

# 2022 HoCo candidate questionnaire

Our Revolution Howard County - county council & executive endorsement requests

Name \*

Christiana Rigby

Campaign Website

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Why are you running for county office? What have you done in recent years to benefit Howard County (e.g. civic engagement, testimony, activism, etc.)?

I am running for re-election to the Howard County Council because I love our community, and I want to continue to make progress and improve the lives of Howard County residents. Howard County is one of the wealthiest counties in the nation, yet too many families in our neighborhoods struggle to pay for housing, put food on the table, and make ends meet. Our County Government has a responsibility to create systems where all of our neighbors and families can succeed. That has been my focus over the last 4 years, and it will continue to be my focus going forward. Over the last four years in elected office, I have worked to advance important issues in our community, including raising the local minimum wage in Howard County to \$16 over the next several years and tying future increases to inflation. In 2019, I led the Council in increasing school surcharges on new development, which pays for school construction in Howard County to help alleviate over-capacity schools. I have also championed the development of important affordable housing projects in our community, including Roslyn Rise, Robinson Overlook, and the recently-approved Patuxent Commons.

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

I wholeheartedly agree with each of Our Revolution's 6 platform issues.

(1) Defend Democracy: Protect Voting Rights & Get Money Out of Politics – I am a strong supporter of the Citizens' Election Fund program in Howard County and am currently participating as a candidate. I support extending this program to more types of elected office and making it an attractive campaign finance option for candidates to participate in. While we do not have much control over voting rights at the local level, I am a strong supporter of our Board of Elections and believe that our BoE should be funded at the appropriate level to ensure that our elections are carried out smoothly and accessibly for all residents.

(2) Medicare for All – I am a strong supporter of Medicare for All. Last year, I wrote a letter to our Congressional Delegation expressing my support for Medicare for All. All four Democratic members of the County Council signed on to our letter, and I believe that we should continue to work with state and federal officials to achieve this policy goal. At the local level, I am currently advocating for investments in healthcare access for county residents through the creation of a local Maternal Health Clinic. The purpose of this clinic would be to provide pre-natal and reproductive health care to expecting parents in our community who are either uninsured or underinsured. Local organizations like Horizon Foundation and CASA are leading the way on this effort, and I am fully supportive of their efforts.

(3) Climate Action: Keep Fossil Fuels in the Ground – Climate change is the pressing issue of our time. As a parent of two young children, I firmly believe that we need to take bold and immediate action to ensure that our children have a healthy planet and a sustainable future. I strongly support Howard County's recent actions to approve solar power PILOTs to bring solar energy generation to Howard County. I have also supported the development of an updated Climate Action Plan for Howard County, which was funded in FY22 and is currently under development. In the next term on the County Council, I am interested in working on a legislative package that makes Howard County a leader in shifting to renewable energy, expanding our green infrastructure, and achieving net-zero emissions on a rapid timeline.

(4) Fight for \$15 and a Union – I strongly support a living wage and workers' right to join a union. In 2021, I introduced legislation with Councilman Jones to establish a \$16 minimum wage in Howard County that is tied to inflation. The truth is that \$15 is not enough for families to live on, especially in Howard County where our cost of living is very high. Howard County's minimum wage law is one of the most progressive laws on the East Coast, and I am optimistic that it will encourage our State and other jurisdictions to take stronger action on raising wages. Regarding labor unions, I strongly support the rights of workers to join a union and collectively bargain for higher wages and better benefits. I voted in favor of CB10-2022, which would have required a right-to-return for hospitality workers who were laid off during the pandemic. I am committed to empowering working people and raising wages for families in our community.

(5) Criminal Justice Reform – I support criminal justice reform and am opposed to continuing our current system of mass incarceration. While many criminal justice laws are controlled at the State level, there are still impacts that we can make at the local level, including eliminating instances of incarceration and criminal penalties in our County Code. I also support the ballot measure to legalize recreational cannabis during the 2022 General Election.

(6) Reproductive Rights – I am a strong supporter of reproductive rights, and I am wholly opposed to efforts that seek to limit and take away these rights in Maryland and across the country. At the local level, I support investing resources in maternal healthcare and public health education so that residents are informed and aware

of their rights and the healthcare options that are available to them.

Are you using the Citizen's Election Fund (CEF) for financing? If not, why not? Are you accepting campaign contributions from corporate interests, such as property developers or their associates?

Yes, I have opted to use the Citizens' Election Fund (CEF) for my campaign financing in the 2022 election. My campaign is being funded solely by contributions from individual people under \$250. Most contributions to my campaign are around \$25, and I am very proud that over 150 Howard County residents have invested in my campaign.

Please identify a few serious challenges facing Howard County 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?

My top priorities in the second term are school funding, climate action, affordable housing, economic justice, and equitable transportation. On school funding, Howard County is currently beginning its journey to implement the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, a comprehensive overhaul of how we fund our public school system for decades to come. To meet the needs of this law, we are going to need to invest significantly more in our educators and public school system. Raising and directing this revenue will be difficult, but I believe it is of critical importance.

Likewise, I believe that we need to make significant progress on climate action and reaching net-zero carbon emissions as soon as possible. This will require budget investments, legislation to disincentivize fossil fuels, and shifting to land-use patterns which reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. These measures will likely generate significant opposition from fossil fuel companies and other entities that rely on fossil fuels. Part of our work on climate change also requires a monumental shift in our transportation systems. I support investing in our public transit system, as well as investing in pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure across Howard County.

We need to build more affordable housing (both rental and ownership units) in more areas of our community. Affordable housing construction sometimes generates resident opposition due to the false narratives around affordable housing – we can address this opposition by working with and empowering communities through education and strong coalitions.

What changes would you make to Howard County taxes?

I support progressively restructuring our tax codes in Howard County. In 2020, I proposed a progressive recordation tax, which would have increased real estate transaction taxes on purchases of property worth over \$1 million and decreases taxes on properties worth less than \$300k. Updated estimates indicate that this revenue source would have generated roughly \$30-\$40 million in new revenue for Howard County, which goes into the General Fund and can be used for school funding and other community priorities. While this measure unfortunately failed, I am interested in pursuing this type of legislation to provide tax relief to lower and moderate-income families while asking million-dollar plus property sales to pay a little more.

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

Most new homes in Howard County sell for well-over half a million dollars, which is completely unaffordable and unattainable to low- and moderate-income families who either currently live in Howard County or who work here and want to move here. Unfortunately, our zoning code incentivizes these expensive homes by only allowing large, single-family detached homes throughout most of the county. In order to begin tackling our affordable housing crisis, we first need to allow affordable housing types to be built in more areas of the county.

There are a few ways that affordable housing is created. One option is inclusionary zoning, which is currently lacking in some of our largest zoning districts, like New Town (Columbia). Inclusionary zoning is an imperfect tool because it often results in higher priced market rate units to accommodate the cost of building moderate-income housing units. However, one of the primary purposes of inclusionary zoning is integration of new neighborhoods. Another option to encourage affordable housing is through vouchers or affordable housing subsidies given to individuals with lower incomes. These are administered by the federal government, and there is a ten-year waitlist to receive a housing choice voucher currently due to limited federal funding. Having a limited supply of units also drives the market-price of rents higher. A third option to produce affordable housing is through government-subsidy to the units themselves, which is often done through PILOT agreements, gap financing, or other agreements through our local Department of Housing or through Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) granted by the State. We should be pursuing all three of these strategies to improve affordable housing accessibility in Howard County.

Over the last several years, Howard County has entered into PILOT agreements with affordable housing developers to help incentivize the construction and redevelopment of affordable housing. I support these efforts and initiatives, and I am interested in identifying other avenues to incentivize affordable and mixed-income communities over purely market-rate housing. In addition to expanding affordable rental housing, I also believe that we can improve affordable homeownership by allowing smaller and more sustainable homes to be built, such as duplexes, quads, cottage communities, and other types of missing middle homes. As part of this effort, I support improving and strengthening our Moderate Income Housing Unit (MIHU) program, which requires that when new housing is built, a certain percentage are set aside for families that fall into the moderate-income threshold.

How would you improve transportation and reduce traffic congestion in the county in an equitable and sustainable manner? Please identify priorities and funding mechanisms.

Howard County is very geographically small, which means that we have an excellent opportunity to improve our public transit system and encourage more people to ride transit. In order to do that, we need significant investments in RTA to reduce headways (increase route frequency), expand the number of bus routes, improve service with RTA, and educate residents.

In 2019, I worked with County Executive Ball, the Office of Transportation, and the school system to launch a pilot program that offered free RTA bus passes to summer school students. I am very pleased that the program has now been expanded to provide all high school students in HCPSS with free RTA bus passes.

Improving RTA requires more funding for public transit infrastructure in Howard County. I support imposing a small rideshare fee (a one-time fee charged on Uber/Lyft rides) and directing that money toward a dedicated transportation fund that invests in RTA. Other jurisdictions in Maryland have already adopted this measure to improve transit funding, and I am working on legislation that would take similar steps for Howard County.

How would you increase police accountability, decrease racial disparities in policing, and maintain public safety? Do you support a reallocation of resources to medical or social services as front-line responders?

The Howard County Council recently approved legislation creating a Police Accountability Board for our Police Department in alignment with the Maryland State Police Accountability Act. Similar to other jurisdictions, Howard County residents. I believe that we can decrease racial disparities in policing by recruiting a diverse police force, investing in appropriate training, encouraging adequate staffing and mental health supports to ensure that first responders are supported, promoting transparency and accountability, and reducing unnecessary community interactions with police officers.

I also support allocating resources to medical and social services so that public and behavioral health professionals can respond to mental health crises and other issues where a police presence is not necessary. Howard County is participating in the GBRICS partnership, which invests in mobile crisis teams to reduce interactions with police officers. We have also continued investments in our Mobile Crisis Unit, which responds to emergency calls with mental health professionals. I strongly support investing in and expanding these efforts, which result in better outcomes for community members and first responders.

How would you engage racially and economically marginalized communities to address equitable community policies? How would you ensure more impacted communities have a voice in county commissions?

In 2020, I introduced legislation to create a Racial Equity Task Force for Howard County, which made recommendations on how the County Council could improve racial equity across a number of different policy areas, including public safety. The Task Force was community-led and engaged a diverse group of stakeholders to identify policy recommendations. I am committed to continuing to work with diverse and marginalized communities to improve our public policy in Howard County.

One of the recommendations of the Task Force was to reform the current county process of appointments to boards and commissions. While most appointments are made by the County Executive, I support efforts to diversify our boards and commissions, and our County Executive has been very intentional about including diverse voices and perspectives on our County Boards over the last four years. The recently approved Police Accountability Board requires that membership reflect the racial, cultural, gender identify or expression, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic diversity of Howard County. I believe that all of our County Boards and Commissions should be following this standard of inclusivity when appointments are made.

We can also do a much better job of promoting language access on county websites, including the County Council website. One in five county residents were born outside of the United States, and many households are multi-lingual in Howard County. Our government and legislative information should be accessible to all residents in Howard County.

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

Howard County currently has a strong job market and a dearth of affordable housing. Recent economic data indicates that 75% of Howard County's workforce does not live in Howard County and instead commutes to Howard County from neighboring jurisdictions and states. These commuting patterns contribute heavily to greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles, vehicle traffic, and the transportation sector, which is the largest contributor of greenhouse gases in the State of Maryland. In order to create sustainable jobs, I believe that we need to invest in affordable housing and workforce housing that enables residents to live near where they work.

Regarding promoting equitable economic growth opportunities, I believe that we need to promote apprenticeship programs and workforce training programs that expand opportunities for Howard County students and residents to gain training and earn better wages. I support economic protections and standards, including comprehensive minimum wage laws and other workplace protections.

Additionally, I strongly support investing in childcare access. So many working parents have not been able to return to the workforce because they either cannot afford the cost of childcare, or they cannot find a childcare spot for their children. This has disproportionately impacted women who want to return to the workforce but are currently unable to do so because they must stay home to take care of a child. For single-parent households, it is nearly impossible to balance these challenges. To promote and encourage equitable economic growth, I strongly believe we need to invest in childcare access as a county, both by providing childcare scholarships to low- and moderate-income families and by investing in childcare infrastructure to grow the number of available seats. Importantly, any childcare jobs that are created should pay a fair, competitive, and living wage.

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

In the short-term, I support investing in healthcare access through the creation of new programs and facilities that address healthcare needs. One topic that I mentioned earlier is in the area of maternal healthcare. Currently, underinsured or uninsured parents do not have access to safe maternal healthcare in Howard County. This disproportionately impacts undocumented immigrants who are often unable to secure health insurance. I support our County Government working to address this need through creation of a Maternal Health Clinic. I also support increased investments in mental health, which is not an area that any level of government currently does well in addressing. These supports include more counselors and mental health professionals in our public school system. I am also interested in pursuing investments in mental healthcare for the broader population of Howard County residents.

I also strongly support investments in active transportation, such as pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure. Public health organizations like the CDC and the Horizon Foundation strongly support these measures to promote health and well-being in our communities.

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

I am interested in learning more about ranked choice, approval, and proportional representation and how those systems might be implemented at the local level. I believe that exploring alternative voting systems might better promote civic engagement, voter turnout, and responsiveness of elected officials to the communities who elect them. Our current electoral system often results in low-turnout elections that depresses robust participation.

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

As we work to combat climate change and improve sustainability in our community, environmental justice must be at the forefront of the conversation. Marginalized communities are often left out of conversations about environmental policy, and our environmental efforts must create space, amplify voices, and prioritize their perspectives.

I currently serve on the Complete Streets Implementation Team for Howard County, which is tasked with developing an updated Design Manual that prioritizes pedestrian, bicyclist, and transit access in our community. During this process, I strongly encouraged that the County include an equity analysis for the consideration of Complete Streets funding and projects in our community. As a result of our work, Howard County has established Equity Emphasis Areas (EEAs) to ensure that transportation projects are built in diverse neighborhoods that have not always seen past investment from county government. Access to Complete Streets and alternative modes of transportation (bike lanes, sidewalks, crosswalks, bus stops, etc.) is an major environmental justice issue that I will continue to work on.

Regarding sustainability and nature conservation, there is more that our county can do to improve the vast network of parks and open space that we currently enjoy and love. As Howard County continues to grow, I support maintaining and expanding our parks and natural areas. I strongly support the County Executive's ongoing efforts to purchase the Camp Ilchester property to maintain as parkland for our community, and I was a strong supporter of the County's successful efforts to purchase the 5-acre Savage Remainder property to maintain as parkland and expand the boundary of Savage Park. Both these efforts display our county's commitment to growing and maintaining open space, and I will continue to support efforts like these that identify and prioritize green space for residents.

Echoing my earlier comments on climate action, I strongly support our county taking comprehensive actions to reduce emissions and green our grid in our effort to address climate change. I support additional solar power PILOT agreements to bring solar energy generation to Howard County, and I strongly believe that we need an updated Climate Action Plan that sets rapid targets to expand our green infrastructure and reach net-zero emissions.

Do you support eliminating natural gas in new household construction?

Earlier this year, I submitted testimony before the Maryland General Assembly in support of state legislation to ban the use of natural gas in new residential construction in Maryland. While I hoped that this issue would be better and more comprehensively addressed at the state level this past Session, I support moving in this direction at the county level. In addition to eliminating natural gas in new household construction, I also strongly support greening our electric grid through expansions of green and renewable energies and community choice energy programs that make a larger impact on our climate targets.

How would you address electric car recharging stations in the county?

In 2019, I passed legislation to strengthen requirements for electric vehicle charging stations for construction of new homes in Howard County. This legislation built on the work in 2018 of then-Councilmember Jen Terrasa, who passed legislation requiring EV infrastructure or charging stations for new home construction. While we have made some important progress on EV charging stations, there is still more work to do. For example, Howard County does not have any requirements for EV chargers on new commercial developments or redevelopments. I am currently researching this issue and working on legislation that would address this area and improve access to EV chargers on commercial sites in our community. Additionally, The Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill that recently passed through Congress includes significant funding to State and Local governments to build out our EV infrastructure. I am committed to working with our Office of Community Sustainability and Office of Transportation to pursue and support these grant funding opportunities in our budget.

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