

Our Revolution Maryland (OR-MD), Baltimore County Candidates Questionnaire

1. Please state the position you are running for. How does your experience, along with your life experiences, qualify you for the position?

I'm running for Baltimore County Council in Council District 1. Rich and varied experiences have led to my candidacy for County Council. In recent years, my focus has been progressive political activism, from testifying before the Council to oppose the county signing on to assisting federal immigration enforcement, to lobbying the state legislature to support a Constitutional amendment that would be a big step toward removing money from politics, to protesting Trump's Muslim ban and the Dakota Access Pipeline.

I'm on the Board of Directors for Get Money Out - Maryland and I founded the Baltimore County Progressive Democrats Club, a group that has become a widely recognized force in county politics. I was on the steering committee of the Our Revolution Baltimore City/County Chapter, and have been an Our Revolution volunteer since the organization was founded.

I have proven experience coalition-building, helping to develop alliances among progressive groups in Baltimore County and statewide. In the spring 2017, a large and diverse collection of Maryland progressive groups elected me to represent progressive Democrats on the Maryland Democratic Party Executive Committee as one of the party's Diversity Leadership Council Chairs.

Before all that, I've been a computer programmer, website developer, book publisher, and homeschooling parent. As a small business owner, I understand the difficulties they face in a time when large corporations have increasing power to eliminate competition. I've been on the Boards of Directors of several small non-profits, and a past President of the MidAtlantic Book Publishers Association.

Combining my passion, my activism, and my diverse real world experiences, I'm ready to take the next step and work within government to bring meaningful change to people's lives.

2. What will be the principles or values that guide your public service?

I am passionately committed to justice and equity, and to policies that put people and planet first. I have a strong sense of empathy, and believe in listening and in civil discussion, even when we disagree. However, I also believe that there is a time to speak truth to power and to stand up for what is right and just.

Learning is a cornerstone of my life, and I hope to continue to learn new things every day of my life. I also believe in the value of hard work, and will work hard to serve my constituents.

CIVIL RIGHTS

3. Do you support the Trust Act? (Legislation that prevents a State/local Government Agent from using public resources for civil immigration enforcement; prevents law enforcement officials from stopping, arresting or detaining an individual simply to find out immigration or citizenship status; prevents the State from creating a registry for the purpose of immigration enforcement, and prevents state law enforcement officers from being deputized as immigration officers.)

a. Yes

Explanation:

While the Federal government has primary responsibility for defining whether, how much, and how to regulate immigration, state and local governments have a responsibility for the well-being of their citizens. It's not in anyone's best interest for communities to be disrupted by intrusive policies that violate our civil rights. Targeting people based on ethnic profiling does not make us safer; in fact, it makes us less safe because when people don't trust law enforcement or government, they are less likely to report crimes or seek help.

Images of undocumented immigrants as criminals are racist, harmful, and just plain wrong. What research there is indicates that undocumented immigrants commit crimes at lower rates than the population as a whole. When crimes are committed by undocumented immigrants, the crime can be dealt with like a crime committed by any other person, without treating it as an immigration issue. We need to ensure that law enforcement has the resources needed to deal with crime, without burdening our law enforcement officers with immigration enforcement in addition to their regular duties.

4. Do you support Gov. Hogan's executive order to bar state business with companies that boycott Israel, that is, his order opposing recent BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions)?

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is deep and complex, and Americans have intense disagreement about it. However, regardless of your views, you have a Constitutionally protected right to express those views. By barring the state from doing business with companies that participate in BDS actions, Governor Hogan is violating the First Amendment rights of the owners and directors of those companies. In fact, just today, January 30, a U.S. District Judge in Kansas blocked enforcement of a similar law in Kansas while an ACLU-backed lawsuit proceeds. In his opinion, the judge wrote, "The Supreme Court has held that the First Amendment protects the right to participate in a boycott like the one punished by the Kansas law."

5. Do you oppose voluntary state and local cooperation with federal immigration enforcement beyond that required by Constitutionally-mandated federal law? Where do you stand on efforts to sign a 287g agreement with the Federal government for the Baltimore County Department of Corrections?

Yes, I oppose it. In the spring of 2017, when a bill was introduced in the County Council to sign Baltimore County Department of Corrections up for the 287g program, I worked with a coalition of people from around the county in working to oppose the bill. I rallied with CASA and testified before the County Council.

Although supporters of 287(g) claim that the programs will make us safer, in fact they have actually undermined public safety by harming the relationship between law enforcement and local communities, according to police chiefs from the 64 largest police departments in the

United States and Canada. And these 287(g) programs have NOT focused solely on serious criminals: an analysis from the Migration Policy Institute showed that half of all detainers issued through the program were on people who had committed misdemeanors and traffic offenses. (<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/287g-program-immigration>)

In addition, the expenses associated with participating in this program, including salaries, overtime, supplies, administrative and personnel costs, and the cost of detention, add an additional burden to the county budget. Although detention costs may be reimbursed in part by the federal government, such reimbursements generally cover only a fraction of the cost of detention. A University of North Carolina study cited in the Baltimore Sun found that similar sized jurisdictions had annual costs of approximately \$5 million a year.

Please also see my response to question 3.

6. What will you do to promote racial integration in Baltimore County?

This is a difficult and complex issue involving social, economic, and historical factors. Yet it's essential that leaders have the political will to make it a priority. Better integration benefits everyone; for example, studies have shown that *all* children do better in better integrated schools.

Economic segregation contributes strongly to racial segregation because of the systemic injustices that continue to disproportionately impact people of color. These factors include concentrated poverty due to lack of available affordable housing, inadequate schools, the school-to-prison pipeline, a criminal justice system that unfairly targets people of color, inadequate public transportation for people to get to jobs, and employment bias against citizens returning to the community after incarceration, especially when a higher percentage of those returning citizens are people of color, due to the well-documented biases in the criminal justice system and the consequences of the "war on drugs."

Solving these problems seems a daunting task, yet only by beginning to address them can we work towards a more just and equitable society for everyone.

I would begin by working to pass the HOME Act, which would prevent housing discrimination by source of income. This would allow Housing Choice Vouchers to be used anywhere. Landlords would no longer be able to use these vouchers as a criteria for denying rental; however landlords would still be able to make rental decisions based on other factors such as tenant history and credit rating.

There also needs to be an adequate supply of affordable housing throughout the county to accompany the HOME act. I would work to ensure that developers set aside an adequate number of units to be designated as affordable housing in all areas of the county, but particularly in those areas which are currently out of reach of struggling families.

In addition to creating affordable housing opportunities throughout the county, the other side of the coin is that we need to focus investment in the marginalized and neglected communities in order to create equity, raise the standard of living and quality of life, and create more opportunities.

I also support criminal justice and educational reforms, as detailed elsewhere in this questionnaire.

In working on these kinds of issues, I believe it's important to include leaders from the affected communities in the decision-making process, to ensure that all efforts are meeting the needs of the communities. Without such guidance from people who know best, even well-intentioned efforts can sometimes cause more harm than good.

EDUCATION

7. Do you support legislation providing free tuition at community colleges, vocational and trade schools and will you commit to using new tax revenue from those sectors better able to afford it?

a. Yes

Explanation:

Although the economy has recovered slowly since 2008, we still live in a time of deeply troubling economic hardship. Many young people who want to go to college cannot afford to, and others graduate so deeply in debt they may never recover. Others who don't feel that the college path is right for them struggle to find a job that pays a living wage. Opening up free community colleges, vocational and trade schools to all is essential to improving not only the individual lives of those affected, but our shared prosperity as well. When more people have education that leads to better paying jobs, it raises the standard of living throughout the county. When people graduate without a heavy burden of student debt, they have more money to spend, which benefits county businesses.

Such initiatives should not be limited to new or recent high school graduates, as some jurisdictions have done. From my own personal experience, I understand the need for opportunity for adult learners as well. I completed most of my college degree taking night and weekend classes while working full time, after initially dropping out of college and then returning as an adult. An education should not be a one-time opportunity that, if you miss it will leave you economically disadvantaged for the rest of your life. Free college, vocational, and trade education for adult learners could also help to provide a path forward for citizens returning to the community after incarceration.

I will commit to finding a way to fund this program, including tax revenues from sectors better able to afford it. Such funding options would be easier to achieve at the state than at the county level, so I will work with our state legislators to try to find the best way forward on this, but if the state can't, or won't, act, I commit to finding a way to fund this, because the benefits far exceed

the costs. If the program were set up as a last dollar program, funding the difference after all other sources of funding including Pell Grants (but not student loans), it should be achievable.

8. There is a deeply concerning persistent achievement gap in Maryland public schools that affects a large number of students in economically disadvantaged communities and minority communities. What will you do to help close that gap?

To achieve equity, we must invest more in those communities which have been marginalized or neglected. This doesn't mean that any community should be ignored, but it does mean lifting some communities a little more than others, until we can all rise together. Most parents want the best opportunities and education for our children, but those who have a little more often have more time and money to advocate for their children, so we cannot base decisions on whose voices are heard the most. Closing the gap will benefit us all by raising the quality of life and standard of living throughout the county.

This includes school infrastructure as well as academics. The environment that students are in affects their learning. When students go to school in crumbling, overcrowded school buildings, what message does that send them about how much we value their education? And if we don't value it, why should they care?

Students also can't learn when they're hungry. 65% of Baltimore County schools have at least 40% of their student population eligible for free or reduced price meals. Universal free school breakfast and lunch would ensure that all children have enough to eat in a stigma-free environment.

The county should expand the community schools model to make all schools true hubs for their communities, provide services to students and their families, and increase opportunities for family engagement and real world learning.

In addition, achieving better economic and racial integration will help close the gap. Please see my response to question 6.

9. What would you do to improve the state of Baltimore County public schools?

Baltimore County schools have serious infrastructure and overcrowding issues. Although progress has been made in the last couple of years, there are still a number of schools in shameful condition. Children should not have to go to schools with brown water, overcrowded classrooms, broken bathrooms, and water seeping up through the floors.

It's true that finding funding to accelerate the infrastructure improvements is a challenge, but it's one that I would take on, because the need is so urgent. The status quo is simply unacceptable. And investing in education benefits everyone in the long run, because the better the education we can provide to all county residents, the more residents will be able to give back to the community.

One area that we need to look at is our educational priorities. For one example, as a computer programmer and web developer I certainly support the importance of technology education for children. However, I question the wisdom of investing hundreds of millions of dollars in buying tablets for every child when there are such serious problems with the school infrastructure. Wouldn't it have been better to use that money to accelerate addressing the serious infrastructure issues, and providing stigma-free breakfast and lunch to all students first? Once we have a healthy and safe learning environment for all students, then we can look at how we can best use technology in education.

Another area to look at is how developers can mitigate the impact of development. New housing developments put a burden on already overcrowded schools, as well as on other infrastructure. I would work with developers to ensure adequate support for affected infrastructure via community benefit agreements.

HEALTH CARE

10. Do you support a Maryland single-payer universal health care system, in absence of a national plan, to establish a single standard of quality, therapeutic care to all residents in the state? What do you see as the greatest obstacles to enacting single-payer health-care legislation in Maryland? If you favor such a plan, what can you do to overcome those obstacles?

a. Yes

Explanation:

I believe that health care is a human right, and that the healthcare you receive shouldn't depend on what you can afford to pay. No one should die, or be thrown out on the streets in a hospital gown in the middle of winter, just because they can't afford to pay a medical bill. If Congress does not act to pass a Medicare-for-all plan, and it seems unlikely that it will anytime soon, Maryland should work to develop such a plan to protect residents of our state. The biggest obstacle is that the results of such a plan at the state level are unknown; several states have attempted to pass a single-payer plan, but none have yet succeeded. As a County Councilperson, I wouldn't have any direct ability to achieve such a goal, but I would advocate strongly for it with our state legislators, and encourage all parties to work together to develop a plan that will work.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

11. What is your position on the bail reform imposed by the Maryland Court of Appeals? Do you support eliminating money bail, or other reform to prevent having anyone spend time in jail solely because of inability to pay bail?

a. Yes

Explanation:

No one should be incarcerated simply because they can't afford to pay to get out. As with the rest of the criminal justice system, the money bail system disproportionately affects people of color. People who can't afford bail can be impacted severely in multiple ways, including job loss, health, separation from families, and all before the due process which is their right as citizens. The bail bonds industry serves no one except its own profit, and we should move towards eliminating bail as a pre-trial option. Risk, and not wealth, should be the determining factor in pre-trial status.

12. What is your position on community policing?

I think community policing is an essential tool in developing trust between the police and the communities they serve, and in reducing the devastating effects of mass incarceration. To the extent possible, police officers should be placed to consistently serve the same community, to give them an opportunity to get to know the community members and become a part of the community. Community policing requires leadership to build a culture where community relationships are valued and officers are rewarded for community service, and not just for arrests. Officers should also receive sufficient training, including refresher training, in techniques such as de-escalation. Of course, reactive policing will always be needed in genuine criminal activity, and we need to provide adequate resources and support for the people who put themselves at risk to protect the community. But an us versus them mentality that views everyone as a potential enemy should not be the default.

ENVIRONMENT

13. How would you help move Maryland to a 50% clean energy economy by 2030?

See my response to Question 14 below.

14. How would you help move Baltimore County to a 100% clean energy economy by 2035?

This answer is for Questions 13 and 14 combined. It's essential that we move to a 100% clean energy economy as quickly as possible. We are already seeing the consequences of climate change in effects such as sea level rise and increased extreme weather events. If we don't halt the change, in 30-80 years we could see more extreme consequences, including sea level rise of 3-6 feet, agricultural consequences, loss of most of the world's coral reefs, and extinction of species including food species.

It's easier to make the kinds of changes necessary at the Federal or state level than at the county level. The current Federal government seems focused on destroying environmental protections, so unless something changes, the state is our best bet. I would work with our state legislators to support efforts such as Delegate Shane Robinson's "100% Clean Renewable Energy & Equity Act." If I am elected, and if this act is not enacted in the 2018 session, I would introduce a resolution such as Montgomery County's "Resolution to support strengthening Maryland's Renewable Portfolio Standard Requirement" to call on our state legislators to pass such an act.

Within the county, I would work to ensure that all county buildings and resources are powered by 50% renewable energy by 2030 and 100% by 2035. The current county goal of 20% by 2022 is a good first step, but we must go further to prevent the catastrophic effects of climate change.

15. What are some of your ideas for addressing the unique environmental challenges in Baltimore County and in Maryland?

The Chesapeake Bay is our gem and our treasure in Maryland. We must do everything we can to protect it. Baltimore County's 2015 repeal of the Stormwater Remediation Fee was grossly

irresponsible. This fee, charged to homeowners and businesses, was used to fund projects required by the EPA to mitigate the toxic runoff from impervious surfaces like parking lots from contaminating the Bay. Homeowners paid only a small fee of around \$26 per year, but a propaganda campaign by Larry Hogan and special interests worked to convince people that this “rain tax” was unnecessary and a burden. In reality, by repealing the fee, the burden is shifted from businesses, who are now saving thousands of dollars due to the repeal of the fee, to the taxpayers, because the county is still required by the EPA to do this essential work. So now taxpayers have to foot the bill for the share formerly paid by businesses, but because it’s rolled into the budget, no one notices. And without the fee, the county is not doing enough to protect our Bay: a 2016 analysis from the Center for Progressive Reform rated Baltimore County “9th out of 10 counties on a per capita basis, 8th as a percentage of the overall county budget, and last (10th) both as a percentage of median household income and as a measure of spending per acre of impervious surfaces in the county.” (http://progressivereform.org/articles/BaltimoreCounty_Stormwater_Facts_CPR_2016.pdf) If elected, I would work to re-institute this fee, and to ensure that the county is doing its fair share to protect our Chesapeake Bay.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

16. Do you support raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour?

a. Yes

Explanation:

I am a strong supporter of the Fight for \$15 because everyone deserves to earn a living wage. According to research by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a worker earning current minimum wage of \$9.25 will have to work 91 hours a week in Baltimore County to afford a one-bedroom apartment at fair market rent. (<http://nlihc.org/oor/maryland>) That’s more than two full-time jobs. To afford a one bedroom apartment on forty hours a week of work, a worker in Baltimore County would need to earn \$21.10 per hour. This is an unfair and unsustainable system that not only hurts individuals and families struggling to survive, but also drags down the county's economy.

We must ensure that all workers are paid a living wage. A \$15-per-hour minimum wage would be a start. The exclusion for tipped workers should be eliminated so that businesses can no longer put the burden of meeting the minimum wage on the workers’ tips.

Any changes to the minimum wage will need to be phased in, with a longer phase-in period for small businesses, so as not to create an unsustainable burden. Once we achieve \$15 per hour, the future minimum wage should be indexed to the consumer price index to ensure that it continues to keep pace with the cost of living.

In the long run, raising the minimum wage will help everyone. People won’t have to work two jobs to pay their rent. Businesses will benefit because people will have more discretionary income and more time to spend it. The county will benefit from increased revenue due to a higher income tax base, which in turn will allow the county to better serve the citizens with investments in our county’s future.

Raising the minimum wage would be best done at the state level, and I am a supporter of efforts to pass it in the Maryland General Assembly. However, if it doesn't pass at the state level before I am elected, I will work to pass such a bill for workers in Baltimore County. If Montgomery County can do it, we can to. Further, enacting a \$15 minimum wage in Baltimore County might encourage our neighbor Baltimore City to follow through on its promises to Baltimore City working families.

17. What is your position on unionization?

I support the right of all public and private sector employees to organize and collectively bargain for fair wages and working conditions. We live in a time of increasing income inequality and concentrated wealth, and strong unions are needed more than ever to counter such concentration of power and influence. I oppose the so-called "right-to-work" laws and any other attacks designed to weaken unions.

18. (Rent Court Reform) The Baltimore Sun recently affirmed that "The rent court system routinely works against tenants, while in many cases failing to hold landlords accountable." A reform bill agreed to by many landlords and tenants passed last year in the Maryland House, but was blocked by the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. What specific actions will you take to ensure Rent Court reforms are enacted?

As the Sun report shows, renters, especially low-income renters, are at an extreme disadvantage when confronting experienced landlords who can afford adequate legal representation. I support, and would encourage our state legislators to support, reforms that would assist tenants with providing representation, and protect tenants from eviction when landlords don't meet safety standards. Although the Baltimore Sun study and other work has focused on Baltimore City, if elected I would push for a Baltimore County study to determine whether low-income tenants in the county are being adequately protected in disputes with landlords.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

19. Will you support legislation for Small Donor Matched Public Financing of elections?

a. Yes

Explanation:

I will end the pay-to-play politics that serve special interests instead of our community. As a member of the County Council, I will introduce a public finance option for Baltimore County candidates, and fight to end developer contributions to Baltimore County candidates.

Montgomery and Howard counties have already enacted such public campaign finance programs that match small-dollar donations from county residents for any candidate who qualifies for the program. This reduces the political reliance on big money and encourages candidates to engage with and address the concerns of all citizens.

20. Will you make a pledge to run without corporate, or developer money in your campaign?

Yes, I have already made such a pledge and will strongly uphold my promise.

21. Will you support the legislation by Wolf-PAC/GMOM (Get Money Out - Maryland) to call for an Article V convention to get money out of politics?

Yes! I'm on the Board of Directors of Get Money Out - Maryland and have worked hard to support this legislation. I will be testifying at the February 8 hearing in the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. The 2010 Citizens United decision and the 2014 McCutcheon decision have unleashed a flood of dark money that is warping our political system. Look behind almost every problem we are wrestling with, and you'll see big money. You only have to look at the recent tax plan passed by Congress as an example. Some of them even admitted publicly that if they didn't pass it, their donors would withhold money. In addition to regulating campaign finance, the amendment called for by the Democracy Amendment Resolution would affirm the right of every citizen to vote, and declare constitutional rights are reserved for natural persons, not corporations.

HOUSING

22. Where do you stand on the Home Act to prevent housing discrimination based on source of income?

The HOME act is one of my key issues, and passing it would be a high priority for me. Currently, many landlords refuse to rent to people who rely on federal Housing Choice Vouchers, herding low income families, disabled people, and seniors into areas of concentrated poverty. These neighborhoods tend to have substandard schools and infrastructure, thus compounding and reinforcing the consequences of poverty.

There are many misconceptions and stereotypes about about Housing Choice Voucher recipients. Most are just good people trying to get by and support themselves and their families. 32% are senior citizens, and 30% are disabled people. Landlords could still refuse to rent to those who might pose a genuine risk due to tenant history or credit.

Passing the HOME act, along with working to provide adequate affordable housing distributed throughout the county, will help reduce concentrated poverty and increase economic and racial integration. Studies have shown that all children do better in better integrated schools, so passing the HOME act will be one step towards creating a better educational environment for all our children.

SOCIAL & ECONOMIC SECURITY

23. While there is undoubtedly a wide range of policies you might wish to propose that you have not discussed above, what would be one or two additional policies or programs in particular that you will put forward that you would especially want to highlight – policies which you believe will create economic

opportunity, employment, address income inequality in Maryland, assist low and middle income people in Maryland, bring social services to needy communities or create greater economic security for seniors?

One of the primary responsibilities of the county council is to guide development within the county. Too often, the council adopts a “wait and see” attitude to development, waiting until developers come forward with a project and then usually greenlighting those projects. Development, and re-development, have the potential to benefit communities with jobs, housing, and retail, but they also have the potential for negative impact on the infrastructure and character of a community. I would take a proactive approach to development, first reaching out to the communities to find out the needs and vision of the residents for their community, and then reaching out to developers to work out the best possible solution to benefit those communities. In working cooperatively with communities and developers, there is an opportunity to develop plans that will truly benefit the community, for example with adequate greenspace and recreation facilities, walkable communities, adequate schools, some housing units set aside as affordable housing units, and guarantees of good paying jobs reserved specifically for county residents.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

24. Do you feel that Baltimore County needs to improve in accountability and/or transparency? If so, what are some of your ideas for improving both?

The people of Baltimore County deserve transparent and accountable citizen-driven government that puts people first. I will pursue reforms to ensure that the county government is accountable to the people it serves and makes decisions with the greatest possible transparency. You shouldn't have to take off from work and drive to Towson in the middle of the afternoon to be heard. I will propose moving the Council work sessions to the evenings and providing means for people to submit testimony remotely if they are unable to attend a work session in person. I will work to set up systems so that county residents can receive regular updates from the County Council, including timely notice of matters under consideration and council decisions. I will work to ensure that all residents receive timely and visible notice of pending actions that would affect their community, with adequate opportunity to weigh in before any decisions are made. I would push for multiple hearings in different parts of the county before the budget is finalized, to allow residents to provide input on their priorities.

Please certify by signing below that the above or attached answers reflect your policy views.

Print your name:	<u>Sheila Ruth</u>
Signature:	<u><i>Sheila Ruth</i></u>
Date:	<u>January 30, 2018</u>