

The People's Voice, LLC

Ethics Ballot™

8815 Centre Park Drive, Suite 245, Columbia, MD 21045

ETHICS BALLOT QUESTIONNAIRE

County Council Primary 2026

Name/District: Cat Carter, District 5

Campaign Address/Phone/Email

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Educational History

Bachelor's Degree Secondary Education English Teaching

Languages Spoken/Other Skills/Relevant Experience

I bring more than a decade of experience drafting, advocating for, and implementing national and state education and health policy, with a proven record of strengthening and passing legislation. I have served on multiple Howard County Public School System committees, including the Operating Budget Review Committee (OBRC), Strategic Plan, Special Education Task Force, and Student Discipline Policy Committee.

Following the Howard High School incident, I identified a critical legislative loophole—"may" versus "shall"—regarding school districts' responsibility to share reportable offenses. After briefing state leaders, the Maryland State Board of Education corrected the language within four days to require action. I later uncovered that districts in Howard County and across the country were preparing Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) legislative language incorrectly; I initiated a corrective memorandum at the Maryland level that was subsequently expanded nationally.

After hearing directly from military families and service members, I met with members of Congress, leading to the creation of a Tricare Task Force within weeks. As a result, vision screenings were added alongside Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) screenings for service members within a year.

I have also worked closely with stakeholders to ensure legislation is effectively implemented—not just passed—including translating the Atticus Act into real policy and practice.

Alongside this policy work, I am a former ESL, English, and Journalism teacher; President of the PTA Council of Howard County; a small cybersecurity business owner and Chief Sales Officer; a member of the Glenwood Lions Club; and a longtime community volunteer focused on vision, hearing, food access, and direct service. Together, these experiences shape my approach to leadership—practical, accountable, and focused on outcomes.

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

I am running to use my proven legislative skills and record of results to serve as an effective voice for District 5. I know how to identify problems, draft solutions, build consensus, and ensure policies are implemented—not just passed. I have knocked on thousands of doors across District 5 since June 2025, listening directly to residents and shaping my priorities around their concerns.

I want to support our public schools and strengthen our community while living within our revenues, so families like mine—and longtime residents across Howard County—can continue to afford to live here. My campaign is viable and community-driven: I have raised over \$10,000 in small donations from more than 170 donors, with a majority coming from within the district, demonstrating strong grassroots support. As a Citizen's Election Fund candidate, I am accountable to voters—not special interests—and committed to responsible, results-oriented leadership.

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?

As PTACHC Vice President of Advocacy, I testified, educated and galvanized the community to advocate for increasing the percentage of the Howard County Budget back to historic norms. I was the PTACHC rep on the HCPSS Operating Budget Review Committee OBRC advocating to help support the needs of our students. I explained a complex issue to the community with informational handouts on the budget process and sample email/testimony and empowered them to tell their story to their elected officials to support our schools. Over 5,000 emails were sent to the Howard County Administration and Council. I was featured in several news reports calling on the county administration and council to increase the percentage back to historic norms and concerns about the HCPSS special education program. This rally of the community increased the additional funding above Maintenance of Effort MOE from \$30 million to \$53 million, saving staff jobs and programs for our students. As the current PTACHC president, I have recruited and lead a strong board that is working to support and educate our local PTAs and community.

I bring 10+ years of policy and advocacy experience and a strong understanding of how local decisions impact our community. In Fall 2025, I completed the Planned Howard Academy to better understand zoning and land-use processes. I have testified before the County Council in support of a stronger APFO and advocated for an Office of the Inspector General to ensure responsible growth and accountability. I have also helped community members effectively advocate for their own issues, bringing resident voices directly into the County Council process.

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

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Yes. I am participating in the Citizens' Election Fund because it allows me to run a people-powered, grassroots campaign that is accountable to voters—not special interests. Having advocated in Annapolis and Washington, D.C. as a community advocate, I know how important it is for elected officials to be beholden to the people, not lobbyists. The CEF ensures transparency, fairness, and broad public participation while allowing me to focus on listening to residents and advancing community-driven solutions.

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 priorities will focus on fiscal responsibility, strong public schools, long-term community preservation, and health access, while ensuring we live within our revenue—just as families and small business owners must do every day.

1. Responsible budgeting and cost-of-living protection

With rising costs, federal cutbacks, tariffs, and inflation, residents have told me how they are struggling. I will prioritize budgets that fund core services, especially public education, while avoiding unnecessary increases to the cost of living. As a small business owner, I understand the importance of planning, prioritizing needs over wants, and making disciplined financial decisions.

2. Addressing deferred maintenance in our public schools

Howard County has nearly \$200 million in deferred maintenance in school facilities. Delaying repairs only drives up long-term costs and affects learning environments. Nearly 20 years ago, I bought a fixer-upper in Woodbine. While the list of repairs felt overwhelming, through careful planning, saving, and steady progress, we worked through it. The County must take the same approach—prioritizing critical repairs, phasing projects responsibly, and making consistent investments to protect our schools.

3. Protecting green space and rural preservation

I will continue to support policies that protect green spaces, farms, and rural communities for future generations. Responsible land-use decisions and strong growth management help preserve our quality of life while preventing infrastructure costs from being passed on to taxpayers.

4. Supporting access to healthcare amid federal cuts

As a health advocate, I have heard from many District 5 residents who are worried about rising healthcare premiums in 2026 and the potential loss of coverage due to federal cuts. I will work with partners in Annapolis, local healthcare providers, and Federally Qualified Health Centers to identify effective, fiscally responsible ways the County can help meet growing healthcare needs and protect access to care.

These priorities reflect my commitment to practical, compassionate leadership that meets community needs while respecting financial realities.

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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?

The current County Council demonstrated strong leadership in guiding Howard County through the pandemic and in advancing important legislation such as the Office of the Inspector General. These efforts show the Council's ability to collaborate and respond effectively during challenging times.

However, there have been instances where the Council has not fully listened to community concerns—particularly around development, the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO), County Board decisions, and budget priorities—leaving residents feeling unheard on issues with long-term impacts.

I have demonstrated my ability to work with people who hold diverse and opposing views by collaborating directly with opponents of my legislation, revising bill language together, and ultimately having those same opponents testify in support the following year. This approach—listening first, finding common ground, and focusing on workable solutions—has allowed me to deliver results while building durable consensus.

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 grounded in fiscal discipline, long-term planning, and affordability for residents. At a time of rising costs, federal cutbacks, and economic uncertainty, the County must be especially careful to live within its revenues and clearly distinguish needs versus wants.

Before incurring new capital projects or long-term operating costs, the County must ensure we are properly maintaining the assets and services we already have. This is especially true for our public schools, where years of deferred maintenance have created costly backlogs that will only grow if ignored. Responsible budgeting means planning ahead, phasing repairs, and avoiding decisions that shift today's costs onto future taxpayers.

I also believe funding decisions should better align growth with infrastructure capacity, so new development does not create additional financial strain through unfunded school, road, and service demands. Budgets should reflect community priorities, transparency, and accountability, with a stronger focus on sustaining core services rather than expanding commitments that increase the cost of living in Howard County.

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.

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Here is my testimony to the 2025 APFO Review Committee

Review Committee: Strengthening APFO to Support Balanced, Sustainable Growth

Good evening, members of the APFO Review Committee, My name is Cat Carter. I serve as Vice President of Advocacy for the PTA Council of Howard County, a member of the HCPSS Security Task Force, Strategic Planning Committee, and the Operating Budget Review Committee. I'm also a parent, consumer advocate, and active community member—speaking tonight in my personal capacity.

I'm here to urge you to preserve and strengthen the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance. APFO is a vital safeguard and can ensure growth doesn't outpace the capacity of our schools, roads, and emergency services. But it must evolve to reflect the growing strain on our infrastructure. Some argue that higher developer contributions—essentially “pay to play”—can solve our school capital needs.

But funding school construction is not a simple transaction. The process is long, political, and layered:

- It relies on state funding through the Maryland Build to Learn Act, which offers up to \$2.2 billion statewide—but requires matching local funds, project approvals, and a backlog of need (<https://mdstad.com/projects/built-learn-act>).
- It depends on county bonding capacity and budget priorities across departments.
- It requires land acquisition, which is costly and limited.
- It involves data-driven planning by the Board of Education and redistricting, both of which are difficult and slow.

And while all these processes play out, our students sit in overcrowded classrooms, and our community deals with congested roads and long wait times for emergency services.

I want to share a lesson I learned the hard way. A few years ago, I tried to grow a garden and raise chickens—free-range, no fencing, no pesticides, no protection. I believed they could coexist peacefully with the surrounding forest. But predators took the chickens. Deer, bugs, and rabbits decimated the garden. It wasn't out of malice—it was just their nature. So I adapted. I built fencing, netting, and a secure coop. Now, everything thrives in balance, but it still requires careful monitoring and adaptation.

Our county is no different. Development can add value to our community's ecosystem—but only if we create boundaries and protections. Otherwise, we open ourselves up to an imbalance that harms families, students, and community. Advocates across this county share bold visions for education, housing, transportation, and healthcare. But no matter how well-intentioned we are, we can't expect market forces—or deer, or developers—to go against their nature. We have seen examples of this throughout our county. Thoughtful, enforceable policy is what turns vision into sustainable reality.

Please:

- Reject efforts to weaken APFO

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- Improve APFO to be more efficient and adaptable
- Enforce existing development pacing
- Expand APFO to include broader public infrastructure and services

Please put our community's safety, education, and long-term well-being first by reinforcing—not relaxing—the essential protections that keep Howard County's ecosystem in balance. Responsible development is a vital part of that ecosystem, just as predators and deer are part of the forest—but without fencing, netting, and safeguards, my garden and chickens didn't stand a chance. The same is true for our schools and public services. Growth must be managed with care, or it will overwhelm the very systems that make Howard County thrive.

Thank you.

Cat Carter

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.

I support Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) as one tool to help residents afford to stay in Howard County, create modest rental options, and allow residents to age in place while better utilizing existing housing. As a homeowner who has personally considered adding an ADU, I understand both the opportunity and the responsibility that comes with this type of housing.

I believe ADUs should be included under the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) so that infrastructure—such as schools and roads—keeps pace with added density. I support owner-occupancy requirements, as they help ensure properties remain connected to and invested in the community, rather than driven by outside corporate interests.

I am cautious about broad “by-right” approvals for ADUs and multiplexes. While streamlining can be appropriate in some cases, removing conditional use review also removes important guardrails that protect neighborhoods, infrastructure capacity, and existing residents. The impact on parking should be considered, looking at walkable neighborhoods and public transit to mitigate congestion. Thoughtful review and community input are essential to achieving sustainable growth that balances affordability with quality of life.

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

Howard County should expand affordable housing through practical, sustainable strategies. I support the thoughtful use of ADUs, aligned with infrastructure capacity and community character, to help residents age in place and better utilize existing housing. Affordable housing should be geographically diversified, and the County should support downsizing options, including affordable 55+ housing. I would also

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advocate at the state and federal level for capital gains exclusions to better reflect inflation, making it easier for longtime residents to downsize. As a parent of adult children, I am concerned about whether the next generation can afford to live in Howard County. The County should also review the impacts of investor ownership and short-term rentals to protect homeownership and neighborhood stability.

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 expanding low and moderate income housing must be done thoughtfully and sustainably, with attention to infrastructure capacity, neighborhood character, and long-term affordability. I want to review the incentive structure for housing size and starter homes. I want to look at other jurisdictions for effect models that have delivered solutions. The goal should be to provide housing options for working families, seniors, and young adults without creating unintended costs for existing residents.

At the County Council level, I would support policies that encourage a mix of housing types across the County, including ADUs and senior housing, and that ensure housing decisions are coordinated with schools, transportation, and public services. I also support reviewing zoning, fees, and regulatory requirements within the Council's control to make sure they are reasonable and not unnecessarily driving up the cost of building, remodeling of existing homes, and maintaining affordable and workforce housing. My approach is to expand opportunity while maintaining fiscal discipline and protecting quality of life.

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

I support County-funded housing trusts as a tool to promote long-term affordability, with strong guardrails and accountability. Fund usage should prioritize public and nonprofit entities, consistent with Maryland's affordable housing land trust model, with limited private participation only when it clearly advances public goals and leverages additional funding.

Housing efforts should support a diversified housing strategy and prioritize existing housing, redevelopment, and infill before building on green spaces, farms, and forests. Incentives should encourage smaller, starter-sized homes, and the County should look to best practices in other jurisdictions to ensure policies are effective, fiscally responsible, and aligned with community needs — to expand opportunities without compromising neighborhood stability or increasing costs for existing residents.

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

Preserved agricultural land is paid for by taxpayers specifically to preserve farming and agricultural use, and that purpose must remain the priority. Any commercial use on preserved agricultural land should supplement—not replace—active farming and agricultural production.

Uses such as solar, mulching, or alcohol production should only be considered when they are clearly secondary, support the long-term viability of agriculture, and do not undermine preservation goals. Ensuring the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) has adequate resources supports clear standards and consistent guidance that benefit farmers, nearby neighbors, and the broader community—helping balance agricultural viability with neighborhood compatibility and long-term preservation.

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?

I support using PayGo funds for deferred maintenance in HCPSS facilities, with at least 50% directed toward reducing the backlog. Deferred maintenance only becomes more expensive over time, and these investments protect learning environments and taxpayer dollars. PayGo funding should be encouraged to maximize matching state capital funding, while also preparing for potential federal cuts and mandates that could place additional financial and administrative burdens on the County.

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?

I support using the ENR construction cost index as the standard for increases to both building excise taxes and MIHU fee-in-lieu rates, because it ties adjustments to the construction industry's own cost data and helps take politics out of the process. Automatic indexing can provide predictability and reduce unnecessary annual debate. At the same time, I believe periodic review is important so the Council can consider broader economic conditions, affordability impacts, and public facility needs before increases take effect.

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 County volunteer boards should receive legal and regulatory training, particularly boards like the Board of Appeals, whose decisions can significantly impact development outcomes by overturning determinations made by the Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) and the Hearing Examiner. These decisions carry substantial authority and long-term consequences for communities.

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Through the Planned Howard Academy, I gained a deeper understanding of the time, expertise, technical analysis, and community input that go into the DPZ process, and that work should carry meaningful weight. The County should also look to best practices in other counties and jurisdictions to ensure training, procedures, and standards support consistent, informed, and balanced decision-making on development issues.

When challenges or concerns arise, the County Council's role should be to examine legislative and procedural language to identify where improvements or clarifications are needed. At the same time, elected officials and appointed board members must listen to the community and ensure residents' voices are heard, strengthening trust in the process and leading to clearer, more effective outcomes.