

Kendrick Sampson Offers His Voting Guide to California's Propositions

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Highlight: The actor and racial-justice activist, whose organization BLD PWR is one group behind L.A. County's Measure J, weighs in on seven state initiatives on the ballot this fall.

Body

Kendrick Sampson, the actor and activist co-founder of the social justice group BLD PWR, has been an active voice this year in local L.A. politics, including co-leading a weekly protest at the offices of Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey over her handling of police killings of civilians. "There have been over 620 murders at the hands of law enforcement in L.A. County under her watch and no accountability, and she takes a large amount of money from police associations," says Sampson.

While he hasn't endorsed Lacey's opponent, George Gascón - "I formally endorsed a hell no to Jackie Lacey," he says - Sampson's group BLD PWR is one of the steering committee members (along with BLM Los Angeles) behind Measure J. The proposal would have L.A. County set aside 10 percent of the locally generated unrestricted funds in its annual budget to spend on alternatives to incarceration, such as job training, affordable housing, mental health services, counseling, substance abuse treatment and youth development programs. "Every year, the biggest chunk of the budget goes to the sheriff's department, to judges, to probation officers, all of these oppressive institutions," says Sampson. "Measure J would raise the floor so that a minimum would be required to go to these things that the community needs most." Sampson is also supporting the candidacies of Nithya Raman, who is running for election in the Los Angeles City Council District 4 race, and Holly Mitchell, running for the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to represent District 2.

The Hollywood Reporter asked Sampson for his take on some of the 12 California propositions on the ballot this year - ones that speak to his core concerns of racial justice, criminal justice and supporting communities. Look out for additional voter guides from Hollywood names across the political spectrum on THR.com in the coming days.

PROPOSITION 15 It would make commercial landlords, with an exemption for small businesses, face regular property tax assessments. Sampson, who is voting yes, says, "It closes a tax loophole for corporations and funnels that money into investing in schools and local services."

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PROPOSITION 16 It would allow diversity to be used as a factor in public employment, education and contracting decisions. "Prop. 16 is a big yes. [California] is one of nine states that has a ban on affirmative action," says Sampson. "As people with the campaign have said, if you really want to prove Black Lives Matter to California, this is one way."

PROPOSITION 17 The initiative would restore voting rights to people who are on parole. Sampson - who believes that no one, including people who are in prison, should ever lose their right to vote - says this a clear yes for him: "I don't think that [parole] should be a reason that people can't vote, especially if they have already served their time."

PROPOSITION 18 It would permit 17-year-olds to vote in primary and special elections if they will turn 18 by the next general election and would otherwise be eligible to vote. "That's an easy one, a yes, for me," says Sampson. "We want to get more young people involved as early as possible."

PROPOSITION 20 The initiative would increase penalties for certain property crimes and repeated parole violations. "A big hell no," says Sampson, who notes that the initiative is backed by a number of police unions. "It's a very scary proposition that could beat back a lot of wins we've had in California to operate in a more equitable fashion."

PROPOSITION 21 It would expand the authority of cities across the state to enact rent control. "That's an easy yes," he says, "to make sure that we expand areas where people can rely on a controlled rent."

PROPOSITION 25 The proposal would replace cash bail with a system that would evaluate public safety and flight risk. Sampson is voting no. "The wording is very confusing," says Sampson, who supports eliminating cash bail but explains: "This is not the way to do it, especially by replacing it with a system that relies heavily on an algorithm. There are so many studies that algorithms have racial bias ingrained in them."

Updated: Story updated to include Sampson's support of Raman and Mitchell.

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