

ETHICS BALLOT QUESTIONNAIRE

County Council Primary 2026

Name/District: Christiana Rigby, Howard County District 3

Campaign Email: Christiana@christianarigby.com

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Educational History

UMBC, Environmental Studies BA with Environmental Policy concentration

Languages Spoken/Other Skills/Relevant Experience

Current:

Proficient in English and A2 level in Spanish

Maryland Department of Planning - Sustainable Growth Subcabinet member

Maryland Comptroller Local Government Advisory Council member

National Association of Counties - Community, Economic, & Workforce Development Policy Steering Committee member

Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) Legislative Representative - 2019, 2025-2026,

MACo LGBTQIA+ Affinity Group Lead

Former:

Kings Contrivance Village Board member 2014-2018, Vice Chair 2015-2018

Howard Ecoworks Board Member 2016-2018

1. Why are you running for this office? Non-Incumbents, please describe how your campaign is viable.

I am running for re-election because Howard County needs a trusted leader with a record to prove it. I have spent the last seven years in office collaborating with our community to deliver real results, and I believe deeply in what we can continue to accomplish together.

Over the past seven years, we have been tested. We endured a global pandemic, faced rising costs that stretch family budgets, and continue to battle the impacts of climate change. In uncertain and divisive

times, steady and experienced local leadership matters more than ever. I lead by listening to our neighbors, showing up where it matters, and working collaboratively to deliver results people can feel in their daily lives.

The challenges ahead are real, but so are the opportunities. Meeting them will require leadership that is experienced, forward thinking, and grounded in our values. That is why I am running for re-election to continue representing District 3, and I hope to earn your support in the weeks and months ahead.

2. Non-Incumbents: What qualifications do you uniquely bring to hold this office? What experience do you have with the County Council? Have you ever testified before the County Council? What positions did you take?

NA - I am the only incumbent elected official seeking to return to their current role at the entire county level.

3. Are you using the Citizens Election Fund (CEF)? Why or why not?

I was proud to participate in the Citizens Election Fund in the last election. I spearheaded changes in 2023 that made it easier for first time candidates to participate and advocated for full funding of the CEF. I remain a staunch supporter of the CEF's mission to amplify everyday voices. However, I have serious concerns about the fund's capacity this year. With ten candidates already participating, including eight first time candidates, the available funds are under significant pressure.

I believe the CEF is most critical for those trying to break into the system for the first time. By stepping aside and fundraising traditionally this cycle, I hope to ensure that adequate resources remain available for the new voices and first time candidates who rely on this program to make our democracy more inclusive.

4. If you are elected, what are your top priorities for 2026? Discuss at least three areas in need of change, under the purview of the County Council, and how you would address them.

If elected, my legislative agenda for 2026 and beyond will drive change in three critical areas: Education Funding, Housing Stability, and Economic Opportunity. We cannot just manage the status quo; we must actively reduce cost pressures on residents while growing the stable revenue streams our community relies on.

Stabilizing Education Funding.

Howard County schools are our crown jewel, but relying on piecemeal funding is not sustainable. As an HCPSS graduate and public school parent and volunteer, I understand the

urgency and support the HCPSS strategic plan. As a County, we need to prioritize bringing in additional revenue to meet the needs of our students, educators, and parents.

I will champion data driven, progressive tax restructuring to encourage a multi year revenue strategy that gets ahead of budget gaps. We need a third party review of our tax structures, guided by experts, not politicians. We must work in partnership across multiple levels of government to modernize our school facilities and provide educators with the resources they need.

Expanding Housing Access.

We face a shortage of housing options that pushes out younger generations and prevents seniors from aging in our community with dignity.

I will push for policy changes that preserve our current stock of more affordable homes while cutting red tape for new, accessible housing. Teachers, Firefighters, Bus Drivers and Utility workers should be able to live in and near the communities they serve. We need increased housing supply for all levels so we can have a more balanced community and continue to meet the needs of residents now and in the future.

Strengthening Local Economy.

Rising costs, federal chaos and economic uncertainty are squeezing our families and small businesses. We need a local economy that is resilient against these national trends, and is less dependent on stability in Washington DC.

I will work to modernize our regulatory environment, making regulations clear and straightforward so small businesses can start, expand, and thrive. By facilitating smart redevelopment, we can increase our commercial revenue, ensuring we have the resources to fund our priorities without placing the entire burden on existing residents and taxpayers. I am also interested in exploring programs like Cincinnati Aggregate, which directly lowers energy costs for their residents.

5. What do you believe are the strengths and weaknesses of the current County Council? How have you demonstrated your ability to work with people who have diverse positions?

I would define the current Council's strengths as fortitude, resilience, and a commitment to process improvement. In 2018, when we entered as an entirely new Council, we faced immediate and unprecedented challenges: a contentious "aspirational budget" process followed by a global pandemic.

While these events caused friction, they also forced us to develop the resilience necessary to govern effectively and a focus on system improvements. This Council has tackled many procedural projects together: an overhaul of the Zoning Board Rules of Procedure; Zoning Board reform; the first update to the Council's internal Rules of Procedure in 20 years; and still-in-progress efforts to reform the Board of Appeals.

From passing COVID rent protections, significantly increasing the school facility surcharge, delivering a nationally recognized general development plan (*Hoco by Design*), to creating a truly independent Inspector General office, the current council has been able to unite on some of Howard County's most pressing issues.

Having represented nearly 70,000 constituents over the last seven years, I know that Howard County's strength lies in its diversity. I have worked tirelessly to build coalitions and expand consensus, ensuring that community groups have a partner in achieving their goals.

I believe that legislative bodies function best when members are open to differing views and that the best policies exist when multiple perspectives are considered. I am proud of my record of working with residents and colleagues across ideological divides to find common ground and create progress.

6. What are your funding priorities for the County? What changes do you believe should be made compared to past budget decisions?

My funding priorities are clear: fully funding our schools, keeping residents safe, and investing in the services that hold us together, like mental health, housing, and community spaces.

The process to fund our priorities is broken. While HCPSS accounted for 64% of all new county revenue in the last budget, the yearly struggle to fund new initiatives indicates that our current funding model is not keeping pace with rising costs and state mandates. When funding decisions are delayed until the last minute in May, it leaves educators with almost no time for thoughtful implementation before the next school year. This creates total confusion for staff and families. Once the budget is formally introduced by the County Executive, the Council has very narrow legal authority to make changes.

We need two major shifts. First, the Board of Education must finalize an achievable budget by March—*before* the Executive submits the budget. Second, we need an independent review by experts and economists to recommend progressive, functional tax structures. This will allow us to grow our revenues for the long term without creating additional burdens on residents today.

7. Do you feel the amount of planned residential growth in the County should be increased or decreased? Include details, such as, overall versus regional goals. Explain your reasons for your

positions, and include any changes you believe should occur to APFO. Be sure to include your opinions about the major areas of recommendations by the 2025 APFO Review Committee.

I believe the amount of residential growth in Howard County must increase from our current historic lows. We have artificially restricted growth, which has created the worst of both worlds: a housing shortage that drives up assessments for long time homeowners while locking out young people and essential workers.

90% of the County's General Fund comes from property and income taxes. When we halt growth (issuing fewer than 1,000 permits recently compared to historic highs of 5,000), we choke off the revenue needed for our schools and services. The only sustainable path to funding education without overburdening current residents is to thoughtfully expand the tax base.

We have more adult children living at home than ever before, and the average age of a first-time homebuyer has risen to over 40. We are leaving generations behind. We must build to meet the State's new housing target of 1,400 new units for Howard County, and we can do so by focusing on redevelopment that replaces unused, unproductive, impervious parking lots with communities, and slow, gentle density that allows seniors to age in community.

Howard County's Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) currently fails to accomplish its goals; instead of managing growth, it blocks the resources we need to fix the problems.

Regional Approach: I advocate for moving away from a "one size fits all" policy. We should adopt a regional chart similar to other counties, which sets standards based on growth designations in the General Plan and overlaid with school capacity.

Strategic Exemptions: We must stop placing hurdles in front of vital redevelopment projects like the Long Reach, Owen Brown, or Oakland Mills Village Centers.

2025 Committee Recommendations: I strongly support the Committee's recommendations regarding Multimodal Transportation (#7-9). We must prioritize infrastructure that moves people, not just cars.

Unit Mix: We should encourage high ratios of studio and one bedroom apartments in activity centers. Data shows these units generate very few students, allowing us to grow the tax base without overcrowding schools.

8. What is your position on locations for new multiplexes and/or ADU's? Include issues of owner occupancy and by right versus conditional use.

Small multiplexes and ADUs should be allowed by right anywhere a single family detached home is allowed, provided they fit the visual character of the neighborhood.

Visually, these structures should match the form and scale of nearby single family homes. Practically, the impact is unchanged: a single family home often houses 3-5 unrelated individuals with 1-5 vehicles. A small multiplex housing the same number of people simply separates the interior to provide independent kitchens and bathrooms. It offers dignity and privacy without increasing the actual population density or traffic burden of the neighborhood.

I support the owner occupancy requirement included in CB3, as it ensures these properties are managed by neighbors invested in our community. However, I strongly oppose adding a Conditional Use requirement.

Requiring a Conditional Use process imposes thousands of dollars in fees and legal costs on residents simply trying to adapt their homes to their family's needs. Furthermore, the legal standard for Conditional Use requires proving that a specific site has *adverse impacts above and beyond* what is normal for that zone. Since small multiplexes and attached or detached accessory dwelling units have minimal impact, nearly every case would likely be approved legally, meaning the process serves only as an expensive barrier to entry, not a true safeguard.

9. How do you think the County can best increase the supply of more affordable housing units?

Affordable housing does not happen by accident; it requires intentional government intervention and subsidy. The best approach is a multi pronged strategy that addresses different types of housing needs.

Large Scale Solutions:

We have a high demand for lower income units, particularly for seniors. To support this, we must use a mix of financial tools to lower development costs. This includes utilizing a revolving loan fund (similar to the successful models in other counties), leveraging Federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), and offering PILOTs (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) to reduce long term operating costs. Additionally, the County should offer "time benefits," expediting the permitting process for projects that meet our affordability goals.

Small Scale Solutions (Multiplexes & ADUs):

I would love for the County to partner directly with residents to create smaller scale housing. We can learn from jurisdictions that provide pattern books containing preapproved design and build plans for Multiplexes and Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). By combining these preapproved plans with low interest loans or grants, we can empower individual homeowners to be part of the solution.

Increasing Supply Works to Lower Housing costs:

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Lastly, we must follow the data. Austin, Texas, recently saw not just a slowing of rent increases, but an actual *decrease* in average rent after they aggressively added housing supply. Increasing housing supply is the most effective way to stabilize costs for everyone.

10. What positions do you hold regarding the current levels of low and moderate income housing in the County? What changes to specific policies, that the Council can control, would you sponsor or support to implement your positions?

Howard County's Moderate Income Housing Unit (MIHU) policy, enacted in 1989, relies on straight inclusionary zoning. For example, depending on the zoning, in a 100 unit development, 15 units are reserved for MIHU. The difference between the cost to build those units and the lower price they sell/rent for is currently shifted onto the remaining 85% of units, driving up costs for middle class families. If we want to retain a strong middle class, we must ensure housing is attainable at all levels, not just subsidized at the margins.

We have made significant progress on Disability Income Housing Units (DIHU). Prior to the passage of CB18, there was only one in the entire county. Thanks to projects and regulatory reform that I have championed, we will soon have nearly 100 units that adults with disabilities can call home.

Policy Proposals:

Activity Centers: I believe Activity Centers should target closer to 20% affordable units. However, we cannot simply mandate this and shift the cost to other residents.

Public Financing Tools: The County should create a revolving construction loan fund. By acting as a financial partner, the County gains a seat at the table to enforce affordability without inflating rents for everyone else.

Regulatory Reform: Howard County and Maryland have overlapping, complicated regulations. We have tried to prioritize everything in our zoning code, and as a result, very little of what we truly need or want gets built. I am hopeful that the ECON task force will produce concrete actionable reforms that the new body can evaluate with the community.

11. What is your position on County-funded housing trusts? Should fund usage be public, private, or both and why?

I support the use of Housing Trusts to bridge the gap between market costs and community needs. These funds should be publicly administered and guided by a public board to ensure transparency and effectiveness.

Currently, federal policies, high interest rates, and expensive materials make "missing middle" and affordable housing nearly impossible to build without support. The government has a unique opportunity to act as a catalyst. By providing low interest financing or gap funding to nonprofit and private entities we can

make projects viable that otherwise wouldn't break ground and also gain a measure of control as a partner in the project.

I look to models like The Laureate in Montgomery County as a blueprint. That project utilized a public-private partnership where the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) retained ownership while leveraging private construction expertise. This reduced costs and ensured long term affordability, proving that when the government shares the risk, the community reaps the reward.

12. How do you feel about large-scale commercial uses on Preserved Agricultural land, such as solar panels, mulching, alcohol production uses?

I support uses that help our farmers remain economically viable, as traditional farming on its own is rarely enough to sustain a farm in Howard County. However, especially on Preserved Agricultural land, these uses must be subordinate to the farming, not replace it.

I support our current solar policy, which protects our best soil by prioritizing solar installations only on the land least suitable for crops. I support small-scale alcohol production or mulching if they support the farm's finances.

I generally oppose large-scale industrial uses that would permanently damage the soil or create undue residential burdens.

13. What is your position on using PayGo funds for deferred HCPSS maintenance? What percentage would you choose to use for that purpose this year? Are there other budget areas you would prefer to see that money fund, or be added to the priority list?

Post-COVID, Maryland, and specifically Central Maryland, experienced positive volatility in income tax collections due to high capital gains activity. This, combined with ARPA funds, has resulted in higher than average PayGo levels in recent years. While PayGo functions like a cash payment to avoid debt, it is a finite resource.

In FY25, Howard County directed over \$61 million to the Board of Education for capital projects. To put this in perspective, the State of Maryland, which holds primary power over education policy, contributed roughly \$39.93 per capita for statewide school construction, compared to Howard County's \$187.89 per capita. While I support using PayGo for schools, aging facilities are also a statewide issue. We need a stronger partnership with the State to successfully battle the backlog, rather than relying solely on County cash reserves.

I can not support setting a rigid percentage for PayGo funds this year. Until recently, I might have supported a threshold, but the current political and economic climate demands flexibility. We have weathered government shutdowns, a global pandemic, and now face aggressive instability and potential

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workforce reductions from the federal government. Proximity to D.C. has shifted from our greatest asset to a potential risk.

The County Charter restricts PayGo to capital projects, debt reduction, or nonrecurring expenses. Given the uncertainty ahead, I would prioritize using these funds for emergent community stability needs, including but not limited to:

Safety net items like emergency food assistance, eviction and foreclosure prevention assistance, and support for local nonprofits.

Legal Defense fund to ensure support for residents targeted by federal overreach and costs to protect County sovereignty from Federal overreach.

Ultimately, arguing over the percentage of PayGo is addressing the margins. The long term answer is to grow County and State revenues so we can invest sustainably in our solutions.

14. What is your position on the Engineering News Record cap on the Council's ability to increase building excise taxes and moderate income housing unit fee-in-lieu rates?

Utilizing the ENR rate creates a perverse incentive that results in additional increased costs when costs are already increasing. I agree with TPV/Lisa Markovitz's previous testimony on this issue.

15. Do you believe that County volunteer boards should have legal/regulatory training? What is your opinion of the current procedures of the Board of Appeals?

Yes, I believe all county boards should have legal and regulatory training, especially those administering quasi-judicial processes. The current Rules of Procedure for the Howard County Board of Appeals were enacted in 1989 and are long overdue for an update. While the current Council has added training requirements, we must do more to support the volunteers tasked with administering the law on behalf of our residents.

I also support the creation of a plain language guide to familiarize residents with quasi-judicial processes, teaching them how to find relevant criteria and engage effectively in land use cases. This is something I do with constituents regularly, and I believe a starter guide would be helpful. Clear rules, transparent communication, and a demonstrated respect for all parties involved will greatly enhance the experience for residents during Board of Appeals cases.