

# RFS\_09082020\_BETHANY\_HALLAM\_FINAL\_3

Tue, 9/8 6:43AM • 39:14

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, allegheny county, life, election, run, county, drugs, jail, substance use disorder, bethany, knew, feel, parents, county council, hear, literally, office, day, candidate, running

## SPEAKERS

Bethany Hallam, Amanda Litman

**Bethany Hallam** 00:00

The following podcast is a dear media production.

**Amanda Litman** 00:03

Hi, I'm Amanda Litman, your host of Run for Something the podcast. I'm also the executive director and co founder of Run for Something the organization and author of Run for Something the book, I am perpetually on brand. I am coming to you sort of live sort of not from New York City, where I live with my very rowdy dog Satie, who you might hear in the background of these episodes from time to time, please bear with us. The show you're listening to is an exploration of local governments. It's a conversation with Run for Something candidates and alumni and people who will inspire you and give you hope and make you feel good about government again, this is going to be our second episode of the show. we're interviewing Bethany Hallam, Bethany is the Allegheny County Council member. She has a story that is so non traditional. Her background is wild. Her personal experience is everything that we are told a politician can't be, and I think you're going to love hearing it. Let's go to the interview. I am so excited about today's interview with Bethany Hallam, the Allegheny County Council member who story will just like blow your mind. You are one of my favorite elected officials. I feel like I'm gonna say this in every episode because every candidate and elected official that we work with is one of my favorites. But I think your story is so inspiring and you have so aggressively decided to take no bullshit and I think it's really beautiful to watch. So Bethany, thank you for joining us for our second episode of Run for Something the podcast, I would love for us to start with telling us a little bit about yourself, like, Where did you grow up? What was it like? How did you get to be where you are?

**Bethany Hallam** 01:37

I'm sure my story is a little different than a lot of other people's but that is actually one of the things that I'm hoping to change. I'm hoping that more people who just come from a regular everyday background run for office. And so I've lived in Pittsburgh my whole life. I still live in my parents basement about 10 minutes north from downtown in the North Hills. And so I had a really Normal upbringing, I mean, great parents to younger siblings in the suburbs of Pittsburgh. And I was just really involved in always staying busy. And so my parents will tell you now that my childhood was a precursor for, you know what was becoming the rest of my life. But I've just always had this passion and energy, and I didn't ever really know where to direct it. And so when I was younger, I spent a lot of my time in different sports. I was a swimmer. I played lacrosse, I played softball. I mean, basically anything. My parents were willing to sign me up for Team activities. I was always on board. So my junior year in high school, I tore my ACL playing lacrosse. So again, didn't think anything of it at the time. I was prescribed painkillers at the time of the injury and more whenever I got the surgery, and then four months after the fact, as I was going through physical therapy, so just as I was about to start tapering off and finishing physical therapy, went back to sports, tore my other ACL playing with Again. And so anyways, it was the same situation where prescription painkillers you know, wasn't abusing them was just taking them as prescribed but all together, I was on painkillers for about 18 months. Now one day my doctor decided, Okay, no more you're done with these and I just felt ill I didn't feel like myself. And I knew something was up and a friend was like, you're probably withdrawing Here, take this pill. And so that's kind of where the next decade of my life was spent. And, you know, I had multiple run ins with law enforcement because of my drug use. My pill usage eventually manifested into heroin usage. Whenever I was in college. I graduated college, just literally barely. Where do you go to school? I went to Duquesne University came and so great college, great education, but I stayed close to home intentionally, because I knew that was where my supply was. That's where I had connections to make sure. I mean, very early on in my

battle with substance use disorder. It wasn't about getting high. You know, because when I first started the prescriptions, it was just keeping myself from feeling pain. And then by the time I realized that I was addicted to opioids, I, it was too late for me to feel like I could do anything. I felt like I was completely powerless over what was going on. And the only thing I could do was find more drugs to make sure I wasn't sick. I was able to get up and go to class. And then I worked full time the whole time. I was in college, and it was just about maintaining, and very quickly that maintaining turned into stealing to support my habit. I mean, I stole all my little brother's video games, and he would buy new ones and I'd steal them again and sell them once I stole my mom's engagement ring and pawned it, like things that were literally unforgivable. And so I really had a broken relationship with my family for most of my life. adult life until I started my recovery because of that,

**Amanda Litman** 05:03

did your parents know what was going on?

**Bethany Hallam** 05:05

Not at the beginning. By the time it started to get bad I was at college. So even though I stayed in Pittsburgh, I wasn't living at home. So I was away at school. So they figured it out probably three years into the 10 year battle. And by then, I was very like, fuck you want anything to do with you? Let me live my life. What do you know, I knew better than everyone, right? I was the smartest person in the world, and nothing that they could tell me all the help they offered. I mean, I had great health insurance and they had the financial resources to be able to send me to treatment. And every time I go away to a rehab facility, I leave against medical advice or I'd find a way to get high while I was in rehab, or you know, even worse, I'd meet a boy and we believe together was was always like, worst case scenario. And so they really tried and it got to a point We were they didn't want to talk to, they didn't want me around. They didn't want my younger siblings were embarrassed of me. They hear stories from their friends. Oh, did you see Bethany was here doing this or Bethany was hanging out with this person or Bethany's in jail again, you know, and so it took a big toll on my whole entire family. For the first few years, my parents would lie to my relatives and not tell them that I was in rehab, tell them I went away to summer camp or something like that, you know, because it was this stigma that's attached to substance use disorder, that my parents were really ashamed of me. And I didn't have a care in the world except where I was going to get my next fix.

**Amanda Litman** 06:38

to graduate from college. Where do you end up living

**Bethany Hallam** 06:42

in a car, and so I was saying, I wasn't really living anywhere. You know, I would bounce from house to house boyfriend, the boyfriend, friend's couch, the friend's couch. A lot of time I spent in a car with a guy I was dating for a long period of time and sleeping at rest stops and Walmart parking lot. And really anywhere that the police weren't going to come pounding on our window in the middle of the night.

**Amanda Litman** 07:04

How often are you interacting with law enforcement?

**Bethany Hallam** 07:06

Oh, I mean, if any interactions count, not just like arrests and citations once every three or four weeks, I mean, I'm just telling us the move the car and go somewhere else. Or if I was driving, I was known for having a suspended driver's license. And so I felt the need to keep driving even while it was suspended. they'd see me driving and they pulled me over and it was just another year added on to the suspension, you know, and then really, eventually, I got a DUI, I was sleeping and when I say sleeping, like I nodded off in my car with my car running in a parking lot and woke up to the police shining lights, my windows pounding on my window and like thought that was going to be the real wake up call. Because every interaction with law enforcement before that was kind of just, oh look white girl from the suburbs who uses drugs. Well, just make sure she goes out, you know, which is how I really came. To see this whole how discriminatory this current criminal justice system is, because so many interactions that I've had with law enforcement that just led to a slap on the wrist or community service, we've seen people across the country lose their lives, or get life in prison or even decades in prison and, you know, ridiculous amount of fines and fees that they'll never be able to afford. And so I think that's when I started realizing, oh, this happens to me and everything's okay. And that just was like, to me, oh, I'm invincible. And then, in 2014, I sold Suboxone to a police officer, obviously didn't know as a police officer, which you always think how could you sell drugs to a police officer? I would know it was a cop. I did not know. Okay, and so, you know, that was really the first time I was facing felony charges.

And I was facing a lot of prison time. And again, I have the resources afford a great attorney, I had, you know, a family who was at least visibly there for me and showing up the court dates in it, you know, I had this great support system. And so I got two years probation when I was facing eight to 10 years in prison, the felony charges got dropped. As part of a plea deal. I pled to a misdemeanor charge instead. And you know, looking back now, that was such a pivotal moment in my life, because if I would have been convicted of that faladi I would have never been able to take office, I would have never even been on my radar to get involved with politics because I just would have felt defeated. I felt defeated by the time the whole process was over with I can't imagine if that outcome would have been differently. You know, how different my life would have been. But anyways, two years probation, I was still actively using heroin multiple times a day every day. We were waking up early in the morning to go to Home Depot and loads in different stores to steal stuff to support the habit throughout the day. I mean, it was just everything. Day a grind. And so when I said earlier, I had always had all this energy and passion and I never lost that I was just using it towards something that was detrimental to my well being. So eventually I was getting weekly drug tested. Because of my probation, I was cheating my drug tests, you know, bringing in clean urine so that I, they wouldn't know that I had drugs in my system. And then one day, the drug test tested positive and I got taken straight to jail. And that was 2016. That was if you remember what was going on in 2016 like Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton and I had I was on my local democratic committee during all of this so I had you know, always been there been around the scene but wasn't putting any time or effort into it How I wish that I could have because my whole life was chaos. You know, I had no stability. I barely had a place to live. I was living this double life trying to act like I was off drugs when I was still using didn't know where to turn. I had tried 12 step meetings. Hundreds of them, and it just wasn't clicking for me. And so I went to jail. And I remember so vividly. You know, it was the first time I had a clean mind in my entire life where there wasn't drugs or alcohol or even cigarettes in my system affecting the way I was thinking and processing information. And so, you know, after a couple months of pretty nasty withdrawal in a jail cell and the Allegheny County Jail, it was election night. And I remember going to bed and everybody had predicted via exit polls that Hillary Clinton was winning the election. And so I went to bed like cool sigh of relief, you know, making all these plans for what I was going to do when I got out and how I was going to help further that cause and then I will never forget the middle of the night. The corrections officer overnight was a female corrections officer and I woke up to her cheering and so I was like they called it Hillary one you know, a female's cheering must be a female was elected to President and then I heard over the TV sound system, Donald Trump giving his victory speech and my heart sunk, and I get goosebumps now just talking about it, because I won't ever forget how I felt at that point, it was a lot of guilt and remorse, you know, not just because I felt like, maybe if I wasn't in here, and maybe if I was doing more to help elect Democrats, maybe this wouldn't happen, but also at the same time feeling all the guilt and remorse of all the friends I had lost along the way, and all of the family relationships that I had ruined, and just all the missed opportunities. So I got out in January 2017, and I vowed that I was not going to sit at home and feel sorry for myself, you know, no driver's license, a criminal record, no job. I've broken relationships with my family. And I was just so lucky that so many people were there to scoop me up and love me and support me and I just went all in that passion. And that energy that I had always had my whole life but hadn't really known where to direct them. But I realized that what I wanted to change is the system that we live in and how many people I was sitting with inside the county jail, who needed help and resources. They didn't need to be locked away in cages and treated like animals. And so that's really where, how I got here today.

**Amanda Litman** 13:16

I think it's incredible. You know, so many people talk about not having been involved in politics before 2016. You were actually incredibly involved in politics before 2016. Like, in your parallel life, right. What was your initial political engagement?

**Bethany Hallam** 13:31

I was bartending at a local pub. And there was this group of older gentleman who would always come in, it was like \$2 Tuesday's, they'd come in and get their \$2 beers and they'd sit and they talk politics. And so I would just engage in conversation with them and they treated me I mean, I was very visibly. I mean, 50 pounds underweight scabs all over my face from you know, actively using drugs and picking. They knew something was going on, you know, but they treated me like a human I'm being. And I think that was the first time that, you know, throughout my battles with substance use disorder that someone treated me like a human instead of because of my drug use. And so we would talk every week we would talk about politics. And eventually one of the guys who is still a big mentor to me today, he was like, have you ever thought about getting involved in politics, and I kind of laughed it off. And he was like, I'm serious. And so I got appointed to my local democratic committee. I ran for the seat the following year. And then I got involved in the state democratic committee and ran for that. And so currently, I still hold my local in my state democratic committee seats. And so that's where I think a lot of

people don't actually have any idea how these local committee structures work. And they hear like the DNC and the RNC, but they don't understand how it breaks down to the local level. And so I've tried to use my experience would be like, you don't know where to start. Your local committee is the perfect place to go because you can invest in as much or as little time as you want. And really, the end goal is to elect democrats and to me, and that should be everyone's goal as Democrats and as people who want to participate in democracy. And that's what the local committee did for me and exposed me to and introduced me to candidates who were running for office. And we had that was when we started to see that wave of like, locally, we had Sarah Enamorado and Summer Lee, who were both these like, bad ass female candidates who were just speaking truth to things that so many people had been waiting for so long to hear come out of the mouth of someone who was running to represent them in office. And so I just, you know, went headfirst into their campaigns. And then before we knew it, it was next year, and somebody approached me saying, Have you ever thought about running for office? And people would ask me that dozens of times before when I would be at all these political events as a member of the Democratic committee, and it never crossed my mind. I just thought you know, you know, my past. You know, like the stories about me. Have you know where I've been and what I've done and I thought that was completely disqualifying. And the more I started thinking about it, I was like, Well, how are we going to change the stigma that's attached with substance use disorder? And that the stigma that's attached with people in the criminal justice system? How are we going to change that? Unless there's people who are out there talking about it and talking about experience in sharing stories of success? What was the moment you decided? Yes, I'm going to do this. That's a hard question. Because I don't know if there was really a moment it was kind of like a steady scale of like, no way I would never do this building up to, you know, asking the people who were close to me, I mean, super important to me was my employer, right? Are they going to give me some wiggle room because I can't afford to not be working, you know, and my parents, are they going to be okay with because the thing that I knew, was that if I ran, I was going to be me. 100% I wasn't going to try to conform to any of these norms. This is what a female candidate should look like. Or this is what a young candidate should act like, all of these stereotypes of you have to do it this way, or you can't win, nobody will take you seriously. And I wanted to change that. Because I'm not the type of person who can put on a pantsuit and some stilettos and do my makeup. That's not me, like I walk into any event with a pair of ripped jeans, sneakers and a messy bun, because that's just how I feel comfortable, you know. And so I think it was a big ramp up of that, like my parents knowing, hey, everything's going to be out in the open now. So maybe you should call up aunts and uncles who told them I was in summer camp all those years and let them know, they'll be really worried because I want to do this right. And I want to make sure that I give other people hope that you can tell your story and be yourself and still have a successful, you know, experience in the political world. And I don't know if you've ever seen Eight Mile but that was one of my favorite movies.

**Amanda Litman** 17:55

classic, classic movie

**Bethany Hallam** 17:57

Classic movie, right? And so that was a movie that really gave me the idea of you remember the rap battles at the end, where he's like, I'm going to tell you everything that you're going to say about. And that's exactly what I did in my race. I came out there with this is who I am. This is where I've been. And this is where I want to take Allegheny County into the future. And people resonated with people. And I had no idea if it was going to or not, but I knew I had spent an entire life lying and leading a double life while I was battling substance use disorder that I was done with that life and I was just going to be honest and be myself.

**Amanda Litman** 18:31

What made you decide county council and in particular you primaried like a very long time Democratic establishment. Yeah. Family. Yeah, if I remember correctly, what made you pick both that office and that opponent?

**Bethany Hallam** 18:45

Yeah, so um, county council specifically because of the oversight that there is in the county I knew the criminal justice reform was a big issue for me, and especially having been in the Allegheny County Jail. I think that's one of the most ironic pieces of where I am. Now. Is Four years ago, I was sitting in the Allegheny County Jail and now I'm on the jail oversight board and County Council which legislates around the jail. I knew that was a big thing for me. I knew I wanted to be involved at the county level because our public transit system is a countywide transit system. And I lost my driver's license for 10 years. I literally got it back this summer for the first time since I was in college. And so I wanted to be able to have an impact on the things that I had personally experienced. Because I knew there were so many people out there who had had similar

experiences as me and felt like no one was paying attention and no one cared. And then specifically the at large seat, because I realized that I had a unique perspective personality traits where I could relate to people from so many different backgrounds. And a lot of people think of Pittsburgh not realizing that Allegheny County is so much more than just the city of Pittsburgh. We have about 300,000 people in the city of Pittsburgh and 1.3 million people and all that Allegheny County, so people are so different when you go from municipality to municipality, you can drive 45 minutes outside of the city and you're still in Allegheny County. So there are some more rural parts. It's not this big like blue block. Like there are like you see, like Philadelphia County, by contrast. And so I just knew that if I wanted to make the most impact, and I wanted to be able to help the most people that having the largest constituency, I have the second largest legislative district in the entire country. Wow. Yeah.

**Amanda Litman** 20:32

I don't think I realized that.

**Bethany Hallam** 20:34

That is wild. Yeah, seventh largest. And so I have so many more people that I have the ability to talk to and communicate with because I knew my biggest thing was, as much as I've been involved in I volunteered on races. I've been on the democratic committee. I didn't know the first thing about actually being the candidate or being a legislator. And so going into this whole process As I knew something that was important to me was the concept of CO governance. To this day, the majority of pieces of legislation that I put forth, whether it's on the board of elections, or the jail oversight board or county council are not even my ideas, their concepts that I've come up with in conversations with other people with constituents who have said, Why don't we have this? Why can't we have this? And the more I would start to look into it, the real answer was because our current elected officials lack the political willpower to be able to make the changes that people need it. And again, I came into this, you know, no bullshit, everything on the line. And I've made sure to keep that consistent throughout my term

**Amanda Litman** 21:40

When you went up against your incoming opponen, what was the response from the party like?

**Bethany Hallam** 21:47

I was laughed out of so many rooms and that wasn't even just at the beginning. I mean, that lasted for at least the first few months of the campaign, because everybody knew him. He had held the seat that I want for 20 years and friends. Anyone who's not familiar with Allegheny County Council, it's only existed for 20 years. So he had held the seat literally since the beginning the conception of Allegheny County Council and was just really well known, had other elected officials in his family, and was just this big name in Allegheny County politics. And so I would be like, Hey, I'm babbling, I'm running for county council. Like, what? What seat Are you running for? And I'd say the at large seat and they'd give me this confused, look for a second and then just start laughing. And eventually it didn't affect me because remember, I have had so many trials and tribulations in my life and so many points where everyone was embarrassed of me. I was embarrassed of myself. I wasn't showering for weeks at a time I was living off like, a half a packet of ramen a day. I mean, I've seen so many worse things than you laughing at me because you don't think I can do this. And so I think that's why I was able to push through is because to me, you can say whatever you want about me, but I've Been there, I've seen things that you could never imagine that I hope you never have to experience. And I mean, I hate to say like sticks and stones, you know, but really like, try. So I had people I mean, I still to this day, you know, have people on social media who will, you know, use derogatory terms about people with substance use disorder, you know, and call me that and, you know, use that to spread my name through the mud. And but overwhelmingly, people were like, Wow, I've never heard someone just come out and say that, I mean, I almost would lead with it, like, Hey, my name is Bethany. And you know, after a 10 year battle with substance use disorder, I saw so many things wrong with a system that I wanted to fix. And here's how we're going to do that together. And people were like, You're not supposed to be telling strangers this, but I'm running to be I'm going to be on your ballot asking you to cast your one vote in this race for me. I want you to know everything about me where I come from, what I stand for, what my plans are. want you to know everything I just want to be honest. And I think that was more like a shock for people not as much that they were not appreciated or that they were put off by it. But it was just such a shock. Like, oh my gosh, did you really just answer that question that every other candidate here on this panel completely avoided giving an answer to? I'm like, Yeah, because to me, I know what I believe in. I know what I want to fight for. And there's no wavering on that.

**Amanda Litman** 24:24

The night of election night or night of Election Day. What did you do? How did you feel?

**Bethany Hallam** 24:29

Um, so remember, in Allegheny County, there are 1300 and 23 polling locations. So I spent the day I'm going literally we did like a spiral around Allegheny County ending up in the city where, again, I didn't have a driver's license for the whole campaign on election day. So I had a really close friend who was working on my campaign drive me around. We went to tons of polling locations throughout the day. So by the end of the day, that was what 1314 hours of driving around going Facebook Live from every polling place. We could get to And I heard that you're not supposed to go to your election night party until you know the results because you don't know how you're gonna react if you win, what are you going to do if you lose? What are you going to do? And so I did it. I was like hiding around the corner at this little restaurant right near where my election night party was. And I was just sitting there, I wouldn't let any of my there's five of us, you know, nobody was allowed to look at their phone, check the results like see updated polling, you had to put it in your pocket. Let's just enjoy this last time because I didn't know I was going to win on election night. I have people say all the time. Oh, you know, I knew I was gonna win that race. I knew I was going to lose. I had no idea. All I knew is at the end of the day. I literally put it all out there. And I dedicated my life to you know, trying to fight for the betterment of the community that I've lived in my whole life that I love so much. And so I got a call. And I answered it and it said a local radio station that I would sometimes do a segment on So I thought they were just calling like they normally do on election night to be like, Bethany, what did you see at the polls today? What do you think's gonna happen? And instead it was, you know, some folks who were on there, like, I guess like election night commentators, you know, and they're like, hey, there's enough of the race, and we're calling your race and you want. And so I'm like, I was standing in the street, because I wanted to go outside so I could hear the phone call in case they wanted me to be on the radio. And I was like, Are you fucking serious? And I didn't know that that was live on the radio. They had to like blurt it out and everything. And I was just like shaking and sweating. And I went inside and was like, screaming at everyone, like, let's go to the party. We won. And I get there. And you know, one of the things that I lost over my 10 year battle with substance use disorders, like my ability to really feel emotion and feel, you know, that's one of the things I've been working on for years now. But I was just crying all the people who had put so much Their heart and soul into my campaign. We're all crowded in this brewery. And we're just hugging me and my dad had had an open heart surgery a couple of days prior. So he was like calling me My mom had had her Achilles tendon operated on. Neither of them were there at home, like follow me for updates. My brother and sister time, my boyfriend, and there was just so much emotion and so much love that I mean, if there's any day in the world I would ever go back to it's election night because it was awesome. And all my friends won, like everybody that I was running around in the campaign trail with, we all want our races and we all like went through that process of campaigning and are now in this process of government together. And it's just so cool.

**Amanda Litman** 27:44

I think it's incredible. When you think about the timeline, you say you spent Election Day 2016 in a jail cell listening to Trump win three years later, winning like yeah, you had come so far. I think people think of like, you have to lay the groundwork to be a politician. For years and like put in the hard work, and you did the hard work, but also these things happen much faster than most people realize.

**Bethany Hallam** 28:08

Yeah, it was definitely a lot for me as well. And then there came the issue of like, being like in a campaign and then being an elected official brings on all this additional stress, which no one can ever convey to you. Like, I thought I understood. And so I had, you know, a lot of people close to me who were just making sure that I was, you know, that's a lot of people returned to drug use after a period of recovery because of additional stress. And so I was just so lucky that I had a lot of people who were not just doing campaign check ins, but were doing like mental health and well being check ins with me. And were like, you look stressed today. Like, let's just go out and get some food and talk, you know, and so I think that was something that helped me so much is because when you're in those early years of recovery, and everything is tough, and everything can be a trigger, and so I'm just at the end of the day, I truly believe it was my support today. Not just my close support system, my boyfriend and my family and my close friends. But all the people on the campaign trail who were just looking out for me and genuinely wanted the best for me, when you took office, you pretty quickly started pushing what the county council could do. What are you most proud of? Oh, most proud of so far, you can pick a few things. Okay, so one of the things I'm most proud of is since the because remember, my whole almost my whole time has been COVID. Right. I was in office for two and a half months whenever Allegheny County shut down for COVID. So all the list of things that I had that I wanted to do, like while I was running, and before I got into office, suddenly had to take a backseat to all of the things that were so timely and necessary now, because people were hungry and people were broke and people were getting evicted from their homes and

losing their jobs and kids weren't in school so they weren't getting the meals they needed in the support. And so it was just like everything change really quickly. But lucky for me, I was brand new to this anyway, so I was able to just adapt and roll with it. I say something I'm most proud of is something I've actually done as a member of the jail oversight board, is we've put \$50 on the commissary accounts of every single incarcerated person at the Allegheny County Jail each month since the pandemic started. And so, again, coming from a personal experience, I think it was something that wasn't even on the radar of the rest of the members of the jail oversight board, but my parents spent thousands of dollars just to talk to me on the phone and make sure I could purchase basic hygiene items off of commissary. And so I think it's hard for folks who have never had a loved one who was incarcerated to understand how expensive it is for a 15 minute phone call. And then learning that the county actually profit 69% of the cost of the phone call is profit in the county's pocket. You know, they don't realize that you aren't provided basic hygiene items and adequate nutritional content for food, just in your everyday meals and in your provisions. And so they don't realize how people are struggling on the outside. So imagine like the people were on the inside of the jail, they need our help, too. And so that's something I'm really proud of. Another thing is in Pennsylvania, this was the first year we had no excuse mail and voting. And so as the large member of county council, I'm on our board of elections. And I'm so passionate about elections and election security. And we had just got brand new voting machines with hand Mark paper ballots, which we were like long overdue for. And so I actually introduced legislation to send a mail and ballot application to every single registered voter in Allegheny County. And after the election, when all the data came back about mail and voting in Pennsylvania, we had the highest percentage of participation in mail and voting out of any county in the entire Commonwealth and we were able to completely eliminate the edges One level disparity that you usually see with mail and voting, and just made it equal equitable for everyone. And so, as we know, when we want to see these policy changes, it's important that everyone has access to voting, and that it's easy for them to do so. So any barriers we can remove even something as simple as not making someone have to seek out an application, just sending one rate to their door can have such a profound impact. We had a 42% turnout in the primary and I can't wait to see what happens here in the general because, you know, I'm 30 years old, this is most definitely the most important election of my life if it wasn't 2016. But this is kind of our do over.

**Amanda Litman** 32:39

I think your accomplishments point to some really important things that I just I would love to like really nail home. One is how much of the things that we think are national issues like voting rights and criminal justice reform are actually handled on like a city or county level. Oh, yeah, people don't always connect the dots here like the role that the county council plays in It actually administering so many of the things that we give a shit about cannot be oversold, as you think about what remains for the rest of this cycle. So we're like, I don't know, well, a little over two months to Election Day, three months to election day. Who knows time is a flat circle. What are you either most passionate about? What do you what like, what's the number one priority for you for the remainder of the cycle?

**Bethany Hallam** 33:23

Oh, definitely, to me, it's criminal justice reform. It's about protecting folks in the jail. Just in general, our most vulnerable populations, right. So to me, that's a lot of different groups. It's people in the jail. It's also people who are in our county run nursing homes. It's also people who rely on public transportation to get to and from work and to and from doctor's appointments. And all of those things in the midst of a pandemic, to me are scary as hell. And I want to make sure that we're not just surrounded and represented by elected officials who care about who can write them the biggest campaign contribution and that were instead you know, focusing on people Who actually need us and whose lives would be so drastically changed if they just had a little bit of support and a little bit of resources. And Allegheny County, we've been hit pretty hard by the overdose epidemic, especially during COVID. And so, you know, just working with local elected officials at a local level and saying, Hey, you know, let's talk about safe injection sites and you know, needle exchange programs and things like that, that, believe it or not, are legislated at the local level.

**Amanda Litman** 34:27

What can people do to help you

**Bethany Hallam** 34:29

run for office? More than anything else? The way that you can help me is to look up seats that are available, where you live, and run for office, no office is to local, no office is unimportant. Every single level of government has an impact on your everyday life. And while there's so much discourse going on in this country about who's going to be sitting in the White House come January of 2021. What really affects your life is your school board members who are making decision about

whether or not it's safe to send your kids back to school or whether or not they're a police in the schools, it's your Borough Council members who can literally make zoning ordinance to ban fracking in your community. It's your county council members who are legislating about things that are going on at the county level, such as access to public transportation, and such as the way that people are treated whether in our allegheny county jail or on probation or parole at the county level. It's your state legislators who literally passed ak 77, and gave us mail in voting in Pennsylvania for the first time that just so happened to be when we needed it the most in the middle of a pandemic, and they didn't even know and they were doing it, but that was gonna happen. You know, it's so many of these local offices that people sleep on, are so so important. And if you're pissed off about any of those things that I just talked about, then maybe you should be the one who could run for office because there is nothing more inspiring than being able and going to the back going to the polls and casting a vote for someone who truly inspired You and truly has the lived experiences to make happen, what you want to see what so many of your neighbors want to see but don't know where to look for it because they're used to seeing the same name on their ballot, election after election after election. It doesn't have to be that way. And no incumbent is untouchable. And it is our job as constituents of every different level of government to make sure that we hold our elected officials accountable every single year, every single election by going to vote them out of office, if they're not doing a good job by going to vote for them if they are doing a good job, and they are representing us. But sometimes, and when I say sometimes, I mean pretty often, what it's going to take is someone like you to stand up and run for office, because it might have been in the back of your mind for quite some time and you didn't know if you were ready, and you didn't know if you'd be able to do a good job, but I can tell you that having the passion and the dedication and the motivation to just want the best for your community is really all it takes.

**Amanda Litman** 36:59

I give that pitch Probably once a day and you did it better than I ever have. That was perfect. My only little addition is if you're looking if you're listening to this and thinking where do I go to find the office to run for run for wide dotnet is your place to go you can enter your address and or the Run for Something team will give you exactly what offices are available to you. Right now we have all the information for 2021 but we'll be adding 2022 as we get into next year and as that information is available, so you know and I think Bethany your story is proof that like nobody's background is too messy, or too complicated or too you know, off the record or off the off the beaten path to make it happen. So I am I am so glad that we are on your team and so glad that you're able to tell your story today. Thank you.

**Bethany Hallam** 37:41

It's what did I tell you?

**Amanda Litman** 37:49

Bethany Hallam, my God, that woman is energetic and pumped and effective. She has a take no prisoners attitude. That is just his won't make me feel better about democracy when so many things feel so bad. If you liked hearing what she had to say you're going to love the next couple episodes we have lined up. So make sure you subscribe rate review, share it with a friends and ask them to rate review and share it with a friend. You can find Run for Something online at Run for Something now on Instagram and just at Run for Something everywhere else. I'm at Amanda Litman on Twitter and at Amanda Li tm on Instagram. We want to hear from you. So tell us what you think. Go to the comments DMS everything is wide open so jump on in and thank you for listening go to Run for something.net to learn more and talk to you next week.