**Joint Maplewood/South Orange Statement**

The South Orange and Maplewood Democratic Committees believe in unity and creating an environment with a diversity of thought, beliefs, culture, race, religion, and age to represent the community it serves. We are further committed to promoting democracy by doing everything we can to ensure that all eligible voters are registered and are fully informed about candidates running for office.

Our Committees support and have advocated for an office block ballot design, as well as a convention with voting by secret ballot to decide the endorsements of the Essex County Democratic Committee. Having said that, at this point, the “county line” is thankfully all but dead, and is a moot point for a campaign message. In fact, both of our committees are moving forward and are currently partnering with Democratic party district leaders in Montclair, West Orange, and other towns to work toward getting a convention in Essex County. We are committed to continue these collaborations as Essex County municipalities and leveraging best practices from each town. We are happy to tell you more about what our process is in greater detail.

When considering whom to vote for, we urge voters to ask candidates what their *specific* goals are in offering to bring about greater transparency and accountability in the Democratic Committee. The Fair Ballot Dems campaign message is that they are “working for fair, transparent, and accountable politics. NOT political machines.” What processes do they plan to use to enact these changes? Which municipalities, and which district leaders outside of South Orange and Maplewood do they plan to reach out to, or to coordinate with?

We urge voters to consider, if they want to see a more transparent and democratic process in Essex County, that there are over 1,000 district leaders in Essex County, and change is only possible by getting the majority of these committee members on board. Maplewood and South Orange are two small towns in one of the largest counties in the state, and our total number of district leaders is less than 8% of the total number of district leaders in the County. We urge voters to consider how “[where SOMA leads, we make space for others to follow](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02U7DbymzLvTWpKAR8skZMCA8zxgt9bx8xFjczbpjZCtA498dX9ns8DAjfecnqf1uil&id=61558095527217)” may come across to district leaders in some of our larger committees in Newark, East Orange, or Irvington, and whether a message of presuming these communities will follow South Orange and Maplewood is the right one to bring to these district leaders.

We are concerned that a voter guide written and prepared by candidates on the ballot, and who hold leadership positions in the organization making the guide, may not be neutral and provide an unbiased presentation of candidates to voters. We feel that this is an inappropriate approach for offering an impartial voter guide.

Many of the statements written in this guide about the role of a district leader, while technically accurate, are not based in any practical reality about how the Essex County Democratic Committee actually operates or what the role and power of a district leader actually is. The most important role of the district leader is to get out the Democratic vote in their district, and to serve as a liaison between voters and the larger Democratic Party. We’d like to offer the [District Leader Manual](https://www.essexdems.org/_files/ugd/22708f_117f1df9bcf548e19abdbb4a90c35f48.pdf) available on the Essex County Democratic Committee website, as well as the [Maplewood Democratic Committee bylaws](https://drive.google.com/file/d/10GRrIlEmWjRIxAqXhw147AJBoK6gQQem/view) (specifically, Article 3, Section 5), which we hope will provide a more comprehensive and accurate representation of the role of a district leader.

We stand together to create a more unified and inclusive society. We would like to ask you to elect and re-elect the district leader candidates on our slate. These individuals have proven their willingness and commitment to the community. We are keen to ensure a solid victory for the Democrats in November 2024. Let's not lose sight of the real enemy in this election. We are excited about the future of our party and our role in it.