

PROFILE: INDIANA HOUSE MINORITY FLOOR LEADER CHERRISH PRYOR



Longtime legislator talks about the 'core of what an elected official is supposed to do,' as well as why housing policy remains a focus of her legislative work

by Derek Cantù (dcantu@csq.org)

When thinking back on a valued legislative accomplishment, Cherrish Pryor tells the story of a bill she worked on for a constituent, a mother who tragically lost her son only weeks away from his high school graduation.

When thinking ahead to a policy priority for 2025, the Indianapolis legislator talks about what she has heard and learned about the rise of investor-owned purchases of single-family homes, and the impact that this trend is having on residents and neighborhoods in her city.

Pryor also speaks about what she sees as an everyday responsibility, and opportunity, beyond the legislative process: making government work better for her constituents.

"That's the core of what an elected official is supposed to do, not only pass laws that help people, but to be that conduit, through constituency services, to make sure that people are getting responses from agencies," Pryor says.

She has been doing it now for more than 15 years, first as a member of the City-County Council in Indianapolis and now as a member of the Indiana House.

FROM LEGISLATIVE INTERN TO LEGISLATIVE LEADER

Pryor got her start as a legislative intern and assistant for long-serving former Indiana Rep. Bill Crawford.

She then moved on to serve in various roles in local government, including as a legislative and public affairs director for the City-County Council, as chief deputy for the Marion County treasurer's office, and as real estate manager for the county auditor's office.

In some of these earlier staff positions, Pryor gained a deep understanding about property taxes and how they affect the lives of people and the success of communities. This early work cemented in her a legislative passion on the issue of property taxation, as well as housing.

"Everybody deserves housing that they can afford, that is safe, and that they can feel comfortable in," she says.

Pryor first joined the Indiana House in 2008, ascended to the position of Democratic floor leader a decade later, and has been continually elected to this leadership title by legislative colleagues ever since.

Pryor says she takes some of the same principles of good constituent relations to her role as a caucus leader. Take accountability for your actions, be open to feedback, and show an openness to listen and work hard on behalf of your legislative colleagues.



BIO-SKETCH: INDIANA REP. CHERRISH PRYOR

- ✓ has served as minority floor leader since 2018; first elected to the Indiana House in 2008
- ✓ previously served as a member of the Indianapolis City-County Council
- ✓ named a Legislator of the Year in 2023 by the National Black Caucus of State Legislators; she currently serves as the group's treasurer
- ✓ resides in Indianapolis, has been part of several of the city's civic organizations, and is an active member of her church
- ✓ has a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Indiana University and a master's degree in public affairs from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

"When my [caucus] colleagues are working on issues, I want to be someone they know is working as hard for them as I do for the constituents in my district."

She discussed her views on leadership, legislating and public service in a recent interview with CSG Midwest. Here are excerpts, with questions and answers lightly edited for clarity and brevity.

Q Which legislative victories from your tenure in office are you particularly proud of, and why?

A From the standpoint of property taxes, my freshman year I got a significant bill [HEA 1344 of 2009] passed. It was a bill to verify homestead deductions, and we needed it because we had people who had two or three homestead deductions on their property. Sometimes people had far more than that.

My bill provided a statewide homestead verification program, and that program for several years brought in millions of additional dollars to the local units of governments.

And then from a human standpoint, there was a particular piece of legislation that came about because of a situation here where a local high school student had died. He was a senior, and he was on track and getting ready to graduate. The school did not want to give that student his diploma. But the family really wanted their child to get their diploma. He had earned it, done all the work, basically, to get it.

I was able to get a law passed that said if a student is on track for graduating and getting a diploma, then the parents could petition the school and get a

diploma for their child [posthumously]. [Editor's note: This provision was included in HB 1384, passed in 2017.]

Q One of your priority issue areas this past legislative session was on fair housing practices. Can you talk about the work you're doing in this area and what you're trying to accomplish?

A One piece of legislation that I introduced [HB 1113], and that I will probably introduce again, deals with investors and trying to get a handle on investors that have been going into communities purchasing properties.

Oftentimes, they're overbidding people who are wanting to use those homes to actually live in. When these investors are bidding \$30,000 or \$40,000 over the asking price, and you're a family just starting out or a young person just wanting to live the American dream, then you're going to continually get outbid or outpriced.

Home ownership is really important to me. I am trying to figure out a way where we're not allowing blocks and blocks to be filled with investor-owned properties where people are renting properties, and where every year or two years the whole dynamic of the community or the neighborhood changes because renters are moving in and out all the time.

We want to provide stability in the neighborhoods and then also, quite frankly, provide stability of the housing market. [Editor's note: HB 1113 would put in

place new rules and restrictions on investors purchasing single-family residences.]

Q How do you view your role and work as part of your caucus leadership team?

A The one thing that is important to me as the Democratic floor leader is that if my colleagues have a concern or issue, they feel comfortable coming and talking to me about it. And when my colleagues are working on issues, I want to be someone they know is working as hard for them as I do for the constituents in my district.

Q You also have taken on a leadership role at the National Black Caucus of State Legislators. Can you describe how your participation with this group has influenced your work?

A I'm one of 150 in the Indiana General Assembly, so there's 150 very strong personalities and we all come with our different backgrounds. And with the National Black Caucus, you're having to deal with other people from other states who are sometimes at the top of leadership in their own states. Being able to navigate and come to a consensus with those individuals on difficult policies has been very beneficial to me. We're able to take wise feedback and guidance here in Indiana, and other states are able to get feedback and guidance based on what we're doing in Indiana.