

# Our Revolution Baltimore City/County

## Delegate and State Senate Endorsement Questionnaire

Name: Sheila Ruth

Desired political office: Delegate

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

After two years as a sitting delegate, I've learned a lot about how to work within the system to move progressive change. Before that I was engaged in legislative advocacy as an activist and organizer. That experience helped me to understand how the legislative process works, but also has given me insight into how to work both inside and outside to move legislation.

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

I am a state delegate because I can't tolerate injustice. I am outraged that children go to bed hungry, people die from lack of health care, and Black and brown people experience large disparities in health, standard of living, and life expectancy. I'm terrified by the climate crisis, which is already impacting our planet and will only get worse, potentially much worse if we don't act quickly. I can't sit by and do nothing, so I'm determined to act. The values that guide my service are fairness, justice, commitment, and hard work.

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

Yes, I am a progressive! I am committed to supporting working people, protecting the planet, and building a fair and just society. But what makes me progressive is that I believe in using the power of government to find solutions and help people. Free market solutions don't work, and only benefit the wealthy and large corporations. I believe that government must take direct action on economic inequality, systemic racism, the climate crisis, and universal healthcare.

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?

The latest IPCC report says that climate change is inevitable, unprecedented, and irreversible. It also says that immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are needed if we hope to limit the temperature rise and avoid calamity. This is a planet scale crisis and requires a planet scale response. Federal, state, and local government must all act and do everything we can to rapidly decarbonize our world.

5. What is your position regarding a Green New Deal at the state level?

Although there is not a specific package called the Green New Deal at the state level, the state should be an important player in implementing the principles of the Green New Deal: decarbonization, jobs, and justice. We must use every mechanism we can at the state level to rapidly decarbonize, including energy generation, buildings, and transportation. We must also build and retrofit infrastructure to be resilient to the impacts of the climate crisis that we are already seeing and which will continue to worsen.

These efforts will also create jobs, and we must ensure that the jobs created are family-sustaining, union jobs using mechanisms like project labor agreements. We also must provide for a just transition for workers displaced by decarbonization and to ensure that they can transition to good paying union jobs at least equivalent to the jobs lost.

We know that the climate crisis does not impact everyone equally, and that Black, brown, and lower-income communities are already seeing disproportionate impact of climate change as well as the highest levels of pollution. These environmental justice issues must be centered in any environmental changes.

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?

The Climate Crisis and Education Act would have charged a carbon fee on all fossil fuels imported into the state for combustion within the state, as well as other related provisions. The fees collected would have gone into three funds, to fund education, climate-resilient infrastructure, and protecting low and moderate income residents. I strongly supported this bill and voted for it in committee. ([In this vote list](#), I voted “Nay” on the “Unfavorable” motion.)

This session, [the bill will be reintroduced as the The Climate Crisis and Environmental Justice Act](#), with a focus on environmental justice instead of education, and I plan to again support it.

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

Buildings account for a significant amount of greenhouse gas emissions and electrification of buildings is an important step towards reducing greenhouse gases, as long as the electricity is generated from clean sources. New buildings should be required to use clean, electric energy, and a plan developed for a path to electrification of existing buildings. However, the energy source is only part of the carbon emissions from the building sector. Buildings also need to be designed using passive house techniques so that they are energy efficient carbon neutral.

8. How would you vote on the Client Solutions Act?

I assume this question means the Climate Solutions Now Act, which I supported and voted for in 2021. However, there were multiple versions in 2021, and it failed because of an inability to reconcile the Senate and House versions in time. I haven't yet seen the 2022 version or what provisions will be included, but I will support the strongest possible action on climate because of the existential and urgent threat of the climate crisis.

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

I strongly support and will vote for this.

#### Health Care

10. What is your position regarding a single-payer system (such as Medicare for All) at the state level?

Everyone should be able to get healthcare when and where they need it regardless of ability to pay. I think single payer is morally, logically, and economically the best way to achieve that. The insurance industry adds no value to healthcare; there's nothing that can be achieved through insurance that can't be achieved more simply and economically by a single-payer system. In fact, insurance actively harms people, because their business model and their profits depend on targeted denial of care.

Eliminating the insurance layer will achieve cost savings through eliminating the need for profit, simplifying billing and administration, and ability to negotiate. It will also achieve cost savings by encouraging people to seek treatment earlier before a health issue reaches the need for emergency care. The question is not "how can we pay for it," but "how can we afford to continue the status quo."

Achieving single-payer at the state level is more complicated than it would be as a federal program, but it can be done. Various sources outside of state control, such as Medicare, Medicaid, and federal employee insurance, must be accounted for in some fashion, through waivers or other ways of aligning them with the state plan. The ERISA law means that states cannot mandate that employers cease offering their own plans and participate in the state plan. However, much work has been done on overcoming these hurdles in other states, including Washington, New York, and Maine. By building on that work, Maryland can achieve a state-based single-payer healthcare system.

Last session I sponsored 2021 HB470, the Commission on Universal Health Care. This bill creates a commission that will develop a plan and recommended legislation to create a state-based universal healthcare system. I will be again sponsoring this bill in 2022.

11. Would you vote for paid sick leave?

In 2017, the Maryland General Assembly passed the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act, which was subsequently vetoed by Governor Hogan. In January, 2018, the MGA overrode the governor's veto. The act requires employers with 15 or more employees to provide up to 40 hours of paid sick leave annually, and employers with 14 or fewer employees to provide up to 40 hours of unpaid sick leave. I would certainly be open to, and would likely support, changes to strengthen this law and expand eligibility. I also support the Time to Care Act to provide paid family and medical leave.

### 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?

I've always opposed the JHU private police force.

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

During the 2021 session, I supported the strong package of police reform bills we passed, including repealing the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights, mandating body cameras statewide, providing greater transparency of police disciplinary records, and banning most no-knock warrants. One area that still needs significant work is to stop the school-to-prison pipeline and the criminalization of Black and brown youth. Police don't belong in schools, and instead we need to properly fund mental health services, wraparound services, and trauma-informed care.

One related bill that I introduced during the 2021 session would protect students from being charged with a misdemeanor for disrupting school activities. The disruption of school activities law criminalizes typical adolescent behavior that should be handled with internal school processes, and is disproportionately used against Black and Brown students. This bill passed the House but didn't get a committee vote in the Senate. I will be reintroducing this bill in 2022.

14. Would you vote to end debtor prisoners?

The Maryland Constitution says that "No person shall be imprisoned for debt." Yet today people can be incarcerated under a "body attachment" for failure to appear for a debt

hearing. I voted for HB848 in the 2021 session to prohibit incarceration for failing to appear for a debt collection hearing. HB848 passed the House, but didn't get a vote in the Senate. If the bill is introduced in 2022 I'll support it again.

### 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?

Answering questions 15 and 16 together, since they are related. Maryland has already decriminalized possession of less than 10g of marijuana. I support full legalization and think it's well past time. However, legalization needs to include justice for anyone still incarcerated for marijuana possession, automatic expungement, and reparations for communities harmed by mass incarceration.

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

This is an area I don't know much about, but I'm open to learning more. In particular I'd want to know that there is sufficient peer-reviewed scientific research in double blind studies to show that there is therapeutic value that outweighs any possible negative consequences. In general, I don't believe that possession and use of drugs, natural or man-made, should be a crime. Those that are harmful, like opioids, should be treated as a public health issue.

### 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?

I voted to support the veto override on this bill during the special session in December and Dignity not Detention is now 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?

Hate crimes and hate speech are never acceptable, whether against Asian-Americans, African-Americans, Latinos, LGBTQ people, Muslims, Jewish people, or anyone else.

One of the most important things we can do as public officials is to use our platform to speak out against hate and to avoid normalizing a culture that allows hate to fester.

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?

Watching the many people scramble to escape Afghanistan as the Taliban took over was horrifying and heartbreaking. I'm glad that Maryland is playing a part in helping to resettle the Afghan refugees in a new home. I'm not aware of any legislation that would support them, but I would be open to it. In my role as Our Revolution Baltimore City/County Co-Chair I organized a meeting about the Afghan refugee resettlement to encourage members to support the organizations helping them.

#### 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?

On June 25, 2015, Gov. Larry Hogan did irreparable harm to Baltimore when he canceled the Red Line, Baltimore's planned east-west rail line. Not only would the Red Line have brought hope to communities in the Black Butterfly by making more jobs accessible within a reasonable commute, but the transit-oriented development it would have attracted would have been an economic engine beneficial to the entire city and state. Over 10 years of planning went into the Red Line. By canceling it, Gov. Hogan threw away \$900 million in federal funding and shifted \$736 million in state funding to road projects in predominantly white neighborhoods.

I actively support the Baltimore Transit Equity Coalition in their work to restart the Red Line project, and to create a Baltimore Regional Transit Authority so that transit decisions will be controlled by the region.

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?

In 2021, I introduced HB1204, the Transportation Equity Analyses and Assurances Act, which garnered wide support. There was no opposition, but the bill was hit with an outrageous fiscal note, and ultimately didn't get a vote. This session I will again be introducing the Transportation Equity Act, this time with Senator Jill Carter as Senate sponsor. The bills have been pre-filed as HB141/SB23. Due to extensive work with MDOT, we anticipate a much lower fiscal note, and early indications are that support will

be even greater than last session. The Transportation Equity Act centers equity throughout the transportation planning process and across all modes of transportation statewide. It adds equity as a goal in the Maryland Transportation Plan, requires the annual Attainment report to include data on racial disparities and impact on people with disabilities. It creates a Commission on Transportation Equity, and it requires transit equity analysis, cost benefit analysis, and community outreach prior to any major change. For the 2022 version, I added a requirement that the Commission on Transportation Equity look at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg study and consider how to use it as an instrument to improve transit equity.

### 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?

Eviction is violence, and throughout the pandemic I have taken action to try to prevent evictions, including attending rallies, signing on to letters, voting for housing legislation, working with the Baltimore County housing department to try to help constituents, and accompanying a constituent to court. One important thing that will help is to provide tenants with a right to counsel in eviction proceedings. 96% of landlords are represented by a lawyer in eviction court, but 99% of tenants do not have a lawyer. I voted for the right to counsel bill that passed in the 2021 session, but unfortunately, the companion bill, which would have raised eviction filing fees both to deter spurious evictions and fund counsel for tenants did not pass. This session it's imperative that we allocate funds to provide counsel to tenants in eviction proceedings, and I will vote to support this, as well as other housing and tenant rights bills I expect will be introduced.

### Consumer Rights

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

Insurance companies are not allowed to discriminate based on race or income, but they can set different rates by zip code, which creates a form of redlining. Research from the Consumer Federation of America found that many Black people pay significantly higher premiums for auto insurance than white people. I will support and vote for legislation to correct this.