

AR Politics 101

December 2025 Edition

40 Black candidates file to run for federal, state and judicial office in 2026



The 2026 election filing period ended on Nov. 12, bringing out a diverse group of 40 Black candidates vying for federal, state, and judicial offices. This group includes 20 men and 20 women from 14 counties. Of these candidates, 31 are running as Democrats, a slight decrease from 32 in 2024 and 37 in 2022.

Notably, there are no Black Republican candidates this year,

compared to two in 2024 and five in 2022. In the nonpartisan judicial races, nine Black candidates are running for circuit judgeships and prosecuting attorney positions.

The preferential primary on March 3, 2026, will allow voters to choose between Democratic, Republican, or nonpartisan ballots. To vote in the Republican primary, individuals must be registered Republicans or "optional" party. Visit VoterView on the Arkansas Secretary of State's website to check your voter status.

FEDERAL

At the federal level, two Black men are running for the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives, District 2. **Ethan Dunbar** is challenging **Sen. Tom Cotton**, while **Chris Jones**, from Little Rock, is running against **Rep. French Hill**. Both candidates must win their primaries. Dunbar is competing against **Hallie Shoffner** from Newport, and Jones is up against **Zach Huffman** from Little Rock. Cotton also faces challengers **Micah Ashby** and **Jeb Little**, while Hill has one challenger, **Chase McDowell** from Little Rock.



Mayor Ethan N. Dunbar



Chris Jones

Statewide



State Senator Fred Love

In the governor's race, two Democrats are hoping to take on incumbent **Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders**. **State Senator Fred Love** (D-Little Rock) from Mabelvale and **Supha Xayprasith-Mays** from Bentonville will compete in the primary, while the Governor has no primary challenger.

State Senate

Five Black candidates are running for the state Senate, including two current state house members. Freshman **Rep. Jessie McGruder** (D-Marion) is running to replace term-limited **Sen. Reginald Murdock** (D-Marianna) in District 9, before facing Republican **Kenny Phillips** from Crawfordsville. In Pulaski County's District 13, **Jason Williams** of Sherwood is competing against **Allison Grigsby Sweatman** for the Democratic nomination and winner will then face **Rep. Brandon Achor** (R-Maumelle).



Rep. Jessie McGruder



Jason Williams



Charity Smith-Allen



ShaRhonda Love



Rep. Tara Shephard

One of the most discussed races is for the open Little Rock District 15 seat, where three women are running: **Rep. Tara Shephard** (D-Little Rock), **ShaRhonda Love**, and **Charity Smith-Allen**. The winner of this primary might automatically take the seat, as no Republican candidate filed to run, and no independent candidates have declared their candidacy so far.

State House

In the state House of Representatives, 23 Black candidates are running for seats, including six incumbents seeking reelection. **Rep. Joy Springer** (D-Little Rock) is running for her fourth term, facing Republican **Isaac Ceja**. The other five incumbents are unopposed in the primary election and possibly in the general election.



Rep. Joy Springer



Rep. Jay Richardson



Rep. Lincoln Barnett



Rep. Ken Ferguson



Rep. Glenn Barnes



Rep. Denise Ennett



Steven Person



Michael Mason

Justice of the Peace **Steven Person** and Little Rock school board member **Michael Mason** are also running unopposed so far open seats in Districts 77 and 79 in Pulaski County.

In Crittenden, Saline, and Pulaski Counties, four competitive primary races will take place. In Crittenden County, several candidates are vying to replace **Rep. Jessie McGruder**, who is running for a state Senate seat. The candidates include **Audrey Willis, Demetris Johnson, Joyce Ann Gray, Sherry Holliman,**

and **Willie Williams**. The primary winner will face **Robert Thorne Jr.** in the general election.

In Saline County, **Gina Thomas-Littlejohn** is making her second run for District 81, this time against **Elijah "Eli" Thompson**. The winner will challenge incumbent **Rep. RJ Hawk** (R-Bryant) in November.

In Pulaski County, **Angela Person West** and **Talesha Dokes** both from North Little Rock are seeking to replace term-limited **Rep. Tracy Steele** (D-North Little Rock). In District 70, things are a bit more complicated. After **Rep. Carlton Wing** (R-North Little Rock) stepped down to work for PBS, the governor called a special election to finish his term. Two Democrats, **Cordelia Smith-Johnson** from Sherwood and **Alex Holladay** from North Little Rock, are running in the special election primary on Jan. 6. The winner will face Republican **Bo Renshaw** in the special general election on March 3. Voters in this district will also pick the Democratic nominee for the new term on March 3 as well. The winner of that race will then face Renshaw again in November.



Audrey P. Willis



Demetris Johnson, Jr.



Joyce Ann Gray



Sherry Holliman



Willie Williams



Gina Thomas-Littlejohn



Angela Person-West



Talesha Dokes



Cordelia Smith-Johnson

Six Black candidates have no primary opposition and will advance directly to the general election in November. **Cassandra Mayes** is running for the District 71 seat in Maumelle and will face **Stephen Bright**, also of Maumelle, for the open seat. **Dexter Miller** of Helena in Phillips County is running for the third time, challenging incumbent **Rep. Mark McElroy** (R-Tiller).

Three newcomers are also in the race. **Deonna Morgan** of Malvern is challenging **Rep. Rick McClure** (R-Malvern) in Hot Spring County. **Michael Middlebrook** of Blytheville is running against **Rep. Joey Carr** (R-Blytheville) in Mississippi County. Craighead County's **Shamal C. Carter** is challenging **Rep. Johnny Rye** (R-Trumann). Meanwhile, Lonoke resident **Beverly Coleman-Keown** will face **Rep. Roger Lynch** (R-Lonoke) in Lonoke County.



Cassandra Mayes



Dexter R. Miller



Deonna Morgan



Michael Middlebrook



Shamal C. Carter



Beverly Coleman-Keown

Judicial

Judicial races are underway, with five candidates vying for circuit judge positions. Four incumbents are seeking reelection: **Tjuana Byrd Manning** and **Shanice Johnson** in Pulaski and Perry Counties, **Carlton D. Jones** in Miller and Lafayette Counties, and **Earnest E. Brown, Jr.** in Jefferson and Lincoln Counties. In Hempstead and Nevada Counties, the open seat contest pits former district judge **Kolby Harper** against attorney **Matthew Kimmel**.

The county prosecutor race is also drawing attention. In Pulaski and Perry Counties, **Bobby Forrest, Jr.** is challenging incumbent **Prosecuting Attorney Will Jones**, with a chance to become the first Black person elected to the role if successful. In Jefferson and Lincoln Counties, a competitive three-way race features attorneys **Evelyn Moorehead**, **Karres Manning-Center**, and **Mircha King**.



Judge Tjuana Byrd Manning



Judge Shanice Johnson



Judge Carlton D. Jones



Judge Earnest E. Brown, Jr.



Kolby Harper



Bobby Forrest, Jr.



Evelyn Moorehead



Karres Manning-Center



Mircha King