



# PHILADELPHIA

## FEDERATION of TEACHERS

*Jerry T. Jordan, President | AFL-CIO Voting Rights Panel*

*June 11 and 13, 2022 | Convention Center Room 118B*

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Good afternoon. I'm Jerry Jordan, President of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers. Our union represents more than 13,000 public school workers here in Philadelphia—teachers, support staff, nurses, secretaries, and so many other hard working individuals that help educate our school children every day. We are one of the largest locals in the American Federation of Teachers.

*I'm a lifelong Philadelphian. I love this city, I love the students we serve, I love our educators, and I love this union.* But well before I joined the union—well before I even became a teacher, I watched and learned as my family instilled in me the importance of public education, of justice— and, of voting.

Before I talk about the 'big lie' of today and the nefarious forces at work, I want to offer a brief anecdote from my childhood that resonates today—and that shows us how much **history can and does repeat itself if we let it, and if we don't consistently stand up and fight back against injustice.**

Every evening, my father brought the family together to watch the nightly news. In my house, that meant Walter Cronkite. My parents had always voted, and had always told me that when I was eligible to vote, that it was my critical civic duty. I have never missed an election.

But it was not until I learned from the news that around the country that voting was *not* a given for Black people. It was not something that was readily accepted, and people that looked like me were being barred from voting. I'll never forget learning about the "games" some states were playing around voting rights—how they were disenfranchising voters and putting up outrageous barriers. I remember sitting slack jawed with my brother as we heard the news of the Jellybeans Test.

I'm not kidding. A test at the polling place to guess the number of jelly beans in a jar—and if a Black person guessed incorrectly, they were denied the right to vote that day. They'd be told to try again another time. Think about that. *What an absolute disgrace.*

Growing up in Philadelphia, I have always felt that my right to vote has been safeguarded. But, *I have grown up knowing that has not been the case for all Black people.* And it's still not the case today— and I would argue that we are, in fact, losing ground.

Perhaps we are not seeing the racist ‘jelly bean test,’ but *we are seeing deeply racist efforts to disenfranchise Black and brown voters across this nation.*

Right here in Pennsylvania, Republican lawmakers are twisting themselves into knots trying to come up with loopholes, exemptions, and regulations that make it harder, not easier, for us to maintain a democracy. Here's just one example: in 2019, Act 77, which permitted mail-in voting in Pennsylvania was enacted. It was a bipartisan bill that was able to pass despite a Republican majority in the state legislature. But now, Republican extremists are attacking the law and seeking to upend it.

Why? **Because it's having the effect of making it easier to vote.** And making it easier to vote means a more democratic society. A society that is more reflective of the will of the people. So, a group of right wing extremists are seeking to do everything in their power to upend it. In fact, their fight is now in the state supreme court. Let me just share [one recent NPR headline about what's unfolding](#): “*A mail-in voting law is under attack by Pennsylvania GOP lawmakers who passed it.*” That headline really tells the whole story.

So let's look at what unfolded in the wake of the 2020 election here in Pennsylvania. Republicans here in Pennsylvania were screaming about the “big lie.” And their screaming quickly devolved into organized efforts to actually overthrow the government and overturn an election. And further devolved on January 6th into an insurrection. And you know who was right there, spreading these lies, trying to overturn the government, engaged in a racist attack on the US Capitol?

Pennsylvania's State Senator **Doug Mastriano**. Not only was he there at the Capitol on January 6th, but he funded buses to bring Pennsylvanians to the Insurrection. Did his conspiracies and violent behavior cost him politically? Well, he is now Pennsylvania's Republican candidate for Governor. ***So, you tell me.***

And by the way, Doug Mastriano continues to peddle this insanity on so many levels. In his acceptance speech after winning the primary election on May 17th, he took to the stage and immediately launched into an outright attack on labor unions, on public education, as well as spewing transphobic remarks and making bogus claims about so-called freedom.

And while this is not directly related to today's topic, I would be remiss not to make connections between Mastriano's overall platform and the push for freedom—when *he really means freedom for white cisgender males*.

Because he sure does not mean freedom for the people in Buffalo, in a predominantly Black community that had their lives stolen from them. Or the 19 school children and two teachers who were murdered in their classroom in Texas. Or for the people in our beloved city whose lives were stolen from them in the mass shooting, and in shootings every day. Who do those shootings predominantly impact? Black and brown people.

Doug Mastriano's response? Arm teachers. Make it easier to own guns. He calls it a 'God-given right.'

**So Doug Mastriano's platform of white nationalism is inextricably linked to the ongoing state-wide and national efforts to disenfranchise voters.**

This week, we saw more raw footage of what Doug Mastriano and his allies were doing at the US Capitol on January 6th. And we must connect the dots between that day, and between the legislative campaigns to take away the right to vote.

**Here at the PFT, we can and will continue to push back against everything Doug Mastriano stands for.** We will continue to spread accurate information. We will continue to stand up against bigotry, against violence, and we will continue to stand for the public education we want for our children. We will continue to stand up for the society we want for our children. We'll continue to build coalitions, to push for equitable access to education. For the freedom to vote. For the freedom to live free of the fear of gun violence. These next few months will be pivotal in setting Pennsylvania's path forward.

**The stakes could not be higher.** I'm honored to be here today talking about what we must do to move forward. I look forward to hearing from my co-panelists, and joining in follow up discussions.