

Our Revolution Baltimore City/County

Baltimore City Endorsement Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Zeke Cohen

Office and District Running For: Baltimore City Councilmember, District 1

1. What is your vision and plan for public safety and reform of the police and criminal justice system?

Selecting a leader who could address our city's deep-seated issues with corruption and violence while remaining accountable to the consent decree was crucial. I [led the charge](#) to select our police commissioner with public input. We must involve community members in pivotal decisions about city leadership, including policing.

Collaboration between police and community members is needed to build trust and address neighborhood-specific concerns. I introduced the [Public Safety Task Force](#), a monthly meeting of stakeholders that encourages dialogue and neighborhood-based solutions. To be effective, police need to be involved members of the community -- knowing and known by the people on their beat -- and well-trained in trauma-informed practices.

2. What can you do, within the powers of the office you are running for, to improve education for all Baltimoreans and provide educational equity?

As a former Baltimore City Public Schools teacher, Chairman of the Education and Youth Committee, and most importantly, father to a future Baltimore City Schools student, I am deeply committed to equity and excellence in our schools. I have [vocally supported legislation](#) put forth by the Kirwan Commission to fully fund universal Pre-K, support for English Learners and students with disabilities, increased spending accountability, and other equity-focused measures. I will continue to use my platform to organize support in Baltimore City for this game-changing legislation package.

I am also focused on increasing equity in students' school experiences and opportunities outside the classroom. Last year I heard from students and teachers that trans and gender non-conforming students were experiencing pervasive bullying and inconsistent access to the restrooms that reflected their genders. I [passed a resolution](#) in support of BCPSS Policy JBB to ensure restroom access and equitable treatment for trans and gender non-conforming youth. I will continue to seek opportunities to increase access and accountability in schools. Outside the classroom, I am committed to increasing employment opportunities for young people. Through [This is Working](#), I pushed for increased youth job opportunities. I intend to continue expanding programs like YouthWorks and ensure funding for youth programs is robust, accountable, and effectively used.

3. How will you address blight and revitalize communities while avoiding gentrification?

We need to involve community leaders in community revitalization rather than undertaking projects that displace residents. I put pressure on the Housing Department and worked closely with Ella Broadway, a leader in O'Donnell Heights, to [restart the O'Donnell Heights Redevelopment Plan](#). We have recommitted to investing in neighborhoods including Key's Pointe, Broening Highway, Graceland Park, and Medford. Crucially, community members are at the center of this process. I will continue to promote projects that are by and for the residents of our community.

4. How will you ensure that communities in the Black Butterfly receive equitable investment?

I strongly [support the work](#) of groups like United Workers and the Baltimore Housing Roundtable, and I will continue to build coalitions with community groups with the goal of increasing investment. I would support tax incentives for developers to invest in affordable, community-focused projects in historically redlined areas. I will also continue to support a public transit option connecting East and West Baltimore, and transit-oriented development that promotes mobility and opportunity.

5. How would you improve transit, transportation, and the ability for people to get around in the city?

Public transit is crucial to economic mobility, reduction of greenhouse gases, and limited traffic congestion. My first fight after being elected was organizing a [Bake Sale for Buses](#) to restore full hours to students using bus passes. We can take other steps to make public and sustainable transit options accessible: electric scooters need to be regulated to ensure rider safety, the Bike Share program could be revised and reintroduced, and bike lanes must be protected and expanded. I supported the [2018 Complete Streets](#) legislation to make our streets and sidewalks more cyclist and pedestrian friendly. We need to accelerate implementation of walkability measures and increase equity in access to alternative modes of transportation.

6. Would you support the creation of a Regional Transit Authority to provide transit independence from the state?

Yes. The cancellation of the Red Line train, which had overwhelming support from transportation advocates, demonstrates that the governor is not always the best equipped to make transit decisions for Baltimore City.

7. How will you address the environment, climate justice, and the climate crisis locally, including not only reducing/eliminating greenhouse gas emissions within the city, but also protecting the people and infrastructure from the consequences of the climate crisis? Will you declare a state of climate emergency?

Our city and world are in a state of climate emergency. Following the president's ill-advised decision to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Climate Agreement in 2017, I passed [a resolution upholding its commitments](#) in Baltimore, including a 100% renewable future, a transition away from incineration, and investments in tree cover and sustainable transit options. The resolution was made possible by a coalition of more than 15 advocacy groups, and I continue to collaborate with many of them to gain insights on next steps.

The resolution has informed legislation since, including the [Clean Air Act](#), which I co-sponsored, and Councilmember Bill Henry's [Plastic Bag Ban](#). My next steps toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions and

protecting communities from the impacts of climate change include investing in green stormwater infrastructure to reduce frequent nuisance flooding in Fells Point and Canton and increasing access to bikes across the city.

8. How will you improve public health within the city? Please address racial and economic health disparities and social determinants of health. Some things to consider:

1. **The high asthma rate;**
2. **Food insecurity and food deserts;**
3. **Disparities in life expectancy;**
4. **The effects of trauma and violence.**
5. **Lead in water and housing.**

As a teacher in Sandtown-Winchester, I worked with students suffering from lead poisoning. It is unacceptable that in a city with some of the most advanced healthcare systems in the world, we have allowed children to suffer from a preventable condition. Those who seek to rent out or sell properties with known lead-based paint or water contamination must be held accountable. When I taught in Curtis Bay, I worked with students suffering from asthma from the nearby incinerator. I also support closing the incinerator and investing in making Baltimore's air healthier.

Violence and its resulting trauma is an epidemic in our city, and we have a responsibility to support young people experiencing its effects. I have worked extensively with public health experts, researchers, and community leaders to develop and pass the [2020 Trauma Responsive Care Act](#) (Elijah Cummings Healing City Act), gaining the [unanimous support of the City Council](#), the police commissioner, and a broad coalition of organizations and elected officials. This [legislation](#) will require city agencies to implement trauma-informed practices, and will create a citywide task force to develop trauma-reduction strategy and measure efficacy.

9. How will you improve economic opportunities for all residents of Baltimore? What programs would you create or reform to improve access to well paying jobs?

Workers must have the option to organize in support of competitive wages and safe working conditions without fear of retaliation. I am a former member of the teachers' union, and I have consistently stood with unions on every major issue. I voted in favor of a [\\$15 minimum wage](#) and firmly support workers' rights to organize and collectively bargain. I also believe that robust employment opportunities must be available early in a person's career, which is why I support [increased investment](#) in youth employment programs like Youthworks.

10. What reforms to the structure and functioning of city government would you implement?

The recent political upheaval in Baltimore reflects a need for increased transparency and accountability. In 2018, I passed the [Transparency in Lobbying Act](#) to require public disclosure of all lobbying activity in City Hall. I have also expressed my support for Councilmember Burnett's [Fair Election Fund](#), which would allow public financing of campaigns. I am also open to considering strategies for balancing power in City Hall, including revisions to the structure of the Board of Estimates.

11. How will you improve the quality of life for city residents? Some things to consider:

1. **Community art;**
2. **Community centers and recreation;**
3. **Illegal dumping;**
4. **Beautification of streets and neighborhoods;**

5. Improving infrastructure;
6. Trash pickup and recycling.

My office has prioritized excellent in addressing constituent requests; we have [resolved 2,271 requests](#) (94% of total received) to date. While I am proud of our record of responsiveness, the volume of requests reflects a need for increased accountability and efficiency in city services. I will push for transparency in spending and operations for city agencies.

I will also continue to partner with neighborhood organizations to spearhead more projects like the 2018 [mural in O'Donnell Heights](#).

12. How will you address the needs of immigrants, both documented and undocumented? Will you ensure the safety of our undocumented neighbors?

Immigrants make our country great. Southeast Baltimore has been fortunate to experience an influx of immigration, as new residents have revived neighborhoods that were once struggling. In 2017, I passed a resolution reaffirming Baltimore's status as a [Welcoming City](#). I supported the Open Society Institute's creation of Safe City Baltimore, a legal defense fund and education network that supports our undocumented neighbors. I will continue to [partner with organizations such as CASA de Maryland](#) that uplift and protect Baltimore's immigrants, both documented and undocumented.

13. How will you address the need for equitable and affordable housing?

I am committed to ensuring access to affordable housing; I voted in favor of the [Affordable Housing Trust Fund](#) despite substantial pushback from developers in my district. I will continue to engage with groups like Baltimore Housing Roundtable to consider best practices for ensuring affordable housing options.

14. How will you balance providing services, including water, to all citizens while planning and paying for infrastructure upgrades/repair and replacement?

We need increased spending transparency and [accountability from DPW](#). Access to water is a human right and must be affordable; 23% of the constituent requests my office has handled are related to concerns about water bills or water infrastructure. I supported the [Water Accountability and Equity Act](#), and I will continue to partner with organizations that advocate for sustainable maintenance and billing practices.

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