

ETHICS BALLOT QUESTIONNAIRE

Howard County Executive – 2026 primary

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Educational History:

B.Civil Engineering, Georgia Tech
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Languages Spoken/Other Skills/Relevant Experience:

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

I possess a depth of understanding of County governance, budgeting and land-use policy unparalleled within the field of candidates. I have dedicated much of my second term in office to seeking out those most impactful and similarly-inclined within local government and our various State, federal and non-profit partners, and figuring out how essential government processes work, or should work. I will serve through the end of my second term in office with the same ethical rigor, moral clarity and fierce determination that has marked every day I've served in office since the very beginning. And I have a crystal-clear vision of what Howard County government looks like under my Administration: lawful, ethical, responsive, forward-looking, big-thinking: laser-focused on bettering the quality of life of everyone who lives here, especially our children and elders, now and for decades to come.

We have financial viability. My campaign hit the qualifying thresholds for Citizens' Election Fund matching the first week in January (500 donors/\$40,000), after engaging professional fundraiser Carter Consulting Services just before Thanksgiving. We collected most of our donors and dollars in the two months that followed. I believe we may be the first public-finance campaign to have hit the qualifying number of donors *before* the total dollars. Our median donation amount is around \$71.

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We have strong support from within my homebase, District 1. In the last primary, I won 70% of the primary voters there against a well-funded, establishment candidate. I am very proud of each of the three candidates aiming to take that District 1 council seat in this same election cycle, and that every single one of them also has qualified for public financing. It was critical to me that District 1 would be in good hands once I moved on. My constituents there expect squeaky clean campaigns from their local candidates.

We already have begun strong outreach, otherwise, throughout the County. I have personally made nearly 2,000 direct voter contact attempts, and the campaign will begin door-knocking in earnest shortly.

As in two prior election cycles, we will have a robust, engaging social media presence. This time around, though, I am delighted to have assembled a dream team of professionals to guide us through the significantly more substantial campaign demands of an Executive race, including Sean Ford, Campaign Manager; Fred Yang of Hart Research, Pollster; Trey Nix of Declaration Media, TV Consultant; and Chris Cooper, Convergence Targeted Communications, Mail Consultant.

We have earned every organization endorsement I'm aware of being announced to date: from CAIR Action, Howard County Muslim Alliance and, most recently, CASA In Action.

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

Of course. Even before a public financing option existed, as a candidate in 2018 I accepted no corporate donations, no PAC money. It was painfully evident then—and has become even more so as I serve these eight years alongside those who still cash those \$6,000 Land-Use LLC checks—the chokehold that special interests have on our local government.

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

A. Education, and the consequences of several-years-long underinvestment in both our schools' operating and capital budgets. I plan to address both by dedicating more of the County's general funds revenues to those purposes, as to the operating budget specifically, in line with Delegate Wu's current proposal to mandate at least a certain minimum percentage of general fund revenues annually. I would prefer to work with—rather than in opposition to—the Superintendent and Board of Education to identify and commit to multi-year investment strategies. Investment, that is, in our schools and our students.

B. Land-use policy. Our Department of Planning and Zoning has been and continues to be a rubber-stamp to every plan submitted by every for-profit campaign donor to clear and scrape the last few vestiges of green space in this County. Even our own County projects follow the same abysmal practices. State and

local laws are ignored. Ethical considerations discarded. Appellate processes and enforcement abandoned. I will clean house. Immediately.

C. Housing affordability. No one can afford to move in, or out, it seems. I cannot let go of inclusionary zoning—where new construction must include a minimum percentage of affordable units, usually 10 or 15%—as a meaningful way of increasing available stock of medium affordable housing. It's never had a chance to succeed under current and past Administrations. I plainly think it should be expanded—as I've tried twice before—to at least age-restricted adult housing. And enforced—as part of Downtown Columbia's continuing build in by Howard Hughes, or within our Continuing Care Retirement Communities, like the new 1200-unit Erickson project in River Hill. I plan to convert more of the Housing Commission's existing inventory across the County to lowest-income options, and task that agency with actually building or acquiring more. And I would support zoning changes to encourage smaller, denser for-sale housing *in the right locations*. But, I do not buy the so-called abundance, or trickle-down economics, theory of housing. If those theories had merit, Howard County, as one of the historically fastest growing housing markets in the State, would also be one of the most affordable.

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.

Please see my answer in 3.C above.

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

The County now has two County-funded housing trusts: the one that had tens of millions of unused dollars when I first came into office, and the second initiated by the current Executive via a State local bill. I have been adamant at every instance over several years' budget discussions that the first fund sufficed, that we weren't using that existing funding for what it was intended—or at all, and that otherwise all the second funding option did was eliminate Council oversight. As tempting as it might be to discard those concerns as Executive, I do not plan to.

My feeling is that the criteria is not public or private, but rather for-profit or non-. There will always be unnecessary premiums, self-dealing and waste so long as for-profit entities are involved in the creation of more affordable housing.

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

My District 1 office's appointee to that Committee was Lisa Markovitz. I agreed wholeheartedly with each of her and others' attempts to reign in the otherwise bonkers, and seemingly pre-determined, proceedings. I understand from the current Administration that none of the substantive recommendations will be pursued, and I am just fine with that. I disagree most particularly with the recommendation that a given project could pay its way out of an overcrowded schools test. The "wait times" as is are illusory for all but single-family detached home developments.

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

I dislike the idea. Farms should mostly and primarily grow food, especially ones that State and local taxpayers already have invested in for that purpose. I voted against the recent agri-tourism bill for the same reason. As to solar panels, particularly, non-agrarian surfaces abound for their siting.

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?

Yes, please see my answer in 3.A above. And I have, even as a Councilmember: CB20-2025, and now CB10-2026 dedicate annual "excess surplus funds" prospectively to schools' deferred maintenance needs, above and beyond the current Executive's arbitrary, fixed limit. I incorporated reference to the ElkrIDGE high school site into the latest general plan and expanded schools' ability to reserve space and parcels for their needs as part of their role in new development plans review. I have testified before the Board of Education in support of reserving the first floor of the North Ridge elementary school for pre-K, as the ground floor is already, and suggested the same re-purposing of Bryant Woods Elementary.

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

Absolutely not.

As to stormwater management, for the last several decades, State and so local regulations have sought to address *quality* of stormwater runoff, not *quantity*. Nearly everywhere in the County, new projects are to "manage" only the first (theoretically, dirtiest) inch of rain that falls. With more intense and more frequent storms, that fundamental shift has proven woefully inadequate, devastating to both our natural waterways and the built environment. A significantly greater portion of the County's budget now is diverted to addressing the after-effects of that policy change, e.g., D- projects in the annual capital budget. The ongoing Safe and Sound projects to protect old Ellicott City from surface runoff could possibly be the single-largest undertaking in County history. We need to (a) revise stormwater

requirements to address both quantity and quality of rainfall; (b) require developers and HOAs to dedicate sufficient funding for the maintenance and repair of their respective stormwater controls and cease taking County ownership of them on an *ad hoc* basis; (c) identify and address the most problematic point-source contributions into our waterways; (d) add bio-swales along roadways where existing widths allow; (e) daylight as much as possible natural waterways allowing overflow into surrounding floodplains; (f) prohibit further deforestation of unstable slopes and soils; and (g) plant more trees and native plants in lieu of more and existing pavement and mown grass.

No question I have attempted to strengthen the County's forest conservation requirements many, many times: making waivers from those requirements harder to get and subject to a public process; reducing the threshold of so-called "specimen" trees; adding to the categories of land deserving heightened protections; adding to conservations requirements applicable to and number of designated local scenic roads; augmenting penalties for violations, among other efforts. If we would just simply comply with what already is in State and local law, though, that itself would be an immeasurable improvement to how this County regulates forest conservation.

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

Preventing our elders' isolation and loneliness would be of paramount concern. Expanding access to low-cost transportation, social gatherings, personal grooming and health and fitness options, preventative medicine and prescriptions, and group memory and mental health care.

Dedicating a percentage of existing Housing Commission inventory to those with lowest incomes, and ensuring inclusionary zoning applies to ARAH and CCRC developments.

Improving the food quality and availability at the 50+ centers.

Dedicating outreach personnel to most at-risk members, whether veterans, disabled, or otherwise.

11. How do you propose to improve public transportation?

Add wherever existing road widths permit, sidewalks and protected bike lanes, especially radiating out from our schools and other public amenities; and expand upon the concept of on-demand mini buses as currently run up and down Route 1.

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

Public education, hands down.

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.

As certain religious groups among our community have been singled out for violence over the last nearly eight years, I have gathered with our entire community in solidarity with those groups, in their places of worship to grieve and honor horrific losses, to console and mourn among our community.

I attended the first Shabbat services after October 7, 2023 at Ellicott City Chabad. I celebrated and helped light public menorahs on display the following Hannukah, and every year before, and once since. But I also simultaneously confirmed publicly that genocide was ongoing in Gaza. And I shared with several faith leaders in Howard County my very firm belief that the place for this ongoing trauma to be addressed was by collective action by and among that same faith leadership. That never happened, even as churches and faith leaders throughout the country and the world spoke out.

I spent weeks and weeks of the initial atrocities struggling to broaden awareness and empathy towards the people, the children of Gaza, following the lead of Senator Chris Van Hollen. Of course, I was name-called. I am trolled to this day on social media by those who were most particularly abhorrent. That does not matter. It is not my place to be silent then or now about grave injustices. I do not retaliate.

I try to understand, admittedly I do not. We have neighbors here who have lost scores and scores of family members in Palestine, over now more than two years of unadulterated cruelty. It is a deeply personal and local issue to many of the people who make Howard County home, and so to me.

My job as a public servant is not always to bring people together. Surely not if that so-called togetherness requires submitting to bullying or silencing the most vulnerable among us.

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.

- A. The Howard County Rent Stabilization Act passed unanimously in the first months of the pandemic shutdown. I was told by a fellow Democrat on the Council that such a measure was a waste of time because “renters don’t vote;” that is not how or why I legislate or will govern. I was told by the County Solicitor that anything tenant related would be preempted by State law. As to all but a small part of the law, Maryland courts proved him wrong.
- B. Establishment of the Office of the Inspector General. My D1 office’s work on that bill spanned years. Initially the County Auditor objected to such a measure; once he agreed to support our efforts, due diligence into what overlap may or may not have occurred between his office and the potential IG exposed numerous concerns with his own office’s underperformance, leading to his

eventual replacement. Concurrently, we spent many, many hours in meetings with the Administration. The Howard County IG bill would be the first to be sponsored by a legislator, not the Executive, and given the voting tendency of certain council members, I wanted to be assured of his support before filing an initial draft. We worked extensively with neighboring Inspector Generals, the governing professional association, advocacy groups and bipartisan public support to draft and adhere to the most politically independent IG standards possible. I fended off weakening amendments, including one that would keep the IG within the Council's (political) purview. Former Executive Alan Kittleman spoke in favor of the measure at our initial press conference and subsequent public testimony.

- C. The bill to end the County's for-profit contract with ICE to hold civil detainees. It passed, then got vetoed, but set the stage for State-level legislation outlawing the practice, and an eventual capitulation by the Executive to do exactly what he had vetoed before. Our Department of Corrections concurrently was deemed by the first Trump Administration's Department of Homeland Security to have committed human rights violations against those detainees held.