

# Our Revolution Baltimore City/County

## *Delegate and State Senate Endorsement Questionnaire*

Name: Reginald Benbow

Desired political office: House of Delegates

District Number: 43

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### 1. How does your experience, along with your life experiences, qualify you for this position?

I am a son of Baltimore, raised by a single mother with a father in prison. Few expected me to succeed. Yet, I rose to become the first person in my family to graduate from college and after, I became a Baltimore City public school teacher. I have what it takes to be your champion and fight for change. I fought to become the first person in my family to graduate from college, fought to teach students in classrooms that were either un-airconditioned and too hot or under-heated and too cold, and fought to make healthcare more affordable for all.

I have the tenacity to garner the resources to get our kids the jobs of the future, fund small business grants and finish rebuilding our schools. As a black gay man from a low income background, a triple minority, I have lived on the margins and the intersections. I have the tenacity to fight against interlocking systems of oppression as I understand that racial, educational, economic, transit, climate and health care justice are all inextricably linked.

Furthermore, we need a champion to hold the state government accountable. We need more transit options. Buses should run on time. State payments should be made on time. Our state should be more retirement friendly, with lower taxes for seniors. We need additional, common-sense police reforms, including removing police from schools and local control of the BPD.

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

I am guided by my interest to transform systems and structures in order to create more opportunities for the marginalized. That's what drove me to become a Baltimore City Public School Teacher fresh out of college at age 21. For three years, I fought to give children, who came from the same community as I did, an excellent education. However, I came to realize that my work had to extend beyond one classroom. It would be more efficient to TRANSFORM society writ-large, rather than trying a classroom by classroom approach. I left the classroom to pursue graduate education to equip myself with systems and strategic thinking. I now work to transform healthcare; improving operations and/or quality. After years of leadership in individual sectors, I have come to believe that the best way to transform systems and structures is through effective public policy.

3. Do you identify as a progressive candidate? If so, what specifically makes you a progressive candidate for this political office?

I am progressive. I believe in the power of government to reform systems and structures to create a more perfect union. I believe in the redistribution of wealth and resources to marginalized groups through progressive taxation and social spending programs. I believe that we should invest in human capital: education, loan forgiveness, housing, child care and family leave; rather than fund war and militarized law enforcement.

### **Climate Change/Green New Deal**

4. Do you acknowledge the existence of climate change and the sense of urgency to address this issue on state and local levels?
  - a. The climate crisis is the single greatest challenge facing us today, threatening Southern Maryland with rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and severe economic disruption. This summer, the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released a report showing new estimates for crossing the global warming level of 1.5° Celsius by 2030 and 2° Celsius by 2050. Unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach.
5. What is your position regarding a Green New Deal at the state level?

We must act immediately to implement bold policies that mobilize every aspect of society to transition to 100% clean and renewable energy, repair the generational harms to marginalized communities, and guarantee living-wage jobs to everyone in need of economic security.
6. In the previous legislative session, House Bill 33, known as the Climate Crisis and Education Act, was not passed. If this bill or a similar bill is introduced in the next legislative session, what is your position?

I would vote yes.

7. What is your position regarding the electrification of renovated buildings as well as newly constructed buildings in Maryland?

We should not be building new structures that use fossil fuels. All new construction should use renewable energy. Renovations and refurbishments should use renewable energy where possible.
8. How would you vote on the ClimateSolutions Act?

I would vote yes.
9. How would you vote on the Environment Human Rights Amendment?

I proudly support the Amendment.

### **Health Care**

10. What is your position regarding a single-payer system (such as Medicare for All) at the state level?
  - a. Having worked for Kaiser Permanente and Blue Shield, I believe that a single-payer system is best achieved at the Federal level due to the economies of scale and diversification of risk.
11. Would you vote for paid sick leave?
  - a. Yes, I would co-sponsor this legislation as well.

### **Police Reform**

12. Johns Hopkins University (JHU) is moving forward with establishing a private university-based police department. What is your position regarding the establishment of a private university-based police department at JHU?

In 15 minutes, I can walk from my house in Ednor Gardens to JHU's Homewood campus. I graduated from the JHU School of Education in 2013 with an MSED degree. My house has been broken into twice, in 2014 and 2015. This is a personal issue for me, not an academic exercise. I do not support the University police force as designed because it lacks good community governance, and scant details to date on its coordination with the Baltimore Police Department.

13. What proposed legislation or action will you take to address police reform on a state and local level?

The lack of centralized information on police misconduct and terminations, coupled with laws and police union contracts that often shield records from view, provide opportunities for officers disciplined or fired for misconduct to find work in other jurisdictions. The voluntary FBI Excessive Force database collects data from only ~40% of agencies nationally. We need to mandate that all Maryland police agencies participate in the FBI Excessive Force database. Beyond that, we need a state level registry to track bad officers. Anton's Law, while admirable, depends on information requests and on agencies answering those requests, which they've refused. We need a searchable database and dashboard-based registry that collates information from every police department in Maryland.

14. Would you vote to end debtor prisoners?

Of course. This practice has no place in the 21st century and is banned by the Maryland constitution.

### **Drug Policy Reform/Legalization of Marijuana**

15. What is your position regarding the decriminalization of marijuana possession and use in Maryland?
16. What is your position regarding the legalization of marijuana for recreational use in Maryland?

There should be no decriminalization without full expungement. My own father and relatives have been harmed by regressive drug laws. Marijuana should be legalized and taxed to generate revenue, with special attention paid to repay Black communities harmed by mass incarceration.

17. What is your position regarding the decriminalization of psilocybin and legalization for therapeutic use in Maryland?

Psilocybin should be made permissible for medical use by a prescribing provider.

### **Immigrant Rights**

18. In the previous legislative session, House Bill 0016, known as the Dignity Not Detention Act, was vetoed by Gov. Hogan. If this bill is reintroduced in the upcoming legislative session, what is your position?

The veto was overridden and I support the law.

19. According to the 2010 US Census, Asian-Americans make up 6.1% of Maryland's population. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in hate crimes nationwide and locally against Asian-Americans. What proposed legislation and action will you take to protect these individuals on a state and local level?

Elevate the "Working Group" formed by Governor Hogan to a state funded commission. Follow the recommendations issued by the commission. More must be done to repair and cultivate relationships between Black and Asian American communities. I would implore the commission to explore this in depth.

20. In recent months, Maryland has become a 'welcome state' in supporting the transition of refugees arriving from Afghanistan. What proposed legislation and action will you take in meeting the immediate needs of Afghan refugees on a state and local level?

First, federally, the status of Afghan refugees must be changed from "humanitarian parolees" to a longer-term status. I recommit to urging all members of the Maryland Congressional delegation to support this change. I believe Baltimore City can become a welcoming city, and would support grants encouraging housing and employment for all refugees.

### **Public Transit**

21. In 2018, Gov. Hogan canceled the Red Line. Being that Maryland will have a new governor in 2022, there may be an effort to revive legislation for the Red Line. What is your position regarding the Red Line as a viable transit project in Baltimore?

We must address institutional racism within our transit system by building a Red Line that links our communities through sustainable transportation & connects working class Baltimoreans to a broader range of jobs and opportunities.

22. In a 2021 study conducted by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Baltimore Transit Equity Coalition, it showed racial disparities in Baltimore's transit system. What proposed legislation and specific action will you take to address this issue?

Transit equity is not just about transit, but about economic mobility. In the Baltimore region, only 9% of jobs are currently accessible by public transit in an hour or less. Commuters need & deserve reliable & affordable transit options to travel to and from work, school and recreation. We can strengthen the city's reach to have more jobs accessible by public transit by building

light rail transit lines, and investing in a north-south transit corridor along York road in the 43rd district.

### **Housing**

23. In August 2021, Maryland's moratorium on residential eviction expired. What proposed legislation or action will you take to address the issues related to tenants who have fallen behind in paying rent?

We must establish rent control as rent prices continue to outpace influence. We must incentivize developers to build affordable housing and not just luxury apartments and condos.

### **Consumer Rights**

24. How would you vote on auto insurance prices not being tied to zip codes?

The discriminatory practice of linking auto-rates to zip codes must end as an unfair tax on Black and Brown communities.