero regrets. In fact, they said they're proud to be among the 92% of Black women who showed up and showed out during the Presidential election in 2024, continuing a long tradition of leading the charge for justice at the ballot box.

Yes, it takes time to educate voters. But so does scrolling Instagram. So does planning a vacation. I'm asking you to get uncomfortable. To step outside your circle. You know when elections are. You know how to check your registration. So help someone else do the same.

Offer rides to the polls. Host a "poll party"—invite people to meet you at the polling place, give high-fives, and share last-minute tips about who's who. Make voting an event.

Because we don't just need registered voters. We need informed and empowered ones. Arkansas has thousands of registered Black voters who never cast a ballot not because they don't care, but because they don't feel equipped or don't believe their vote will make a difference.

It's up to us to change that.

Here's how to activate someone this week:

Step 1: Ask a friend or family member what district they live in.

Step 2: Help them find out who their Arkansas State Senator is.

Step 3: Let them know who's announced to run for that seat.

That's a quick, simple act of empowerment and it only takes a few minutes.

Let's move on up...past registration, through education, and straight to the ballot box.

This piece is part of an ongoing series on legal empowerment, equity, and justice in our communities.