

ETHICS BALLOT QUESTIONNAIRE

Howard County Executive – 2026 primary

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Educational History:

Duke University, BA

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Languages Spoken/Other Skills/Relevant Experience:

I have served as the County Councilmember representing District 4 since 2018. During my time on the Council, I have been laser focused on being an effective community voice and delivering high quality constituent services. A few examples of constituent advocacy include my efforts to assist Harper's Choice neighborhoods that would have been adversely affected by two poorly sited proposals for the North Columbia Fire Station. I also assisted the Rivers Edge neighborhood to defeat the State Highway Administration's proposal that would have adversely affected road access for their neighborhood. I also worked with the Cedar Creek neighborhood to file a Zoning Regulation Amendment that would have prevented industrial activities, such as the chemical incineration of plastics, next to their neighborhood. I feel strongly about representing the citizen voice.

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I have served as the County Council Chair twice, and was the Council representative on the BWI Roundtable to address unhealthy noise levels generated by airplane traffic to and from the airport. I volunteered to be a member of the HB1450 Task Force, which was formed to explore ways to increase school capital funding. After the Task Force report was issued with few recommendations for increased funding, I collaborated with a group of the Task Force members to issue an Addendum to the report that highlighted additional means for funding school capital projects. I have the time and energy to take on additional work and have consistently volunteered to do so.

I have lived in Hickory Ridge Village in Columbia for 38 years with my husband Ben, where we raised our daughter Alyssa. Prior to my election to the County Council, I served as a Commissioner on the Howard County Human Rights Commission and Co-Chaired the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission. I was the President of the Wilde Lake High School Booster Club and active in the Harper's Choice MS and Clemens Crossing PTAs. I am an attorney and have spent much of my professional life working in the nonprofit sector, primarily serving in the role of general counsel.

1. Describe why your campaign is viable and what makes you uniquely qualified to serve as our next County Executive.

My strategy relies on the groundwork I've laid over the past seven months since my campaign launch. I plan to raise a total of \$750,000 to \$1,000,000. I've worked hard to ensure that my campaign is competitive through small dollar donations from real people, and I'm proud to say that I am in a strong position. In November, I qualified to receive my first public match. As of January 14, I have raised approximately \$85,000 from almost 780 Howard County voters for a total raised of \$368,000, including matching funds received and pending.

I continue to connect with voters, share my vision for the County, and raise funds for a smooth path to victory. I have had great success with my current campaign strategy of direct voter outreach and frequent small fundraisers, with help from highly engaged supporters who spread the word about my campaign. I am on track to reach my fundraising goal and I will accelerate this strategy as the campaign progresses.

I've assembled a team of veteran consultants to assist with my campaign. My general consultants are Martin-Lauer Associates, who also assist with fundraising, and Tru Blu Politics. I'm also working with two other firms for advertising and polling, both of which have strong track records of success. Their expertise will enable me to continue sharing my priorities and values with the people of Howard County, via digital, print, radio, television, and direct mail.

I have a strong network of volunteers and supporters throughout our diverse community, and my field operations will continue to expand in 2026 so that I can connect with voters where they are.

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I am uniquely qualified to serve as our next County Executive because I am a people-powered politician. Not only is my campaign fueled by donations from the people of Howard County, but the priorities of the people in this County fuel my campaign platform and, as a two-term Councilmember, have shaped my legislative track record. Since 2018, I have shown up every day for the residents of this County. In fact, I have missed only one meeting during my seven years as a Councilmember.

I am one of the most accessible elected officials in the County. I attend cultural and community events so that residents have direct access to me. I answer emails, take phone calls, and explain my voting record to the public through thorough and thoughtful communication. I have sponsored and supported legislation that makes sense for Howard County, not legislation to score political points. I know the County budget; understand the day-to-day operations of the County government; and am trusted by the public school system, community nonprofits, and business leaders.

2. Are you participating in the Citizens Election Fund (CEF) public financing? Why or why not?

I am proud to be using public financing and to be the first Democratic candidate for County Executive to qualify for matching funds. During my second campaign for Council, I was the inaugural CEF candidate, surviving various unforeseen pitfalls of the newly created public financing scheme. After my second election, I sponsored legislation to correct these shortcomings so that future CEF candidates would not be impeded by political maneuvering. Among the changes the Council made was to allow candidates using the CEF to access 50% of the matching funds before another candidate has filed.

I chose to be a CEF candidate because it supports my values that the citizens, not special interests, should be my primary constituency. As a CEF-elected Councilmember, I am not burdened by the social or financial expectations that accepting corporate donations puts on an elected official. I am free to fully vet County projects and proposals as a fiduciary guardian of our residents and as a decisionmaker for the long-term health and success of the County.

3. What do you believe are the three most important issues currently facing Howard County? What are your plans to address these?

In my opinion, the three most important issues facing Howard County are funding public education, supporting our aging and vulnerable populations, and balancing residential growth with environmental protections and quality of life. In addition, our County residents are also very concerned about housing affordability, public safety, and quality of life issues.

Through responsible budgeting, I plan on prioritizing public school construction and renovation to address the approximate \$200 million backlog of systemic repairs and eliminate the 200 trailers that are being used as classrooms. It is possible to systematically address these funding needs with the current revenue collections. I am well steeped in the County budget and am familiar with the growth of Capital spending that has occurred for projects that are not related to the school system's aging and overcrowded facilities. I sat on the HB1450 Taskforce, created by the General Assembly, to identify new funding sources for the public schools' Capital needs. The County's annual revenue collection remains strong and new sources of income include significant returns on income investments.

HCPSS has also experienced operating budget shortfalls that have resulted in the loss of hundreds of positions in the last two years. In FY 26, the shortfall needed by the school district to retain all of the positions amounted to \$8 million dollars. A significant portion of this increase was due to cost shifts from the State to the County in an effort to close a \$3 billion budget shortfall. HCPSS Operating Budget will continue to increase due to State mandates associated with Blueprint implementation and future cost shifts from the State. As County Executive, I will recognize that many of these cost increases are outside of HCPSS's control and I will prioritize the funding of our school district to maintain the existing services and programmatic changes that our students and staff deserve.

As a Councilmember, I have sponsored multiple changes to our County's Aging-in-Place tax credit so that more fixed income seniors can afford to stay in the County as their property assessments continue to rise. As County Executive, I will address this housing burden that seniors face through a thorough taxation revaluation and a push to build more moderate and low-income housing options for seniors. Our County is also experiencing a socio-economic demographic shift that requires more locally delivered support for residents who work hard but who might fall short. Federal dollars that were previously administered by local nonprofits have been cut or saddled with so many limiting restrictions that securing additional financial resources is necessary to maintain a compassionate safety net.

Our County is nearly 100% built out and we are undertaking the process of redevelopment to ensure that we have both healthy housing supplies and population growth. As a Councilmember, I devoted hundreds of hours to the most recently adopted General Plan (HoCo By Design), which outlines the framework for the growth of the County for the next decade. I undertook great efforts to make sure that our green spaces, access to natural spaces, and sense of community survived the transition to more density in certain areas. I am eager to shepherd the County through comprehensive rezoning so that we are able to secure economic security without sacrificing environmental protections, sensible growth controls, and our exceptional quality of life.

I'll address my efforts to increase housing affordability in my response to Question 4.

4. What do you believe are the best ways to get more affordable housing units in Howard County?

Please describe how your ideas can be implemented and result in more units affordable to low or moderate income.

During my time on the Council, I have supported important initiatives to increase the amount of affordable housing in the County. Through zoning and funding decisions, I supported the modernization and increase of subsidized apartments in Columbia, the continuation of the County's income-based rental program and first-time home purchase assistance program, and the ability for the Housing Commission to purchase apartment buildings to maintain affordability.

Despite these remarkable accomplishments, housing prices continue to rise making it harder for working families to live near their work. Much of this is due to market forces outside of the control of government intervention. Limited new land, cautious financial lending, increased labor and material costs contribute to high housing costs.

In addition, I continuously hear from residents that they want affordable homes to purchase. People come to Howard County to work and raise their families, and they need options that suit their needs. However, State and Federal assistance is often limited to the construction of apartments. This is a missed opportunity. As County Executive I would encourage the construction of more missing middle housing so that young families can buy a residence in the County and reap the financial benefits of home ownership.

To address the shortage of missing middle homes, I included a bonus density for homes to purchase in certain zoning districts in the General Plan (HoCo By Design) as a method for incentivizing developers to build more affordable homes. Increased density often results in an influx of students and it is important to plan future development with a long-term perspective, balancing and pacing new developments without exceeding the capacity of our public facilities. This strategic approach will allow us to meet the needs of current employees and future residents, without compromising the needs of our schools and communities.

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

The County currently has a Housing Opportunities Trust Fund, which receives discretionary funds that do not revert back to the General Fund if left unspent at the end of the fiscal year. This is a unique feature in the Operating Budget designed for a specific purpose by the State legislation. The Department of Housing administers the fund and has provided gap funding to a variety of affordable multifamily projects in the past. When this fund was first created, I proposed the addition of guardrails to ensure that the money would be spent transparently. That legislation did not pass and we are not informed about how that money is spent by

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the project recipients. As County Executive, I would implement guardrails and more transparency concerning these grants.

The County does not own housing projects but relies on the independent Housing Commission and private non-profits that use Federal and State tax credits to finance the construction of mixed-income rental projects. I would be interested in pursuing pilot programs that use public land trusts and other novel approaches to our current models.

The need for affordable housing is great but I am deeply concerned that the only available options are small rental apartments that are so expensive to build that the square footage price is comparable to the purchase price of a single family home. I have long advocated for more emphasis on pathways to homeownership either through financial assistance for first-time homeowners, credit repair services, or incentives for construction of smaller, for-purchase residential units.

6. What are your positions on the most substantive recommendations by the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance Review Committee, posted in August of 2025?

I do not support the pay-to-play model as I believe this extra fee will adversely impact affordability in the County and will be insufficient to support HCPSS' needed Capital projects. Based on the most recent school enrollment data, I believe that APFO's building constraints will soon be less of an impediment in most areas of the County. The area with the greatest capacity needs is the Southeastern region and focussed school capacity funding will be able to resolve those challenges without dismantling APFO.

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

I voted to allow solar production on non-arable portions of agricultural preserved land. I believe that supporting solar generation is a responsible step towards resolving our climate crisis and diversifying our energy sources. I do not support adding industrial activities like commercial mulching to agricultural preservation farms. I did vote for the most recently passed agritourism bill that expanded the commercial operations allowed as an accessory use on farms. I tried to limit the impact and conflicts that these operations would have on neighbors. I was especially concerned about the noise produced by amplified music festivals on farm breweries. My amendment to restrict the times and duration of amplified noise failed to get enough support to pass.

8. How would you specifically, as County Executive, accelerate school construction and acquisition of school sites? Are you willing to budget more for high school maintenance needs and site acquisitions?

I would partner closely with HCPSS and the Board of Education (BOE) to develop a funded plan for accelerating school construction so that school communities are no longer pitted against each other for insufficient annual appropriations. Fighting for scraps is disrespectful to the students and the school staff. They deserve to know when the aging buildings where they spend the majority of their time will be modernized and expanded so that space is no longer an impediment to learning. I dug deep into the various funding streams that are available to find recommendations for increased funding for school construction and maintenance when I was serving on the HB1450 Task Force. Increased funding to HCPSS' Capital needs could come from a variety of sources, including excess surplus and investment income, as well as prioritized funding over and above historic amounts.

9. Do you believe our current storm water management regulations and forest conservation requirements are adequate? What would you change, if anything?

Our current stormwater management regulations are not sufficient as evidenced by the expensive and destructive stream restoration projects we undertake to address waterways that have been eroded and degraded by runoff from impervious surfaces. As County Executive, I would undertake more source point mitigation efforts to reduce the flow and velocity of stormwater before it reaches our streams.

As a Councilmember, I supported strengthening forest conservation requirements. Some of those votes were successful, some were not. Destroying mature trees and replanting with small sticks that become fodder for our deer population is not a responsible forest conservation strategy. This does not help reforestation when our forests disappear under layers of concrete. As County Executive, I would continue to support strengthening on-site conservation efforts so that the few remaining parcels that have not been developed will continue to provide essential forest cover.

10. As the Howard County senior population continues to increase, how would you address their service and financial needs?

Supporting the aging population is one of my top three priorities. As stated above, I will continue to seek tax relief for seniors who are on fixed incomes and facing escalating property assessments, as well as concentrate on building new moderate and low income projects for our senior population. I will support staffing and programming at our 50+ centers so that seniors have meaningful activities to remain active and healthy in their later years. I will also advocate for additional state and private funding in order to continue expanding the capacity of our hospital. I am aware that all funding sources must be explored in order to keep our aging population safe and provide the emergency medical care they need.

Lastly, I hope we can also increase funding for transportation services to connect seniors to social activities, medical appointments, and other outings.

11. How do you propose to improve public transportation?

Our current public transportation system is limited and unreliable. Many of my constituents contact me about cancelled buses and delayed arrivals. I would like to investigate more microtransit options to better connect riders with on-demand services. I have long advocated for the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system that would connect Howard County to stops in Montgomery County and certain Metro stations. Funding for and construction of the BRT is underway. I will also work with our State partners to increase the frequency of service to the MARC stations in Howard County.

12. What do you believe are the top financial priorities in the budget, given so many competing needs for resources?

My top financial priorities are education, public infrastructure (including roads, sidewalks, water and sewer systems), public safety, and social services. It appears that there is not enough money for these important government services because the County has expanded into projects that extend beyond the scope of the public domain. As County Executive, I will always prioritize our top financial needs.

13. Howard County is not immune from the religious and ethnic division that has become a main concern across the country. Provide specifics for what you have done to bring people together.

I am very proud of our ethnic and religious diversity in this County and I have been a reliable friend to minority and immigrant groups. I join them for cultural events and holidays, meet with community leaders, seek solutions to conflicts, and aim to be as accessible and present as possible. After a nationwide surge of hate crimes against Asian-Americans, I urged the Police Department to increase patrols following a series of thefts

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and vandalism that occurred at Asian-owned businesses near the Mall. I attended the Stop Asian Hate rally to show my support for this community, and I've made it a priority to show my solidarity in the face of discord.

I'm sensitive to the lack of access that minority and immigrant groups experience when interacting with our County government and educational system. I testified at a Board of Education budget hearing in favor of dedicated professional staffing for the IEP process to better assist our disabled students and special education classes, as well as ESL students. I am also aware of insensitive and hateful remarks and harassment that occurs in our public schools towards ethnic and religious minority students. I have had private conversations with school leadership about this situation and will continue to lobby for a safe educational space for all children and their families.

I seek to level the playing field for all minority groups in County contracting. I met with members of the County's Equal Opportunity Business Commission and asked the County Executive to study the participation percentages of minority-owned businesses in Howard County contracting.

Most recently, following confirmation of ICE activity locally and concerning acts of violence from ICE in other jurisdictions, I've made an effort to diffuse tensions and give our community the information they need to stay safe. Being the loudest voice does not necessarily mean anything in polarized, inflammatory situations in which emotions are running high.

Unfortunately, ICE is known to target jurisdictions that outwardly speak out against them. My goal is to stay calm, be transparent, and avoid further provocation in order to keep our immigrant communities - and everyone else - safe.

14. Give three examples of legislation you have sponsored of which you are the most proud. For non-legislative serving candidates, note three supported examples.

I am most proud of the legislation that required consensus-building with my Council colleagues. By collaborating with all of the Councilmembers, I was able to increase government transparency, modernize the Zoning Board process, and increase school construction funds.

In 2024, I built unanimous support among my Council colleagues for an independent Office of Inspector General (IG) to investigate waste, fraud, and abuse. The creation of the IG office required a Charter amendment (CR107) and an implementing ordinance (CB61). The Council, under my Chairmanship, held several worksessions to discuss specific components of implementation so that the public was aware of the conscientious steps taken to ensure that the IG office could perform their investigations without political

interference. The final bill was unanimously adopted by the Council.

In 2019, I co-sponsored CB42, which updated the School Facilities Surcharge levied on new residential units for funding school construction projects. At the time, HCPSS was one of the fastest growing school systems in the State and there was an anticipated shortfall of \$36 million in Capital funding every year for school construction. It was obvious that HCPSS couldn't redistrict their way out of overcrowded schools and that an increase in the School Facilities Surcharge would provide an infusion of funds to put students in seats and keep HCPSS competitive. A new rate was determined by calculating the capital costs of the square footage for new residential units and included an inflation escalator.

In 2021, I collaborated with other Councilmembers to enable the Hearing Examiner to act as the fact finder in Zoning Board cases (CB77). This bill removed the politics from Zoning Board cases by charging an independent, legally trained Hearing Examiner to hear the case first and make the record, findings of fact and conclusions of law, and offer a recommendation. Advocates, such as The People's Voice, have long asked for changes that would make the Zoning Board more fair and impartial. CB77 professionalized the Zoning Board process and resulted in a significant decrease in Zoning Board cases due in part because the standard of review had increased. This benefits the County residents by providing more adherence to the existing land use designations.