

ELECTION CENTRAL



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The Office of Elections honors National Black History Month, recognizing the rich contributions and struggles of Black Americans in securing their voting and civil rights. This month serves as a poignant reminder of the journey from the 14th and 15th amendments, to the historic Voting Rights Act of 1965, underscoring the significance of the right to vote.

The dedication to ensuring voting rights for Black Americans continues beyond 1965. Challenges persist, and they highlight the ongoing need for collective efforts to address these challenges.

As we observe Black History Month, we take time to reflect on the remarkable achievements and legacies of Black individuals. The Office of Elections remains steadfast in its commitment to facilitating accessible voting in the City of Richmond, ensuring that all voices are heard.

Q: I know increasing diversity within the office is important to you, why is that?

Keith: Recognizing the value in individuals regardless of their backgrounds has always been a driving force for me. Coming from a small farming community in North Carolina, where the landscape was predominantly divided into white and black communities, my experience was transformed when I stepped onto the diverse campus of VCU in 1998.

The vibrancy of VCU, with its rich racial diversity, stood in stark contrast to my upbringing, and I eagerly sought connections with people from various backgrounds. These interactions opened my eyes to different cultures, leaving an indelible impact on my perspective.

The changing demographics of our city became a source of inspiration for me. It motivated me to cultivate a team that reflects the evolution of our community. By embracing diversity within our staff, we not only align ourselves with the evolving face of Richmond, but it also means that we recognize the beauty and strength that emanate from the diverse perspectives and experiences within our team.

Q: What are some strategies or steps you have implemented to reach more diverse voters of Richmond?

Keith: One of the milestones achieved during my tenure as General Registrar was the introduction of the first-ever bilingual ballot in the city of Richmond in 2021. This initiative was a direct response to the passage of the "Virginia Voting Rights Act" by Jennifer McClellan, which mandated the provision of bilingual election materials in jurisdictions where minority populations exceeded 10 percent.

Upon the 2021 census revealing that Richmond's Hispanic community had surpassed this threshold, I took proactive steps to implement bilingual ballots in English and Spanish. Rather than waiting for a mandate from the State Board of Elections, I embraced the opportunity to foster inclusivity in our democratic process, recognizing that proficiency in English should not be a barrier to casting a ballot.

Our commitment to outreach has extended to various communities, including the Southside's black and Hispanic communities, the elderly communities in Highland Park, the vibrant millennial population in Scott's Addition, and the talented student population at VCU. Looking ahead, we are excited about upcoming partnerships with the University of Richmond, Virginia Union University, and Richmond Public Schools for diverse outreach initiatives aimed at inspiring enthusiasm for the November election. Together, we hope to create a more engaged and empowered electorate.



Keith being sworn in in May 2021

Q: What are some obstacles that the Black communities in Richmond face when it comes to voting?

Keith: Several challenges affect voting in black communities in Richmond, with transportation accessibility being a significant concern. The relocation of our office from City Hall to a site here on Laburnum Avenue without bus service sparked controversy in 2020, particularly as critics highlighted the impact on those lacking reliable transportation to reach the polls. Unfortunately, some individuals in the black community refrain from voting due to the absence of convenient transportation options.

Another obstacle relates to Virginia's laws on the restoration of rights for individuals with felony convictions. This policy, rooted in the 19th Century, requires individuals to apply to the governor for individual rights restoration. Virginia is the only state in the nation that has this policy, and studies have shown that this policy has a disproportionate impact on black communities.

Q: What are some challenges you have faced as the General Registrar?

Keith: Professionally speaking, the recruitment of election officers and the post-election processing of provisional ballots have posed some of the most significant challenges. Ask any General Registrar and they will tell you that it is very difficult to recruit people to work the polls. And the introduction of Same Day Registration in 2022 has contributed to a surge in provisional ballots, which has added a difficult layer of complexity to our post-election duties.

On a personal note, this role demands an extraordinary level of multitasking, leading to extended working hours. Balancing the demands of this high-profile role with my roles as a husband and as a father to an 8-year-old daughter is a constant challenge. While my ambition as a General Registrar drives me forward, it comes at the cost of dedicating quality time to my family.

Q: Who is your inspiration?

Young black boys yearn to witness adults who mirror their own reflection. In our society, the landscape for positive role models for these young boys is often barren, leaving them to navigate the path to manhood in solitude.

I count myself among the fortunate few who had a beacon of guidance, a mentor, and a role model in my Godfather, the late Sam Phillips. He was a man of simple virtues, a churchgoer and an ordinary working man. Uninterested in the allure of fame or fortune, he dedicated his days to the quiet pursuit of providing for his family. His lessons transcended the mundane; he instilled in me a code of morals and emphasized the value of hard work. Serving diligently as a poll worker for many years, he left an indelible mark on my character.

Following his passing in 2010, I made a conscious decision to honor his legacy by becoming a poll worker myself. Little did I know that this seemingly straightforward choice would unfold into a remarkable journey, culminating in my role as the General Registrar 11 years later.

As I reflect on those transformative years, my thoughts often drift back to my Godfather Sam. His words of wisdom continue to resonate in my mind, a comforting echo that guides me even today. In every step of my professional journey, his influence remains a source of inspiration, a testament to the enduring impact of a humble mentor on a path shaped by his teachings.



Keith with the general registrars of other localities in Virginia

Q: Why do elections matter?

Keith: Imagine you're picking a pizza topping with your friends. If only a few of you vote, the most popular choice might not really represent what everyone likes. It's like saying everyone loves pepperoni because a small group voted for it, even though most people didn't vote at all.

Voting works the same way. When only a small group votes, the result might not truly reflect what most people want. Your voice matters, and when more people vote, we get a clearer picture of what everyone in the community wants. So, let's all make sure our choices count and show up to vote – it's like making sure the pizza topping everyone loves, is the one that actually gets picked!

Election Officer Interest

We are looking for Election Officers! **All you have to be is a registered Virginia voter.** You cannot be an election officer if you are an elected official or an employee of an elected official.



What will I do as an Election Officer?

- Set up a voting equipment
- Check voter IDs and check names on electronic poll book
- Provide assistance and instructions in using the voting machines
- Tabulate the results at the close of the polls
- Must be available on Election Day to serve from 5AM to 9PM or later
- Professionalism, detail-oriented, good customer service skills

Where will I be working?

- You would be assigned to the closest "home" precinct.
- If there are no vacancies at your polling place, you may be assigned to a nearby precinct.

How much will I be paid?

- Election Officers are paid \$150
- Chief Officer \$250
- Assistant Chief \$180

Apply here!



Scan QR code to apply

Have a question?

Text us using

TextMyGov

Voters can use “Text My Gov” to ask the Office of Elections anything related to elections, voting, registration, or other questions.

Text keyword “Hi” to 804-212-3382 to get started.

**Some other feature keywords are:
Elections, Contact, Vote by Mail, Media, Election Dates, Polling Places, Other, Registration.**

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