

# The People's Voice, LLC

## Ethics Ballot™

3600 Saint Johns Lane, Suite D, Ellicott City, MD 21042

### ETHICS BALLOT QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Howard County Board of Education Primary 2024

Congratulations on your decision to run for the Howard County Board of Education. The People's Voice is a civic/political organization in Howard and Montgomery Counties. We have over 4,800 members in Howard County and sponsor the non-partisan Ethics Ballot. If you would like to seek endorsement to The Ethics Ballot please return this Questionnaire to [EthicsBallot@Gmail.com](mailto:EthicsBallot@Gmail.com) by midnight Tuesday March 26. Please note that all questionnaires are published on the website, [www.EthicsBallot.com](http://www.EthicsBallot.com). We will be in touch regarding endorsement dates soon after getting the questionnaires back. We pride ourselves in working hard for our endorsed candidates, and look forward to hearing your positions on important County issues. THANK YOU so very much for your time!

**Be sure to address all aspects of each question. Feel free to add additional pages with question numbers noted to provide more information on each question as needed, or fill in more space herein. Be sure to return via email in Word or text format.**

Name/District: Meg Ricks, district 1

Campaign Address/Phone/Email/Social Media/Website (if not on MD Board of Elections site)

Campaign manager

Educational & Employment History

*2021-present Teacher's Assistant at East Columbia Preschool*

*BA Anthropology, Brigham Young University 2003*

Relevant Experience (including fiscal and budget management)

*Co-chair of the Operating Budget Review Committee, member for 2 years*

*President Guilford Park HS PTSA, President Elkridge Elementary PTA, 4yrs, Treasurer Elkridge Elementary PTA, 4yrs*

*PTA Council Treasurer, 1yr*

*Active participant on HCPSS Policy Review Committees:*

*Policy 10000 Student, Parent, Family and Community Engagement*

# The People's Voice, LLC

## Ethics Ballot™

3600 Saint Johns Lane, Suite D, Ellicott City, MD 21042

*Policy 4010 Donations/4020 Fundraising by  
Schools and School-Sponsored Organizations*

*Policy 3030 Research Involving Employees and Students*

*Policy 6010 School Attendance Areas (alternate)*

Causes financially supported, fund raising work promoted

*Elkridge Elementary PTA and Elkridge Elementary School, Elkridge Landing Middle School PTA and Elkridge Landing Middle School, Howard High School PTSA, Guilford Park High School PTSA, Guilford Park High School Boosters, and Guilford Park High School, Elkridge Food Pantry, Columbia Community Cares, Maryland Food Bank, Small Miracles Cat and Dog Rescue, Animal Safe Haven and Adoption, HoCo Summer Fun4Kids, The Community Ecology Institute, Girl Scouts*

1. Why are you running for this office? What qualifications do you uniquely bring to hold this office? Describe why you feel you have a viable campaign.

My background in the preschool classroom and as a community leader, education advocate, and HCPSS parent have uniquely qualified me to serve on the Board of Education. Growing up on Chicago's south side as a student receiving Free and Reduced Meals (FARMs), I have personally experienced the importance and power of public education to change lives. Serving others in my community and beyond has been a life-long pursuit. My desire to serve my community and the young people of the county led me to run for an at-large seat on the Board in 2022 and is my motivation for running for District One's member of the Board of Education. My deep interest in and passion for education is woven throughout my work and volunteer roles. As a resident of District One since 2005, I have been actively engaged and involved in local issues and community service for many years, including through schools, PTAs, Girl Scouts, HoCo Summer Fun 4 Kids, and other community initiatives and organizations.

While running in 2022, I had the opportunity to engage with families across the county, learn about their needs, and share my thoughts on the key issues facing the Board today. While my 2022 campaign did not lead to my election, it taught me a tremendous amount and introduced me to many voters throughout the county. I am honored, this year, to have the endorsement of educators in Howard County.

Those familiar with my leadership have described me as fair, calm, and level-headed. I strive to be a good listener and believe in the power of consensus building and creative problem solving.

Serving as one of the co-chairs of this year's Operating Budget Review Committee, I've had an opportunity to put into practice calm leadership and consensus building in what can sometimes be a fractious group because of its size, passion, and diversity of opinions, not to mention the difficulty of this year's proposed operating budget. I am ready to bring these needed skills to the Board.

# The People's Voice, LLC

## Ethics Ballot™

3600 Saint Johns Lane, Suite D, Ellicott City, MD 21042

2. What experience do you have with the HCPSS? Have you ever testified before the Board of Education? What positions did you take? (Those with vast experience, pick most important to you.)

I have testified many times over the years before the Board of Education, as well as before other bodies in support of education. Topics I have testified to the Board on include: addressing school overcrowding, high school 13 site selection, redistricting in multiple years, and healthy school start times for all levels. I have provided testimony to the County Council on strengthening APFO, and most recently on Hoco by Design and the need for it to include school sites in the plan and also for much needed and missing community amenities for our young people. I also testified recently, and in the past, to the County Executive on fully funding the HCPSS budget.

3. Funding all the needs of the HCPSS community is harder than ever, given added mandated funding of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future program, and the past use of one-time Covid funds for recurring costs. How do you believe funding shortfalls should be addressed? What areas of the HCPSS budget do you believe are the best areas to cut in order to meet funding needs? Are there areas that you believe should be the last to ever have funding cut?

I believe that HCPSS needs to prioritize what impacts the classroom—including class size, retaining our amazing educators, and meeting our legal obligations. Any cuts should come from where we know the money is unlikely to be spent. We cannot continue the cycle of using one-time funding for recurring expenses. Transportation is one area to examine closely. I am grateful that phase one of the long-awaited sidewalk on Montgomery Road in Elkridge was completed before school began this year. A few hundred students who live very close to Elkridge Elementary and Elkridge Landing Middle can now walk safely to school. Additional phases of the project are coming soon, and hopefully will allow more students to walk safely to the campus and decrease our need for buses to take students very short distances. I know that there are other areas in the county where such projects can help reduce transportation costs for HCPSS and create safer pedestrian routes for all community members. For transportation and other expenses, HCPSS needs to have contracts in place that protect the school system from financial burdens if contractors do not fulfill their obligations.

Cuts alone will not address our budget challenges. We need more funding for our schools. The percentage of the county budget going to HCPSS has declined over the years while the cost of educating our students has increased. The county should look for efficiencies that reduce costs in other areas to dedicate more money to HCPSS to address this increase as well as the additional requirements of Blueprint. We should also be proactive in seeking grants and working with the county government to identify potential sources for additional revenue that can be earmarked to supplement and not supplant school funding. The efforts of our state delegates to assist in these efforts are also much appreciated, including Delegate Atterbeary's proposed bill to address deferred maintenance.

# The People's Voice, LLC

## Ethics Ballot™

3600 Saint Johns Lane, Suite D, Ellicott City, MD 21042

4. Where do you think school construction should be prioritized? How would you address getting schools built faster where they are most needed? Include your thoughts about how to juggle maintenance needs as well.

Transportation costs have risen significantly so we really need to look at building schools where we have many students but no nearby school. When budget cuts need to be found, maintenance should not be on the chopping block. Cutting the people who keep things running in every building is pennywise and pound foolish.

As the school system plans for long range renovations and other projects to address deferred maintenance it has to be under a data-driven approach. Every student deserves to attend school inside a permanent building that is safe, healthy, and adequately sized for the number of students who use it, regardless of whether their neighbors can rally a protest or if people with political sway can influence a decision in their favor. Our county should not leave any state money on the table that could help to advance our needed capital projects. Any private public partnership funding would need to be intently scrutinized. Such funding schemes work best for projects that could generate revenue, like a toll bridge for example. If we had projects that could bring in potential revenue, like adding auditoriums to middle schools that could be rented to the community, perhaps it could be feasible. I would like to see dedicated revenue that supplements and does not supplant current funding for school construction and renovation from our state and county.

While this is not a full discussion of all needed capital projects, I wanted to share some thoughts on some of them. I would like to see a rebuild of Dunloggin Middle School to address both the building age and condition that have objectively placed it at the top of the list as well as needed middle school seats. I would oppose plans to add onto Thomas Viaduct, our newest middle school, which has a very small campus and a current attendance area that stretches far to the south on route 1 to Jessup. That is not where the capacity is needed. We should identify land in Jessup for a future middle school. We need to advance needed elementary schools in Turf Valley and in the south east county. While the 14th high school in Elkridge may have to wait many years before the numbers justify a new high school, the county needs to be working constantly to secure land in the 'civic and educational activity center' so we are ready. We cannot wait another 20 years to build our next high school. If we're not working now, then we will not be ready when the capacity is desperately needed. For Oakland Mills High School, I would like to look into additional funding opportunities for renovation or rebuild tied in with an expansion of career academies and ARL programs in addition to regular high school programming. With its central county location with walk radiuses overlapping with Long Reach and Howard and access to the RTA, this would be an ideal place.

# The People's Voice, LLC

## Ethics Ballot™

3600 Saint Johns Lane, Suite D, Ellicott City, MD 21042

5. How do you think overcapacity school concerns should be addressed? Do you believe current enrollment projection methods need to be changed? If so, how? What, if anything, should be done, when enrollment ends up significantly higher than projected project estimates?

We need to recognize that overcrowding is an equity issue. It's not just the result of wealthy parents trying to crowd into the perceived "best" schools. It is a result of an imbalance in our community planning. Residential development has far exceeded the necessary infrastructure to support it in many parts of the county.

The "A" in APFO doesn't stand for awesome, amazing, or above average, it stands for adequate. We should not be undermining the law that ensures we have a bare minimum of the public facilities needed for our population. The school system and the board, along with the community, need to advocate for adequate school facilities. We want to be able to welcome new students (whether they live in affordable housing, the most expensive home in the county, or somewhere in between) into schools where they can attend class inside brick and mortar buildings and not be packed like cattle into overcrowded halls and cafeterias. The school system needs the time to prepare for additional residential growth and to take timely action to do so.

A period of 'flat' enrollment growth should not be an invitation to coast along. We have hundreds of 'relocatable classrooms' now and a county that is planning to grow. This is the time to get to work on both deferred maintenance and capacity projects.

When we do go through the redistricting process to address overcrowding we need to have the data to make the best decisions. We need to have a consistent application of the different considerations so that we don't have one set of rules for one part of the county and a different set of rules for another part of the county.

A school's enrollment is determined on September 30th of a school year. This calculation underestimates the student body in areas that are more transient. When it comes to enrollment the system should look at an individual school's enrollment over the course of the year and see if there is a pattern of a higher enrollment sometime midyear and find a max number period to check their work. If I'm going to have a party, I want to plan for everyone who's going to be there, not just who shows up right on time. If there are schools that show this kind of a pattern then they should add to their projections to account for it.

Just as schools with high levels of poverty need additional resources, overcapacity schools also need additional resources to mitigate the challenges they face. A lot of staffing maxes out at a certain number per school and is not increased despite greater numbers of students. One example I saw was for lunch and recess monitors at a large and over capacity elementary school. A small number of adults were expected to adequately supervise 170 children out on the playground. When the principal requested to be able to hire more, the request was denied.

# The People's Voice, LLC

## Ethics Ballot™

3600 Saint Johns Lane, Suite D, Ellicott City, MD 21042

6. Do you believe the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) should be strengthened, weakened or left the same regarding school capacity? Why? Note any desired changes. Note how you feel the Board of Education can or should be involved in APFO.

APFO needs to be strengthened. APFO wait times are not currently in line with the time that it takes to build a school, if we had the land available to do so. It basically adds no time to the usual process. The Board needs to make clear to the county council how long it takes to address overcapacity and to show good faith towards using the means at their disposal to address it. In the past, some believed that the Board was using APFO to thwart development by not redistricting. I do not believe that was ever the case. Redistricting is a disruptive process and the Board is often reluctant to use it unless it is clearly necessary. The county in its zoning and land use decisions, created difficult situations for the Board to deal with and in the past has tried to shift blame onto the Board. Sometimes redistricting is necessary but it should be relatively rare if everything is working as it should. The Board and county need to work together to ensure that our school system is ready to welcome every new student and to plan together for the future.

7. Describe positions you have taken, votes you have made, or testimony you have given that you feel is the most important regarding HCPSS issues. Describe how you championed causes, include at least one example of any of your positions or votes that you regret, or about which you feel differently.

Over the years, I have tried to do all I could to advocate for the young people in my community. At the first PTA meeting I attended as a young elementary school parent, I learned that our schools were overcrowded. I knew from my own experience as a child in a very overcrowded school that it was a terrible environment for learning. As I continued to participate in PTA and learn more about the causes and possible solutions, I attended more meetings and began to advocate.

As my oldest approached high school age, our high school, Howard, became the most overcrowded school in the county at around 140% capacity utilization. I found myself in the unusual position of testifying to the Board asking them to redistrict and when they failed to do that, to do something to address the overcrowding. During my oldest's 9th grade year, some students moved to Oakland Mills or River Hill for school based Jump Start programs. This helped somewhat but not enough.

Plans for the 13th high school started to be discussed, in lieu of redistricting, and I joined my community in advocating for a high school in Elkridge. While building a high school in Elkridge seems to be widely supported today, it definitely hasn't always been. Some in our community have been advocating for it for decades. Ultimately the Board chose differently than what we wanted. When redistricting began to open the new high school, I worked hard to try to help the community understand the process and how to get involved. I testified multiple times before the Board and tried to advocate for more compact attendance areas, which everyone really saw the wisdom of after this fall's bus failures.

When the decision went forward differently, I didn't stop advocating. I threw my time and effort behind building community in our new school. I became the first PTSA president of GPHS and worked to establish our PTSA. I joined the Boosters and have been working with them to help build strong volunteer and parent

# The People's Voice, LLC

## Ethics Ballot <sup>TM</sup>

3600 Saint Johns Lane, Suite D, Ellicott City, MD 21042

groups in our school community to support our students. I have also worked to advocate for safety projects, especially on route one, which is the main route our students have to take to get to school every day and for safer pedestrian routes in our community.

One thing I do regret is not helping my oldest to take full advantage of being a part of her high school community. During her first years in high school, we didn't know from year to year if redistricting would happen and if she would continue at Howard or at a different school and I let her know that. After two unsuccessful tryouts for the school play, she never tried out again. I think she didn't want to stay after school for clubs because she didn't want to have to ask for a ride home. The COVID pandemic also really did not help with feeling connected. When my second oldest started at Howard, we knew it was incredibly unlikely she would be staying at Howard after the new school opened. I did, however, encourage her to get involved and enjoy what would be her only freshman year of high school.

8. How do you feel altercations should be handled in schools? Include any staffing changes you believe should occur.

School safety is not a one person job. It really does take a whole community. We must start while students are young to give them tools for dealing with conflict and seeking help when needed. We must not be afraid to speak up and say something if we see something that does not seem right. I believe we can get the benefits of the School Resource Officer (SRO) program while not creating a fearful environment for students. Every student should both feel safe at school and be safe at school. Altercations in schools should be handled by school staff. An SRO familiar with the students is much better than a random police officer when police assistance is needed, but staff should be handling the vast majority of situations before they become serious. I would like to see more counselors in our schools so students have more access to them to help them find productive solutions to the challenges they are facing.

9. What HCPSS policies do you believe should be changed regarding protections of marginalized groups? Include in your answer your views on how to address achievement gaps.

There are currently several HCPSS policies that address this topic. It's not always that a policy needs to be changed, it's sometimes that it needs to be better implemented and followed. We need to make sure school is a safe and supportive place for all. Incidents of hate, bias, harassment, or discrimination need to be taken very seriously and addressed quickly. We need to make sure that the process for reporting problems is clear and accessible. We need to work to create a culture of acceptance and belonging. Unfortunately many students do not feel accepted. Suicide prevention training for staff and for students can help save lives, especially those of our LGBTQ+ students who are at greater risk. Training on bias can help us all to become aware and to do better.

# The People's Voice, LLC

## Ethics Ballot <sup>TM</sup>

3600 Saint Johns Lane, Suite D, Ellicott City, MD 21042

As a child and teen, I benefited from having teachers that reflected the diversity of our community. All students benefit from "windows" (learning about the experiences of people different from themselves) and "mirrors" (seeing people who are like them in positions of authority/accomplishing goals/finding success). I would like to work to make our school system the place where the best and brightest teachers, teachers who reflect our community, teachers with experience and passion, want to come to work and to stay once they're here. Students should learn about the history and contributions of all groups to what our nation is today. We can celebrate our diversity and learn about what we share in common.

Currently, the school system collects and compiles data, breaking various measures down by different groups of students to identify trends and gaps. Individual schools come up with plans to address gaps as part of their school improvement plans. I think that having each school work on this problem independently can be a good way to find potential solutions, but my hope is that we can learn from what is working or not working at different schools and see if we can replicate positive results. I think we would benefit from hearing from the experiences of current students and recent graduates. I think we need to see how mental health and other life challenges are affecting student outcomes. We need to continue to look at the data and evaluate how we are doing and if our efforts to close gaps have been effective. We need to continue asking how we can improve and how we can ensure that every student can be successful.

### 10. What criteria should be prioritized in redistricting?

Boundaries must be redrawn at times when capacity is out of balance and when we open new schools. As a county that has experienced great growth over the last several years and one that has plans to continue growing, we desperately need to be opening new schools. We are already years behind, as evidenced by our growing fleet of "relocatable classrooms." Overcrowding exacerbates every issue that we face in schools and creates additional problems. It worsens outcomes for our most vulnerable students. At the rate we are building residential development vs. schools, in time, every school is going to be facing overcrowding. This is why we need to address capacity first and foremost. The other factors outlined in policy 6010 then help us to select the best plan to address capacity without creating new problems. We don't want to concentrate poverty, create small feeds, move the same children multiple times, or put walkers onto buses that we can't afford and don't have drivers for. We also need to secure school sites in the areas where capacity is needed now and where it will be needed in the future. This will allow making attendance area boundaries to be a far easier process than it is currently. We also want to ensure that any redistricting plan put forward will address capacity concerns for a long period of time so that it does not have to be done frequently.



# The People's Voice, LLC

## Ethics Ballot™

3600 Saint Johns Lane, Suite D, Ellicott City, MD 21042

11. Special education funding has increased over the last several years, but special education student outcomes have not improved. How would you address the legal requirements for students with disabilities to ensure positive outcomes?

Families shouldn't have to fight to get the services and accommodations their children need to learn. We need to stop asking staff to do more and more with less and less. We need appropriate staffing levels and we need training to help all staff, because all work with students with disabilities. We need to help the community understand that special education isn't a niche interest, it's an essential part of every school and has impacts on every classroom, and every student. When we get out of crisis mode and into a more proactive mode, we can identify the students in need of supports that we are now missing.

In addition to money though, there needs to be a culture of care and support for students with disabilities, their families, and all of the staff who work with them. No amount of money (definitely no amount that a school system can afford to pay) is going to be worth it for people to take what they know is a challenging job in the best circumstances, in an environment where they are set up to fail, time and time again. We need to listen to those who are doing the work and heed their calls for change. One recent motion we passed on the OBRC was to support keeping funding for a special education program audit in the Board's budget request. I hope that this item makes it to the final budget, because we know that changes are needed.

Due to the shortage of available spots in private placements and the great costs of such placements, I think that HCPSS should look into the feasibility of creating its own program for students we are obligated to educate, but currently are unable to.

We also need a way to vet and allow professionals who are already working successfully with some of our students with disabilities to be able to provide their services within the schools so that we don't have to duplicate effort or unintentionally stymie it.

12. What research, contract accountability and financial data would you require before supporting a procurement contract? Include in your answer what changes you would recommend to avoid service failures like we experienced recently with the bus system.

I would research other contracts the company has entered into in the past with other entities to compare and contrast how our contract may be different. Researching the financial viability of the company would also make sure our basic due diligence was done. After the bus debacle this fall, we are all aware of how important it is to have liquidated damages clauses in a contract. I would also want to include any other legal remedies that could

# The People's Voice, LLC

## Ethics Ballot <sup>TM</sup>

**3600 Saint Johns Lane, Suite D, Ellicott City, MD 21042**

be available, including restitution, actual damages, compensatory damages, any possible equitable remedies and punitive damages as well if appropriate. I would also want to make sure the terms of what constitutes a breach of contract are clear. If the state legislation addressing this issue passes, it would create a model for certain damages provisions. I would follow the state law. I would also want to make sure that any contracts, especially large ones, are given to the Board well in advance of the time we would need to vote on them.

By Authority: The People's Voice, Lisa Markovitz Treasurer