

# 2022 MGA candidate questionnaire

Our Revolution Howard County - state delegate & senate endorsement requests

Name \*

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Why are you running for state legislature? What have you done in recent years to benefit your district (e.g. civic engagement, testimony, activism, etc.)?

I've devoted my life and career to public service. Both through my work as an immigration attorney and on the boards I've served on (including the Howard County branch of the NAACP, my local HOA of Emerson, HoCo Pride, and others), I've always sought to advance the rights of those whose voices may not otherwise be heard. Even though lawmakers may have good intentions, often times, the laws enacted do not accomplish the intended goals. Many times, it is my clients that suffer as they are generally low income minorities. Although I have shepherded and supported many bills through the MD legislature (including a bill to require human trafficking awareness training in CDL schools and currently a bill to remove a provision creating immigration consequences in criminal pleas of probation before judgment), the level of influence and control over wording of bill stop at the hearing room door. I'm running to bring a voice to trauma survivors, to make laws work for everyone, and to make sure that our elected officials move the needle forward to assist all the residents of our state.

In addition to the engagement mentioned above, I have also handled numerous pro bono matters in the immigration context as well as for survivors of relationship/domestic violence in the courts. I served on the HCPSS Committee regarding Policy 1070 to make our schools more welcoming to immigrant students and their families. I also co-chaired Together We Will which provided voter and political information to people newly energized by the 2016 elections through the 2018 elections. During the 2018 elections, I worked with a number of different local campaigns to make sure that Democrats won key positions in the County.

What actions would your office take on any of OR's 6 platform issues? <https://ourrev.us/Platform2022>

The OR platform issues align with my personal priorities. I've worked with Get Money Out MD for years to make sure that corporate interests are not driving decisions made by elected officials. We can see how money in politics have corrupted officials at all levels of government - if we are truly a government for and by the people, it must be the people who have the greatest voice.

Health care, specifically mental health care, is a core part of the reason I am running. I lost a friend to suicide just over a decade ago. Seeing the current trauma we have all endured through Covid, the time is ripe to truly put protections for health care of all kinds to make sure that no one has to make a decision about spending scarce resources on life saving treatment or medication as opposed to rent or food for their family. Health care is a fundamental human right.

I grew up as an environmentalist and continue to make sure that my life is as green as possible today by driving a hybrid vehicle, composting food scraps, not using paper goods like napkins and paper towels in my house, etc. but each individual alone cannot reverse the problems we see with our planet, we have to get away from our dependence on fossil fuels and put strict controls on industry and corporations to make sure that we move as a society towards a sustainable way of living.

\$15/hour is not enough, that number has not kept up with the rate of inflation. We need to restore the dignity of workers by paying a living wage (which I believe in MD is now \$23/hr). As a union member during my time as a federal employee, I have witnessed firsthand how important labor is and actively continue to support union work including going to rallies and otherwise supporting the workers displaced from the Lakefront Hotel in Columbia.

Lastly, as a former NARAL Pro-Choice MD board member, we need to codify and strengthen all autonomy of people to make the choices best for their families and bodies without government interference. We are fortunate in MD to have this general protection but need to continue to make sure that women have these rights including by going after "crisis pregnancy centers" which abound throughout the state.

Do you support a bill for public campaign financing? If not, why not? Are you accepting campaign contributions from corporate interests, such as property developers or their associates?

Yes, as stated above, we need to remove corporate meddling in elections. As far as I know, I have not received any corporate interest donations. Any contributions received from anyone employed in such a role have been made personally through relationships developed with those individuals. I sincerely doubt that any developers would be interested in supporting my campaign as I have fought against them a number of times in the southern part of the County including the development at the corner of Leishear and Gorman Roads on the land previously owned by the Milk Plant co-op.

Please identify a few serious challenges facing Maryland that your office would address over the next two years. What steps would you take, what obstacles do you anticipate, and how can we overcome them?

First, availability of mental health care including the coverage of insurance companies and attracting a more diverse workforce. Many providers have stopped taking insurance because the insurance companies have created so many hurdles and paperwork that it stopped being profitable for the providers which has made mental health care generally only available for those who are economically better off. In addition, we need to attract a more diverse set of providers so that anyone needing mental health care can find someone who can connect to their background and/or speak their native language. The major challenge for such a program has to do with the state only being able to do so much for the insurance companies ("we don't fail to provide coverage, it's right here in our terms! We can't control what the providers do!"). The state can, however, use its contracts with insurance companies that cover state employees and medicare/medicaid recipients to pressure the insurance companies to reduce the red tape.

Second, climate change and more extreme weather affect all of us, in Maryland and without. We have to focus on moving the state as a whole to renewable energy starting with government buildings including schools. Such an endeavor would surely be costly, but an upfront investment saves us on everything from fuel costs to health care costs as we keep the climate from continuing to change, reducing the impact on all of us.

What changes would you make to state taxes and/or constitutional limits for county taxes?

The biggest problem with our tax laws are their regressive nature - we need to make sure that people are paying in proportion to their income so buying necessary supplies like food, menstrual supplies, and hygiene products should be exempt from taxes. Conversely, luxury goods and excess income should be looked to balance any additional fiscal needs that the state has from tax revenue.

What would you do to make housing more affordable for low-income residents?

Housing prices are driven by the same market factors of other commodities - supply and demand. As demand is high and supply is low, the prices continue to go up. With the issue we have with development and improper infrastructure to support new development, we cannot reasonably expect that we increase the supply. We can subsidize rents and mortgages for those would be residents who have a link to the county - they either are being displaced due to an increase in living expenses or have a job or family within the County. In implementing any program, we should also be looking at the historical impact of housing discrimination and use these programs to mitigate the lack of inter-generational wealth and historic depression of wages among minority communities.

How would you improve transportation and reduce traffic congestion in an equitable and sustainable manner? What are your views on public-private partnerships in transportation, such as variably-priced toll lanes?

We need to focus on non car based transportation which will naturally reduce traffic congestion. By making rail and metro more accessible including by increasing the frequency of trains, providing a greater customer experience, and doing required maintenance in a timely manner as well as providing fiscal incentives for not commuting, we can increase the number of people using public transportation. (for example, I took MARC for years from Laurel to DC, the train routinely got delayed because a freight train used the same rail lines. If the train stopped running, MARC provided no alternate way of returning to a home station). Unfortunately, I have no way of avoiding a car based commute to my current office near Broadway Market from outside of the City like I did south into DC. We also need to promote non fuel based transportation such as biking to work by providing incentives to those who can demonstrate their use of such systems.

I specifically oppose the public-private transportation partnerships as a) roads are a public good so should be commonly owned through the government, b) a private company may not keep up the road to the community's standards or not put the fees back into the community specifically to improve roadways, and c) in other areas of the country, these partnerships have yielded more paved spaces detracting from the natural environment and not serving the needs of the community as most drivers will elect to stay in the non paid lanes.

How would you increase police accountability, decrease racial disparities in policing, and maintain public safety? Do you support full LEOBR repeal?

I have many friends in law enforcement, they all agree that transparency and accountability are essential to good policing and establishing trust within the communities they serve. Every profession has bad apples and any good apple within the profession will want to see those bad apples rooted out. We need body worn cameras with provisions and policies established against independently turning them off during encounters with the community. We also need to prosecute those LE who do not fulfill their oath to protect the community and instead act in ultra legal ways such as by using excessive force or profiling those they stop. Public safety is most provided for when the community has trust within its LE. We need to attract a more diverse candidate pool and work to retain that diversity - for example, the HoCo police department will not hire someone with child support in arrears even if the parent has not paid child support because of unemployment or other unintentional situation. Similarly, certain previous LE interactions can disqualify an applicant; these applicants may be especially strong officers as they have directly experienced the system from the other side and may disproportionately be POC due to the disparities in the justice system. Interactions with LE in a positive manner such as the chess event HCPD holds can help build trust in the community as does the "beat cop" who interacts with the neighborhood as well as incentivizing residence within their assigned neighborhood, forging relationships with residents instead of only showing up when someone reports trouble.

How would you engage racially and economically marginalized communities to address inequity in our society? How would you ensure more impacted communities have a voice in state government?

Marginalized communities rarely come to elected officials on their own accord either because they cannot afford to (either literally cannot access an Annapolis office because of distance or because they cannot take time from work during the day as an hourly employee) or because they lack trust in the officials. Elected officials need to be known and have a presence in their communities; it is not enough for them to sit on a board or work in a particular location, they need to be at community events as mundane as a school drama performance or a roadside cleanup event. Being there to do the work speaks volume as relationships are forged and community members build trust with their elected officials. Instead of waiting for people to come to me, I would meet them where they are. A cornerstone of my campaign has been visiting voters at the door. When I knock, I have a conversation with people - I ask them what is most important to them, I do not launch into a spiel about myself. Even if they choose not to vote for me, that conversation gives me vital information about what people really care about and where my efforts are best placed. If elected, I will continue to go to the places where communities live instead of expecting them to come to me as I have done for close to a decade - I was asked to join the NAACP board because I kept showing up to help and to listen to the branch and its members, not because I asked or because they needed someone to fill a chair (same for Pride). I am very proud of my reputation in the community as someone who will roll up their sleeves and get a job done.

What should state government do to promote sustainable and equitable economic growth and job opportunities?

Many economic opportunities require an outlay of capital or the ability to borrow capital. Unfortunately, many financial institutions continue to discriminate in their lending practices. The State can assist by providing either subsidies for economic investment to minorities or by backing their loans from traditional financial institutions. In addition, we need to provide adequate financial education in the schools as well as provide help to fledgling small business owners in the form not only of start-up capital but also education and professional services that a new business needs to get started. In addition, we need to actually preference minority owned companies in public contracts instead of paying lip service to the idea and practice.

What should Maryland do to improve healthcare beyond what the federal government does, in the short-run and long-run?

The state has the opportunity and ability to influence insurance company coverage and payment amounts through the state employee contract, retirement coverage, etc. We need to leverage that influence to make sure that our residents receive the greatest coverage possible. For example, I have made mental health a main focus of mine for the past decade after losing a friend to suicide a decade ago. We need to make sure that Maryland has coverage available both to students in school and to adults. Currently, although health insurance companies offer mental health coverage, mental health providers have found the insurance system so onerous that they have stopped taking insurance which results in mental health coverage being out of reach for lower income people. We need to make sure that we are attracting new practitioners and make sure that practitioners get fairly paid without having to jump through hoops to accept insurance, broadening services to more people. Mental health coverage is but one example of the way the state can leverage its resources and influence to make sure that more people are covered.

In addition, we should provide health insurance options for those who currently do not qualify under federal law including our undocumented community members. We expanded coverage of state services in a bill this year for pregnant women including post partum. We can and should continue to offer coverage and subsidize clinics that serve this population. In short, we need to keep narrowing the window of the people who do not have health care coverage since health care is a basic human right.

Do you support changes to state voting methods, such as ranked choice, approval voting, or proportional representation?

I would support ranked choice and approval voting systems; proportional representation worries me due to the undue effect the party system would have on choosing who would represent the party instead of the voters choosing. For example, person A may identify as a Green Party candidate but the Green Party decides to place persons B & C on the ballot instead, thus not giving the public a chance to vote for person A. Ultimately, the best system is the one in which the most peoples' voices are represented and heard and we need to eliminate gerrymandering and put public financing and other support systems in place to attract a diverse candidate pool.

What are your top priorities to address environmental justice, sustainability, and nature conservation?

Divest the state's usage of fossil fuels, increase the availability and accessibility of public transportation, and provide incentives and subsidies to private homes and businesses depending on demonstrated need to move to sustainable energy sources. Our minority communities are both particularly vulnerable to climate change and adverse environmental measures and in less of a financial position to be able to act upon any new initiatives. We need to make sure that we are involving community members in any area in which we seek to make changes, but need to continue safeguarding and protecting both their autonomy and advancement to greener ways of living.

What changes would you make to state minimum wage law, including tipped and agricultural workers?

The minimum wage needs to be raised and then pegged to inflation/cost of living to insure that it does not fall behind again. Tipped workers should be guaranteed the minimum wage through a system that allows them to report their tips with the employer picking up the difference if it exists (i.e. a waitress is guaranteed minimum wage so if she only earns the equivalent of \$5/hr during a particular shift either because too many people are scheduled or the day is slow, the restaurant should make up the difference instead of paying a reduced hourly wage; if the waitress makes the equivalent of \$50/hr then the restaurant would pay the regular wage). Agricultural workers should also be guaranteed at least the minimum wage and potentially hazard pay as well depending on conditions of their particular location and crop.

Would you support legislation to enable public workers to have the right to form a union and bargain collectively for contracts statewide?

Yes, as stated above, unions should always be the choice of the employees and should be available in any and all industries as a possibility for the workers therein.

How would you change cannabis policy, including retail sales, distribution, and past criminal convictions?

We need to regulate but legalize just like we did with alcohol. To combat the past system that unfairly targeted people of color, licenses should be weighted towards minorities wishing to engage in the industry. Any past criminal conviction for possession and simple distribution should be vacated in their entirety.

Do you support legislation to require special elections instead of appointments for vacancies in elective offices?

Yes, the public should always be able to decide on their representatives instead of relying on an inner circle of political cadres to do so. Appointments generally lead to permanent positions because of the incumbency bump. As a result, they unfairly weight the system towards a particular person without that person being vetted for the job by those they seek to represent.

What should the state do regarding insurrectionists and conspirators against our democracy?

Prosecute them to the full extent of the law for treason. (And if they are in elected office, impeach them.)

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