

2022 MGA candidate questionnaire

Our Revolution Howard County - state delegate & senate endorsement requests

Name *

Steven Bolen

Campaign Website

<https://bolenformd.com>

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'm running for office because I want to make a difference in the lives of others and ensure that our communities thrive. As an active member of my community, I am committed to making changes for those who need it most. If I am elected, my mission will center on advocating for people with mental health, cognitive, and developmental disabilities; ensuring our children get the world-class education they need to compete in today's global workforce; growing our communities in smart, fiscally, and environmentally sustainable ways; ensuring the viability of our small businesses and agricultural and food-related industries; keeping the Chesapeake Bay clean; and building a renewable, clean energy economy.
- I am a member of the Board of Directors for the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Howard County, and their Public Policy and Community Outreach Committees. In addition, I am an advocate and member of the Howard County Autism Society's Advocacy and Resources Committee. I serve on the Executive Boards for the Howard County Police Department's Citizens' Advisory Council and the Ellicott City & Western Howard Democratic Club. I continue to serve our country as the Vice Flotilla Commander for my U.S. Coast Guard unit and I serve on the Howard County Commission on Veterans and Military Families. I am a member of the NAACP, Howard County Chapter. I have volunteered as a judge for the Howard County Public School System's 5th Grade Simulated Congressional Hearings, Unheard Perspectives, and National History Day. Finally, I have advocated for a cleaner environment and worked with Less Plastic Please to reduce the use of plastics in our everyday lives.

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

1) Defend Democracy: Protect Voting Rights & Get Money Out of Politics

- First, I have taken the “No Developer; No Dark Money Pledge 2022” that Our Revolution Howard County has co-sponsored with other groups in Howard County. And I take this pledge seriously. For me, it’s more than not accepting contributions from developers; it’s about transparency, honesty, and integrity. If elected, I expect to make decisions on policy matters to help improve the lives of my constituents and ensure that our communities thrive. By not taking funding from developers, I tell my constituents that they can be sure I will be working for them, not for this special interest group.
- Second, one of the most important things we can do to defend democracy is to ensure everyone has broad access to voting. The legitimacy of American democracy is rooted in the people, which centers on the ballot. If everyone doesn't get a chance to vote, our democracy will cease to exist. In Maryland, we can lower the barriers to voting by defending:
 - Same-day voter registration.
 - Automatic registration when issued a drivers' license.
 - Community drop boxes for casting a ballot.
 - “No justification necessary” mail-in voting.
 - Extended primary voting.
 - The restoration of voting rights to felons who have served a court-ordered sentence of imprisonment.
- In addition, we should allow mail-in voting with state-paid postage on the return ballot, make election day a state holiday, and stop automatic purges of voter rolls without due process. I will also work to prevent laws from making protesting government policies a felony (like Tennessee is trying to do).

2) Medicare for All

- I support a single-payer/Medicare for all healthcare system. However, several states, such as California, Colorado, Massachusetts, and others, have tried unsuccessfully to enact single-payer healthcare, and one state - Vermont, ended up abandoning its single-payer system. I believe that without federal funding assistance (or a national act) and controlling healthcare costs, it will be difficult for Maryland to implement this type of healthcare system on its own.
- For further discussion on this and explain of my position on what Maryland can do, please see my response to “What should Maryland do to improve healthcare beyond what the federal government does, in the short-run and long-run?”

3) Climate Action: Keep Fossil Fuels in the Ground

- Please see my responses to “What are your top priorities to address environmental justice, sustainability, and nature conservation?” and “Please identify a few serious challenges facing Maryland that your office would address over the next two years.”

4) Fight for \$15 and a Union

- Please see my responses to What changes would you make to state minimum wage law, including tipped and agricultural workers? and “Would you support legislation to enable public workers to have the right to form a union and bargain collectively for contracts statewide?”

5) Criminal Justice Reform

- My criminal justice reform policies center on:
 - Expanding community-based mental health services to people in prison and continued help after they are released from prison,
 - Expanding community-based substance use disorder services to people in prison and continued help after they are released from prison,
 - Eliminating for-profit prisons,
 - Ensuring due process and the right to counsel,
 - Ending cash for bail (particularly for those sitting in jail who have not been convicted of a crime and are only in prison because they cannot afford bail), and
 - Legalizing the recreational use of cannabis (including the expungement of past convictions for non-violent offenders).

6) Protect Reproductive Rights

- We must continue to fight for women's reproductive rights. The recent passage of a bill in Oklahoma that would criminalize abortion, and the Texas Heartbeat Act that allows private citizens to sue abortion providers and others, are clear examples of how legislating for women's health continues to be an uphill battle. I will work with other Maryland legislators to enshrine a woman's right to choose in the state constitution. And I will advocate that our federal legislators codify Roe vs. Wade into federal statutes.

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?

I will support a bill for public campaign financing. And, I pledge not to take donations from developers. On my website and printed materials, I explicitly say that I will not accept contributions from developers.

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?

Some of these issues will be lifelong goals to reach. But, over the four years of my tenure, I will work on these priorities:

- Fighting for women's right to choose:
 - Enshrining women's right to reproductive choice into the Maryland state constitution. This will take 3/5 votes of both Maryland chambers and a majority vote in a referendum by the people, which might be challenging to accomplish. In the meantime, I support the proposed Abortion Care Act that will allow nurse practitioners, midwives, and physician assistants to perform abortions and require private insurance companies to share the cost of abortion procedures.
- Helping low to moderate-income families and seniors to overcome inflation:
 - For low-income wage earners and property owners, I favor a higher credit allowance that can be claimed on the Earned Income Tax Credit. And I support raising the income limit and amount of credit that can be claimed on the Home Property Tax Credit.
 - For seniors, I support property tax credits for retirees on fixed incomes.
 - For working parents, I support child daycare tax credits and fully funding pre-K education.
 - For all citizens, I will tackle inflation caused by supply-side shortages. We have all been affected by post-pandemic inflation, and we have all seen the empty store shelves. To absorb the shock of supply disruptions, we need to increase the amount of warehouse space devoted to inventory - to include cold storage for food. Today, space is primarily dedicated to processing. In addition, we need to grow and maintain our critical pool of supply-side workers such as truckers, delivery personnel, dock workers, rail workers, warehouse workers, etc. I will work to help these workers unionize (such as in the case of Amazon workers), improve their pay and benefits, and, most importantly, improve their workplace conditions.
- Reducing healthcare and prescription drug costs:
 - For my explanation of the obstacles and what Maryland can do to make healthcare affordable and accessible, please see my responses to "What actions would your office take on any of OR's 6 platform issues?" and "What should Maryland do to improve healthcare beyond what the federal government does, in the short-run and long-run?"
- Funding the Blueprint for Maryland's Future:
 - Funding for large bills like these is always challenging. But, we can use sales tax from cannabis sales and online sales to help fund this program.
- Constructing an electric vehicle infrastructure:
 - It is clear that the automotive industry is making significant investments to provide more electric vehicles (EVs), if not an entirely all-electric inventory, to its consumers sooner rather than later. General Motors has

announced that it will invest \$6B by 2024 in electric pickup truck production alone and expects to sell over a million EVs by 2025. In Maryland, we need to keep up. I will work to construct an EV infrastructure to include installing Maryland-wide charging stations, modernizing the power distribution grid, developing clean power generation, and providing for the recycling and disposal of batteries. For more discussion on this, please also see my response to “What are your top priorities to address environmental justice, sustainability, and nature conservation?”

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

For low-income wage earners and property owners, I favor a higher credit allowance that can be claimed on the Earned Income Tax Credit. And I support raising the income limit and amount of credit that can be claimed on the Home Property Tax Credit. Finally, I support property tax credits for retirees on fixed incomes.

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

One thing the state can do is to provide grants to municipalities to implement Community Land Trusts. Land trusts are one tool that communities can use to provide permanent affordable housing to help close the racial and income wealth gap. Under the land trust model, a nonprofit community land trust owns the land and sells the home on the property to qualified buyers at a below-market-rate sales price. A recent example of this program is the Baltimore City Department of Housing & Community Development’s announcement of awards to three nonprofits last year. Under the Baltimore City plan, grants will be used to support housing for those at or below 50% of the area median income.

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?

- I support public mass-transit options to provide mobility to underserved areas. But, I am skeptical about implementing public-private partnerships in public transportation. I am concerned that the “last mile of service,” i.e., the point of drop-off from a bus, subway, or train to a commuter’s endpoint location, would be accomplished by non-unionized labor such as Uber or Lyft drivers. In addition, these services rely on “smart” technology to access their service. This could potentially marginalize people who cannot afford to own a smart device and people with disabilities who may not be able to use a smart device.

- One of my concerns is providing transportation assistance to low-income people, seniors, and people with disabilities to meet their healthcare access needs. We need to ensure these vulnerable groups can get to their healthcare providers, pharmacists, and mental health and substance use disorder practitioners, etc. This is especially true for people who live in our rural areas. I would support:

1. Unionizing gig workers in industries serviced by companies like Uber and Lyft.
2. Working with healthcare providers such as primary care physicians, therapists, substance use disorder counselors etc., to provide transportation services to low-income and special needs patients.
3. Providing no-cost, delivery-free medications to Marylanders via the United States Postal Service for long-term chronic care management of hypertension, high cholesterol, and diabetes.
4. Expanding telehealth/tele-mental health services to people with mobility issues by expanding reliable digital broadband service to all citizens across Maryland.

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

- To reduce crime and build confidence in public safety, we need to get back to basics like community policing. That is, the “beat cop” needs to patrol the neighborhoods and shops in their beat on foot, not just from their patrol cars. Police officers need to get to know the communities they serve. A visible, personal presence will promote good police-community relations, build public safety confidence in the community, detour crime, and allow the officer to gain intelligence on criminal activity they would not otherwise have.
- Also, the demographics of the police department, just like other public institutions, need to reflect the populations they serve.
- I am not opposed to the repeal of the LEOBR. However, as a strong supporter of labor unions, I support workers’ rights to have a say in what their work environment looks like and to be protected from unfair disciplinary and termination practices. The public needs to be protected from police misconduct, and officers need to be protected from unfair labor practices and be allowed “due process” in disciplinary actions. We can have both. The requirement to use body-worn cameras and the implementation of local police accountability boards are two good steps in the right direction.

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?

- One area where we can reduce systemic bias is in the education system. We need to energize young black and brown students to enter the teaching profession, and that starts with hiring faculty and staff that share their lived experiences and act as role models to show them they can achieve their dreams. In addition, we need to make investments in historically black colleges and universities to help lift up marginalized people through higher learning. And we need to make similar investments in vocational/trade schools.
- Beyond education, we can provide daycare to struggling families so that parents can work and afford to take care of their children. We need to offer grants to minority-owned businesses to start, grow, and maintain their business. We need to lower the cost of healthcare and prescription drugs and help manage long-term chronic diseases so that people can afford their medications and pay the rent! And finally, to generate, maintain, and pass wealth from one generation to the next, we need to help people own property. Property ownership is probably one of the most important determinants for lifting people out of generational poverty. (See my discussion in question “What would you do to make housing more affordable for low-income residents?”)
- Impacted communities can have a more prominent voice in state and local government by electing people in these communities to office. Ranked-choice voting and proportional representation are two voting schemes that could be implemented to ensure more equitable representation in our legislative bodies.

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

As stated in the previous question, this can be accomplished through improved education opportunities, childcare support to struggling families, opening up business opportunities to minority-owned businesses, and, most importantly, helping people own property.

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

Access to healthcare services and long-term management of chronic disease - including prevention, diagnosis, and maintenance, is essential to maintaining Marylanders' health; and keeping them out of acute care and the hospital emergency department. Therefore, I propose creating a Healthcare Trust Fund (HTF) to help Marylanders get the services they need and stay healthy.

The HTF could provide grants and other assistance to primary care physicians, pharmacists, and other healthcare providers to offer their patients chronic disease education prevention, diagnosis, and maintenance care. In addition, the HTF could assist low-income patients and those with disabilities with transportation to their healthcare providers. Lastly, the HTF could provide no-cost, delivery-free medications through the United States Postal Service to patients to manage chronic care of their hypertension, cholesterol, and diabetes.

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

- I support rank choice voting (RCV). I believe RCV is an equitable means to ensure majority support of those elected, minimize "strategic voting" by political operatives, promote diversity, encourage more people to run for office, curb negative campaigning, promote party unity, and increase voter turnout.
- In Maryland, we have districts with multiple delegates, which could be considered close to "proportional representation." I do not oppose proportional representation as it would give those in the minority a better chance of having equitable representation in our general assembly.
- I don't favor "approval voting" as it could adversely affect minorities who might be left with the choice of voting for the "least objectionable" candidate instead of the ones they prefer.

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

I oppose facilities like the Wheelabrator in Baltimore. Facilities like these disproportionately affect low-socioeconomic communities since those are the communities most likely to be situated near them. Public health, property values, and standard of living are all affected by these energy sources - including the environment. Maryland needs to lead the way to an electric economy fueled by hydrogen. Japan is already teaming with Canada and other nations to build a clean, electric economy. We can, too! A green economy will not only create good jobs but will also help keep our environment clean.

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

The minimum wage should be adjusted for inflation so Marylanders employed in jobs that pay the minimum wage don't fall behind. Tipped earners should be guaranteed the minimum wage by their employers if their wage, including tips, falls below the minimum. Agricultural workers who work on a piece-rate pay structure should be guaranteed the minimum wage after computing their per-hour wage compensation. Furthermore, regardless of the hours worked per week, seniors should not be exempt from the minimum wage earnings standard.

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

Yes. Furthermore, I support the Maryland Education Association's right to include classroom size in collective bargaining with the state.

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

I support the legalization of the recreational use of cannabis, including retail sales, distribution, and taxation of cannabis products. Tax and legal age usage should be similar to those imposed on tobacco and alcohol products already sold in Maryland. I also support the expungement of past convictions for non-violent offenders convicted of the possession of marijuana.

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

I support special elections for legislator vacancies within the first two years of office after the election. However, I favor appointments if the vacancy occurs in the last two years of office. The appointee should be of the same political party as the vacating legislator.

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

Every citizen should be afforded due process, including our core value that one is innocent until proven guilty. If a citizen is found guilty of insurrection against the state or conspiring to commit an insurrection, they should suffer criminal and civil liability to the fullest extent of the law. Furthermore, any elected leader found guilty of insurrection or conspiracy to commit insurrection should be relieved of office and barred for life from holding office at any level. Likewise, any person running for office who is found guilty of these offenses should be barred for life from running for office at any level.

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