

*I am Shared Safety*  
**Jovida Hill**  
**Executive Director, Office**  
**of Engagement for**  
**Women**  
**Executive Director,**  
**Philadelphia Commission**  
**for Women**



“Social justice is my life,” says Jovida Hill. “It’s part of who I am. There is no separation between my personal and professional life.”

Jovida came of age in the city in the 1960s, during the convergence of the civil rights and the Black Power movements, the reproductive rights and women’s rights movements, and the anti-Vietnam war movement. “All of those movements informed me,” Jovida explains. At age 14, a supporter of the anti-Vietnam war movement, Jovida handed out leaflets door to door. “I was also campaigning for Robert F. Kennedy because he backed giving 18-year-olds the right to vote.” The 26th Amendment to the Constitution (lowering the voting age from 21 to 18) was passed in 1971. The following year, says Jovida, “I was among the first 18-year-olds to vote, and I’ve never missed an election since.”

Jovida serves joint roles—as executive director (ED) of Philadelphia’s [Office of Engagement for Women](#) (OEW) and ED of the [Philadelphia Commission for Women](#), a post created by a ballot initiative put to Philadelphia voters in the primary election in 2015. She joined Mayor Jim Kenney’s administration in 2016 in its Office of Diversity and Inclusion—now the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Stephanie Levin, co-chair of Shared Safety’s communications sub-committee, spoke with Jovida earlier this spring about the role of the OEW and Commission for Women, why Jovida believes in the work of Shared Safety, and what issues that affect women and girls need more attention and resources.

**SL: What is the mission of the OEW and the Commission for Women?**

**JH:** Our work is advocacy. We want to be a bullhorn for issues regarding women’s status. Since OEW does not have a budget or staff, the only way we can make an impact is through advocacy and collaborations—like the one with Shared Safety—and related to issues like human trafficking and maternal mortality disparities.

In my work with OEW and at the Philadelphia Commission for Women, we have helped advance a gender wage equity bill, a domestic workers bill of rights, and the OVA ([Organized Voices for Action](#))—Birth Justice Philly impact project. We do a little bit here and a little bit there, and hope we’re chipping away at gender inequity.

**SL: How does Shared Safety involvement factor into your work?**

**JH:** I'm a devotee of the collective impact approach, and Shared Safety is the epitome of how to tackle these issues that seem insurmountable. I love the way Shared Safety is addressing these issues; I'm proud to be associated with it.

**SL: What issues that affect women and girls should we be talking more about?**

**JH:** Street harassment. That's a safety issue. We need a cultural shift in the way we think about appropriate sexual behavior. This kind of shift takes time; it doesn't happen overnight. I believe comprehensive sex education should start in kindergarten.

**SL: What keeps you doing this kind of work?**

**JH:** I do it because it has to be done.

**SL: What do you enjoy doing when you are not elevating women's issues?**

Spending time with my six amazing sisters, my sister friends, and my amazing husband who puts up with me and my social justice stuff, 24/7/365.

I'm also addicted to libraries and books; I love Philadelphia's library system.

**SL: What books impacted you when you were growing up?**

The Nancy Drew Series. I started reading those books in third grade when my mother died. Nancy Drew was the only person I knew in the whole world who didn't have a mother. And, the whole idea of girls having autonomy, solving mysteries, driving their own cars—on their own—was a big deal.

I also grew up reading Black literature; I read and reread Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* at a young age.

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