

Who's Running for Florida Governor in the August Democratic Primary?

By Sandy Parker | Sparker's Soapbox | Published 2026-07-17

Six Democratic candidates qualified for Florida's Aug. 18, 2026 gubernatorial primary: David Jolly, a former Republican U.S. Representative who switched parties and is widely described as the frontrunner; state Rep. Dotie Joseph (D-North Miami); Dayna Marie Foster; Evelyn Castillo-Bach; Thomas E. Fernandez; and Kenneth Stephann Norman.

Governor Ron DeSantis is term-limited, making this an open-seat race with no Democratic incumbent. The primary winner advances to the Nov. 3, 2026, general election against the Republican nominee.

Learn about the Executive Branch of Florida's government in my [Sparker's Civics primer post](#).

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Research and campaign finance data for this post were compiled with assistance from Claude (Anthropic AI), drawing on the Florida Division of Elections, candidate websites, and Florida news sources. All information was reviewed and verified by the author.

Evelyn Castillo-Bach

Bio

Evelyn Castillo-Bach, 74, lives in Pembroke Pines in Broward County. She was born and raised in New York City and didn't learn to speak English until fourth grade; her mother immigrated from Cuba in 1948, and her father was born and raised in Puerto Rico. She has lived in Pembroke Pines since 1998. She

became a teen mother at 19 and later graduated cum laude with a focus in cultural anthropology and biomedical sciences; she holds a Master of Science degree from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism ([campaign website](#)).

She is the Executive Director of the Balanced Justice Network, an organization she founded in August 2023 that advocates for criminal justice reform, second chances, and transparency in plea bargains and sentencing; she says she has monitored the Florida Department of Corrections for nearly 25 years. She has been married for nearly 30 years to Peter Bach, a Danish national and lawyer who works on rule-of-law and human rights issues in post-war countries. She is the mother of three sons. ([campaign website](#)).

Castillo-Bach is a long-time registered Independent voter who changed her party affiliation to Democrat in August 2024 ([campaign site](#)).

Platform

Castillo-Bach's "Where I Stand" page reads more like a running series of policy announcements than a simple list. Her campaign is built on the motto "People First, Not Politics" and three pillars: Health, Home, and Freedom ([campaign website](#)).

Her most developed positions include:

- a prison-reform agenda addressing both correctional officers and incarcerated people
- an affordability plan built around "what you earn, what you pay, and what you owe"
- a call to ban all medical debt paired with a proposed "Florida Direct Care" program that would pay healthcare providers directly for uninsured and underinsured residents
- a call to ban data-center non-disclosure agreements and fund a Florida Affordable Housing Fund with "Big Tech" profits.

On the proposed constitutional amendment to eliminate property taxes, she has expressed skepticism, arguing it doesn't address the underlying property-insurance cost crisis and would still require funding the services property taxes currently pay for ([campaign website](#)).

Endorsements

No endorsements were found on her campaign website or in public sources as of Jul. 13, 2026.

Further Research

- Campaign website: evelynforgovernor.org
- Active social media: [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [TikTok](#), [X](#), [Bluesky](#)

In the News

- Meet the Florida Democrats running for governor against David Jolly. ([Florida Phoenix](#), 6/24/26)
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Thomas E. Fernandez

Bio

Thomas E. Fernandez, 49, lives in Homestead, FL. He was born in Cuba and came to the United States via the Mariel boatlift in 1980; he was raised in the Bronx before moving to Florida in 1997. He is a retired U.S. Air Force medical technician who was stationed at Eglin Air Force Base near Fort Walton Beach, and is now a community advocate. He filed as a candidate on Dec. 5, 2025 ([Florida Phoenix](#), 6/24/26).

Fernandez earned a bachelor's degree from Weber State University, a Master of Science in Clinical Laboratory Sciences from Rutgers School of Health Professions, was certified by the American Society for Clinical Pathology. Throughout his career, he remained committed to public service through healthcare, nonprofit leadership, community advocacy, helping families, seniors, veterans & individuals with disabilities ([Ballotpedia](#)).

Platform

No dedicated campaign website or Issues page was found for Fernandez. He calls his campaign “NOVA” — Navigating Our Vision Ahead — and says he wants to protect families from rising costs, sudden healthcare needs, and gaps in childcare and education. His stated top issue is housing affordability and cost of living. ([Florida Phoenix](#), 6/24/26; [Ballotpedia](#)).

On the proposed constitutional amendment to eliminate property taxes, he acknowledges the appeal of a tax cut while cautioning that the tradeoffs need to be weighed rather than accepting either side's messaging at face value ([Florida Phoenix](#), 6/24/26).

Endorsements

No endorsements were found in public sources as of Jul. 13, 2026.

Further Research

- Campaign website: none found as of Jul. 13, 2026; the campaign operates via Facebook and an [ActBlue donation page](#), branded “Thomas Eloy ‘NOVA’ Fernandez.”
- Meet the Florida Democrats running for governor against David Jolly. ([Florida Phoenix](#), 6/24/26)

- Active social media: [Facebook](#), [X](#)

In the News

- Meet the Florida Democrats running for governor against David Jolly. ([Florida Phoenix](#), 6/24/26)
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Dayna Marie Foster

Bio

Dayna Marie Foster, 32, is a South Floridian raised in Fort Lauderdale by a single mother; she moved to South Florida from New York in second grade. She earned a B.S. in Finance from Florida Atlantic University, a Master of Science in Finance from Florida International University, and a Master of Science in Information from Florida State University; she is currently pursuing a B.S. in Political Science at Florida State University ([campaign website](#)).

If elected, she would be the first Black woman governor in Florida's history.

Platform

Foster's campaign site presents a structured platform across two pages. Her core "Six Pillars," branded "Florida First," are:

- | | |
|---|---|
| • Economic opportunity for working Floridians | • Immigrants make us stronger. No human is illegal. |
| • Affordable housing, now | • Gun reform for a safer tomorrow. |
| • Healthcare that works for all | • Protect and fully fund public education. |

Her expanded "Policy Platform" page adds nine further priorities: Reproductive Freedom and Full Equality for Florida Women; Opportunity, Dignity, and Rights for All; A New Deal for Public Safety; Making College Work for You; Defending LGBTQIA+ Freedom, Safety, and Visibility; Investing in Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure; Protecting Our Planet: Bold Climate Action for Florida's Future; Putting OUR Kids First: Education, Justice, and Care for Every Child; and Power to the People: Voting Rights and a Government That Listens.

Foster's campaign FAQ states she doesn't accept AIPAC funding. On the proposed constitutional amendment to eliminate property taxes, she opposes it outright, citing her own experience as an educator whose salary is funded by property-tax revenue and the risk to police, fire, and other municipal services; she has said property-tax reform is warranted, but elimination isn't the answer ([campaign website](#)).

Endorsements

No endorsements were found on her campaign website or in public sources as of Jul. 13, 2026.

Further Research

- Campaign website: fosterforflorida.com
- Active social media: [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#), [X](#), [Facebook](#)

In the News

- Meet the Florida Democrats running for governor against David Jolly. ([Florida Phoenix](#), 6/24/26)

David Jolly

Bio

David Wilson Jolly, 53, was born October 31, 1972, in Dunedin, FL. He earned a Bachelor's degree from Emory University in 1994 and a Juris Doctor from George Mason University in 2001. Jolly worked for Republican U.S. Representative Bill Young full time from 1995 to 2006 in various positions, with a brief break for six months in 2001 when he worked at a Washington securities firm. From 2007 until first running for Congress in 2013, he worked as a lobbyist, during which time he made political donations to both Republicans and Democrats. He served as the Republican U.S. Representative for Florida's 13th Congressional District from 2014 to 2017, when he was defeated for reelection by Charlie Crist. ([wikipedia](#))

After leaving Congress, Jolly practiced law and spent nearly a decade as a political analyst for NBC and MSNBC. He left the Republican Party in 2018 amid frustration with the party's direction under Donald Trump, registering with no party affiliation and later with the Forward Party (2022–2025), before registering as a Democrat in April 2025. ([wikipedia](#))

He is a fifth-generation Floridian and the son of a minister. He and his wife Laura are raising their family in Pinellas County. He officially announced his campaign for Governor as a Democrat on June 5, 2025. His running mate is former U.S. Rep. Gwen Graham, who represented Florida's 2nd Congressional District, was the runner-up in the 2018 Democratic gubernatorial primary, and served alongside Jolly in Congress, where they co-sponsored legislation opposing oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. ([campaign website](#); [wikipedia](#))

Platform

Jolly's campaign site presents a structured, named list of platform priorities under "Issues":

- Solving our Affordability and Insurance Crisis
- Saving Our Schools
- Campaign Finance and Ethics Reform
- Strengthening Florida's Economy
- Restoring Reproductive Freedom
- Investing in Climate Resiliency, Clean Water, and the Ocean Economy
- Restoring Services for Our Veterans
- Giving Florida's Families Access to Florida's Universities
- Reducing Gun Violence
- Clean Energy
- Home Rule and Direct Democracy
- Fighting Crime, not Communities
- Delivering affordable healthcare to Floridians
- Treating Everyone with Kindness, Dignity and Respect

Endorsements

Jolly does not have an Endorsements page on his website. A number of prominent endorsements have been identified in the news, including:

- [David Jolly rolls out endorsements from 'Democratic powerhouses' Gwen Graham, Donna Shalala, Karen Thurman](#) (Florida Politics, 7/9/25)
- [David Jolly rolls out trove of endorsements from 60 current and former Democratic elected officials](#) (Florida Politics, 8/5/25)
- [Florida AFL-CIO, Florida Education Association Endorse David Jolly for Governor](#) (The Floridian, 6/23/26)
- [Florida LGBTQ+ Democratic Caucus endorses David Jolly for governor, congressional candidates](#) (Watermark Out News, 7/14/26)

Further Research

- Campaign website: davidjolly.com
- Confirmed active: [Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#)

In the News

- David Jolly completes party swap, registers as Democrat and escalates gubernatorial aspirations. ([Florida Politics](#), 4/24/25)

- David Jolly, leading Democratic candidate for 2026 governor, shares views on abortion and Alligator Alcatraz, [CBS Miami](#), 4/3/25)
 - ‘We can win’: David Jolly officially announces bid for Florida Governor. ([Florida Politics](#), 6/5/25)
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Dotie Joseph

Bio

Dotie Joseph is a sitting Florida state representative for House District 108, covering North Miami, Miami Shores, and El Portal. Born in Haiti, she moved to Florida in 1982 and attended Miami-Dade County public schools before earning a Bachelor’s degree in Political Science and International Studies from Yale University and a Juris Doctor from Georgetown University Law Center. She also holds a diploma in Mediation and Conflict Resolution from the Institute for International Mediation and Conflict Resolution in The Hague, Netherlands ([campaign website](#); [Florida House of Representatives](#); [Wikipedia](#)).

Admitted to the Florida Bar in October 2005, Joseph focused her early career on civil rights and municipal law. She built extensive experience in local government administration with the City of North Miami Beach, where she ultimately advanced to serve as Interim City Attorney. Alongside her public sector career, she has practiced in the private sector as a civil rights and government attorney, and most recently as a consultant ([campaign site](#); [Wikipedia](#); [LinkedIn](#)).

Joseph was first elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 2018 and has been reelected since, including without opposition in 2024. In 2022 she was selected to serve as Minority Leader Pro Tempore, making her the first Haitian-American in U.S. history to hold that leadership distinction in a state legislature. ([Wikipedia](#))

Platform

Joseph’s campaign highlights “the cost of living crisis” and lists these platform priorities ([campaign website](#)):

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| • Education | • Community Safety |
| • Affordable Healthcare | • Civil Rights & Justice |
| • Economic Opportunity & Lowering Costs | • Government Accountability |

Endorsements

No endorsements are listed on her campaign website as of Jul. 19, 2026.

Further Research

- **Campaign website:** dotiejoseph.com
- Confirmed active: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#)

In the News

- ‘We need somebody who’s focused on us.’ Dotie Joseph makes her play for governor. ([Miami Herald](#), 6/12/26)
 - State Rep. Dotie Joseph joins Florida governor’s race. ([Local10](#), 7/5/26)
 - Florida state Rep. Dotie Joseph throws her hat in the ring for Democratic nomination in gubernatorial election. ([CBS Miami](#), 7/12/26)
 - Democratic gubernatorial candidate Dotie Joseph lays out her vision for a more affordable Florida. ([WUSF](#), 7/15/26)
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Kenneth Stephann Norman

Bio

Kenneth Stephann Norman, 31 — who goes by “Stephann Norman” publicly and “Phann” as a campaign nickname — was born in Texas and moved to Tampa at age 2, where he has lived since ([campaign site](#); [Florida Phoenix](#), 6/24/26). He earned a bachelor’s degree in Business Management, magna cum laude, from American InterContinental University Online. His work history includes a job as a bagger at the MacDill Air Force Base Commissary and customer service roles at Nordstrom and Neiman Marcus; he also served as a caregiver for his late grandfather. He describes extensive volunteer and ministry work growing up in Tampa, including homeless-outreach and inner-city support ministries, and says he lives with a disability, which he cites as context for his “Insured Bill of Rights” platform plank. At the time of his Florida Phoenix interview, his stated occupation was community volunteering in the Tampa Bay area ([campaign website](#)).

Platform

Norman’s campaign site presents “Phann’s Phive Points” ([campaign website](#)):

- Affordable Housing: Rent Reduction
- Revitalize Education: Bringing Back Real Learning
- Healthcare for All: Restoring Florida Healthcare
- Insured Bill of Rights: Protecting Floridians in Times of Need

- Solve Housing Crisis: A Roof Over Every Head
- Honorable Mention: Environmental Change

On the proposed constitutional amendment to eliminate property taxes, he opposes it, citing risk to funding for electric, water, sanitation, police, and fire services, and noting the state hasn't detailed a plan to replace that revenue ([campaign website](#); [Florida Phoenix](#), 6/24/26).

Endorsements

No endorsements are listed on his campaign website as of Jul. 13, 2026.

Further Research

- Campaign website: sn4flgovernor.org
- Active social media: [X](#)

In the News

- Meet the Florida Democrats running for governor against David Jolly. ([Florida Phoenix](#), 6/24/26)

Democratic Campaign Finances

The chart's last column shows available funds reported by an affiliated political committee: a separate state-registered account that may accept contributions of unlimited size and spend without limit in support of the candidate, though it may give no more than \$3,000 per election directly to the candidate's own campaign ([§ 106.08, Fla. Stat.](#)). Committee funds carry over from prior races; Joseph's committee, Victory Now, which she chairs herself, dates to her service in the Florida House, while Florida 2026, the committee supporting Jolly, is chaired by another officer. For more on how to read these figures and learn what this information does and does not tell us, see Sparker's Civics primer [Understanding Campaign Finance Data](#).

Of note:

- **Castillo-Bach:** \$9,100, or 87 percent of receipts, is from Castillo-Bach herself (\$5,100 in direct contributions and a \$4,000 loan). Of the rest, 89 percent came from Florida donors; 11 percent came from out of state, led by Massachusetts.
- **Fernandez:** \$9,266, or nearly all receipts, is from Fernandez himself (\$66 in direct contributions and a \$9,200 loan across three installments). The remaining \$50 came entirely from Florida donors.
- **Foster:** 87 percent of individual contributions came from Florida donors; 12 percent came from out of state, led by New York.

- **Jolly:** 79 percent of individual contributions came from Florida donors; 20 percent came from out of state, led by California. Jolly received \$10,850 from 11 political committees, mostly Florida-based Democratic clubs and organizations. Separately, Florida 2026, the political committee he founded in Apr. 2025, has raised \$3,517,002 since its formation. ([Florida Politics](#); [Florida Division of Elections](#))
- **Joseph:** A \$3,000 personal loan accounts for five percent of her receipts. Sixty-five percent of individual contributions came from Florida donors; 35 percent came from out of state, led by Georgia. She also received \$3,000 from Victory Now, her own affiliated political committee, which has raised \$184,034 since its formation in Nov. 2019. ([Florida Division of Elections](#))
- **Norman:** \$1,700, or 41 percent of receipts, is from two direct contributions Norman made to his own campaign. Of the rest, 89 percent came from Florida donors; 11 percent came from out of state, led by Arizona and Louisiana (tied at \$100 each).

Learn what this information does and does not tell us in the Sparker's Civics primer [Understanding Campaign Finance Data](#).

Summary

With incumbent Ron DeSantis term-limited, the Florida governor's race is an open seat this year, with eleven Republicans and six Democrats on the Aug. 18, 2026 primary ballot. The winners of the two primaries, along with several minor party candidates, will face off in November.