



2022 Endorsement Questionnaire - Prince George's County Council
[All Responses Will be Made Public]

Candidate Name:

Lisa Burnam

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Council Seat Sought:

District 9

1. How does your life experience qualify you for the office you seek?

As a mother of two young children, I understand the expense of raising kids in this area. Families need more support. I also have a disabled mother that my husband and I are now caring for, and it's incredible how little support there is for the disability community, which includes families for care for them. If either my husband or I lose our jobs, we're all screwed. We should have more programs, so families don't have to live on a knife's edge.

Since my days at Howard University and UMGC, I've been an advocate for many issues on my platform. My father, who used to be a labor representative in IBEW Local 827, taught me the value of labor organizing. My mother taught me to be an everyday champion within my community. When I was 9, I started a program to feed homeless families in East Orange, NJ. At 17, my first paid job was as a canvasser for a large environmental non-profit. I hated the job, not for the usual reasons like crappy pay and work conditions. But, I took issue with the fact that we only went into ultra-wealthy, white culdesacs in southern NJ to collect money and signatures so county freeholders would support legislation protecting our waterways. When I asked about how we target, I was told it was "safer, and we can ask for larger sums of money." I was offended by this because I lived in an ultra working class,

Black diasporic urban community with people who cared about their water but no one ever came to talk to them about what to do. I keep that experience with me, and it informs who and how I engage with communities where I live about environmental challenge.

A few years ago, I helped start a worker cooperative incubator in DC called Cooperation DC and helped bring together a grassroots collective to amplify the demands of hunger-striking, abused, incarcerated men at Red Onion State Prison. I was a founding member of Pan African Community Action; the primary purpose was to promote the idea of community control of the police. We also carried out the Justice for Zo campaign, which sought justice for the family of Alonzo Smith, a young Black man murdered by private police in DC.

In 2020, I organized a group of Black Bernie Sanders supporters in the DC-MD-VA area to write LTEs to Black newspapers to counter the mainstream narrative propped up by the Democratic establishment that Bernie Sanders was racist and didn't have the support of Black voters. I'm an active member of the PG County DSA. I was a member of the Green Party for more than a decade, and around 2016-2017, I tried to help establish a chapter in Prince George's until the party lost ballot access.

Professionally, I've worked in communications for center-left and left-leaning public policy institutions. I have a wealth of experience working with divergent political perspectives on the left and advocating for unpopular but needed policies. I believe my combined experiences have adequately prepared me for the challenges inherent to this role. It would be a privilege to be District 9's champion. I want to ensure that all residents are served equitably and organized so they can participate in the shaping of policies that affect their everyday lives.

2. What have the primary sources of your campaign's fundraising been, both in this campaign and past campaigns?

This is the first time I've ever run for office. The primary source has been small-dollar donations from myself, friends, family, and potential voters.

3. In 2018, the Prince George's County Council approved a small-donor public financing program for Council and Executive races to come into effect for the 2026 election. As yet, the Fair Election Fund Commission has not been set up and no funding has been allocated to the program. Do you support the small-donor public financing program? If elected to the Council, will you work to ensure the program is funded each year leading up to the full funding needed for the 2026 election?

Yes, I strongly support this and will work to ensure the county council fully funds the small-donor public financing program. I also think it will be essential to engage in a public education campaign about the need for campaign finance reform, starting with this. The

more constituents are aware that this is even an option, the more pressure we can put on the whole council. It would be instructive to show residents examples of other counties' innovations around health care, infrastructure, and utilities. With campaign finance reform, non-establishment candidates with unconventional solutions to ongoing issues can better reach residents.

4. In 1992, through a citizen-driven referendum, a two-term limit was placed on council members which the council repeatedly attempted to repeal over the years and repeatedly failed. As a result of the addition of two at-large seats on the council in 2016, the two-term limit has been diluted with council members allowed to jump from at-large to district seats and back without limit. Do you think district membership on the council is significantly different from at-large membership? Would you support or oppose the reinstatement of strict two-term limits?

I support the reinstatement of a strict two-term limit that applies broadly to elected and appointed seats. I was also one of the petition signers that circulated last fall. If you served public office at this level of government for two terms, then you've done your service. In general, I don't favor the idea of career politicians.

4. What is your position on the Maryland MAGLEV train proposal?

I don't support the MAGLEV construction. But, a better use of tax dollars would continue building on our current transit systems. We need to expand our bus system and the green line to reach the most rural parts of the county. We should also end development practices contributing to suburban sprawl. The further out we extend communities, the more expensive our infrastructure needs and the harder it will be to meet transit demands.

5. There is a great shortage of affordable housing in Prince George's County. What role can the County government have in creating policies that will provide affordable housing for residents at all income levels? How will you engage on this issue?

The county executive set a goal to build 26,000 new housing units by 2030 with the promise that 75% of them will be affordable. I think it is critical that a number of policy steps are taken to ensure that the council can make good on that promise.

- a. Without increasing the tax burden on county residents, I'd work to establish a fund for residents to draw from during the Right of First Refusal process. If a landlord decides to sell a building or rental home, tenants should be able to purchase their building/home using a match from this fund. This is also a helpful wealth-building tool, especially among low-income communities and first-time home buyers. The Prince George's County Purchase Assistance Program fund has been touted as a crucial part of leadership's affordable housing strategy. Yet, the fund's been depleted since 2018. I want to revive the fund, expand its function and have it serve

as the programmatic vehicle to execute this plan.

- b. Only a small percentage of rental assistance funds has reached Prince George's families. I'd want to conduct a review of the Housing and Community Development agency that administers the county's emergency rental assistance program to eliminate any bureaucratic obstacles and inefficiencies so residents can remain in their homes.
- c. In the case of new developments, I would push for the council to establish a land bank, which would seek out abandoned, blighted, and or severely tax-distressed properties. Then, by establishing a community land trust, the county could begin the development of municipally-owned housing that could be made available for rent or purchase at below-market, affordable rates.

6. As part of the Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021 (HB670-2021), the Maryland General Assembly requires each county to set up a Police Accountability Board (PAB). Prince George's County Council must pass legislation to fulfill this State mandate.

- a. Do you support incorporating the functions of the existing Citizen Complaint Oversight Panel in the PAB?

I strongly support that there should be only one oversight body that has the combined functions of both the CCOP and PAB.

- b. How would you ensure that the composition of the PAB reflects the community?

Recruiting for this body should be more exhaustive than sending tweets and emails. Systematic and concerted outreach to high schools, area colleges, men's and women's groups, senior-serving member organizations, HOAs, civic associations, tenant associations, and prominent grassroots organizations would generate a diverse pipeline of applicants.

But I think there needs to be a step before someone is appointed. To be considered for a PAB position, we should develop a prerequisite training open to all county residents that teaches one's rights as a citizen, undocumented immigrant, and basic police protocols in the county. All those who complete this training become eligible for appointment, and the county executive should automatically receive the contact information of those who complete the training.

Upon completion of the training, individuals can gain access to a database or repository of complaints and resolutions of those complaints. These measures would provide a reliable level of quality control for a citizen board without any training in the law. Diversity is essential, but equally crucial is an informed body that

can knowledgeably advocate for justice for fellow residents injured or worse by Prince George's County police.

- c. Do you support a PAB with subpoena powers and paid investigators to effectively review complaints of police misconduct filed by members of the public?

For this body to be effective, it's necessary to ensure it has subpoena powers and access to investigators.

- d. Do you support adequate funding to staff the PAB to investigate the number of complaints filed, including budgeting for independent legal counsel?

I support this and would advocate for appropriate allocation during each budget cycle.

7. The County Council approved a councilmanic district map that was very different from the map created by the independent Redistricting Commission appointed by the council. The map was found illegal by two separate levels of our judicial system. Please share your thoughts on the Council's map, public opposition to the map, and the judicial finding.

In November, I was one of the 140+ constituents who gave public testimony in opposition to the gerrymandered map. I encouraged campaign supporters to attend that county council meeting to join the effort to stop the council from adopting the gerrymandered map.

Gerrymandering within Democrat-controlled jurisdictions is a problem that doesn't get enough attention. And I think the sooner we can offer public financing, the better positioned the left will be to challenge the office of corporatists and other self-interested officials who abuse their power and violate the public trust. The constituents won this fight, and I'm proud to have contributed to that win.

Read my public testimony: [VIEW](#)

Read the message I sent to supporters: [VIEW](#)

Read my message alerting campaign supporters of the court's ruling: [VIEW](#)

8. The County has a massive backlog in school maintenance, renovation, replacement, and expansion, which former Board Chair and education stalwart, Dr. Alvin Thornton, has attributed in large part to 20 years of historical racial discrimination towards Prince George's students.

- a. The County's solution to part of this problem has been to engage in a Public-Private Partnership for the construction and maintenance of six middle schools - the first county in the entire country to engage in a P3 for school construction. Do you think that using private capital with significantly higher interest rates that places the burden on Prince George's taxpayers is a viable model to address historical racial discrimination or should the State make Prince George's schools whole through State funding.

I strongly oppose the P3 construction model. There's an inherent profit motive when working with private capital, which means construction costs and maintenance fees will always be significantly higher than if State funds fully subsidize the project. In this case, we're building six schools that will total around \$1.23B, roughly costing us \$205 million between maintenance and construction per school. This price tag far exceeds the typical costs for building a school, making this a complete giveaway of our tax dollars.

- b. What is the solution to fixing the huge remaining backlog in school maintenance, renovation, replacement, and expansion?

It's unrealistic to expect the county to eliminate the maintenance backlog without a new infusion of federal funds specifically for school infrastructure repair. Though Biden's infrastructure bill did not earmark funds for schools, I will work with state legislators and Congressional representatives to advocate for more federal funds.

That said, we have a lot of waste in our county. A recent example of that is the redevelopment of the private FedEx stadium using tax dollars. Why is the county doing that? We can significantly reduce the remaining backlog with strictly enforced financial oversight, a broad audit of new and ongoing development contracts, and developing new revenue streams.

We also have a school climate action plan, which

- c. What actions do you think the County should take to ensure that school capacity matches current and future demand?

We should limit how much we can develop in a 5-10 year period. We can't continue to build new housing developments without a plan for the school and transit infrastructure essential to any strong community. A condition to receive tax subsidies in future development contracts would be repairing school buildings in the district where there's a new development. And all new constructions should be negotiated using project labor agreements for transparency, cost management, and guaranteed quality work by union labor.

9. Should the Prince George's School Board be restored to a fully elected body? Why or why not?

We should return to a fully elected school board because it is more democratic and would force all members of the board to be accountable to district voters. They would also be more empowered to voice concerns, offer ideas that buck status quo policies. With a fully elected board, we would probably not have experienced the rampant factionalism,

gridlock and unethical behavior observed over that last year and a half.

10. Through legislation and through zoning and land use decisions, the Council plays a decisive role in county planning, and that planning drives transportation demand, demand for services and facilities, environmental and public health impacts, greenhouse gas emissions, and many other impacts. The Zoning Ordinance Rewrite eliminates the requirement that developers file Conceptual Site Plans (CSPs) for certain kinds of projects. CSPs provide critical opportunities for public review and comment on land use proposals early in the development process. Will you commit to working to restore the requirement for CSPs as soon as possible?

Absolutely.

11. The County Council often uses Zoning Text Amendment bills to rewrite the Zoning Ordinance on the fly and to help developers advance certain projects without going through the normal public review process. ZTAs weaken the Zoning Ordinance and undermine the public's right to know and to have a meaningful say on development proposals. Will you commit to working to end or severely curtail the use of ZTAs and to ensuring that:

- a. Any ZTA bill filed includes a list and map of all of the potentially affected properties, as well as analysis of the potential impacts on communities, the environment, agricultural lands, and demand on public services and facilities?

Yes, I commit to this.

- b. For each potentially affected property, the Council notifies all adjoining property owners, local community associations and watershed organizations, and local municipalities, by first-class mail and no less than 60 days prior to any public hearing on the ZTA?

Yes, I commit to this.

The text zoning amendments are a gross breach of public trust. I also would like the revamp the process for individuals to become a Person of Record. Individuals who aren't a part of HOAs and civic associations are notified of new zoning ordinances. We should make it easier for the general public to plug into the county's zoning processes and learn their fundamental rights in these matters.

12. In May of 2021, the County Council unanimously passed CR-027-2021 in support of a single payer Medicare for All system at the federal level, becoming the first county in Maryland to support the federal legislative initiative. The resolution cited the increase in racial health disparities due to the pandemic that only a single-payer system could address. The resolution also pointed out that Medicare for All “would reduce County spending on healthcare and enable local governments across our state to invest additional dollars into education, environmental protection, housing assistance, and other critical services.” Will you join the County Council in calling on our Congressional delegation to support and enact federal legislation for a single-payer system?

I strongly support universal health care policies and commend the council for passing that

resolution. But, more needs to be done. We cannot wait for Congress to do the sensible thing and pass Medicare for All. Right now, people need guaranteed health coverage, and I'm advocating for creating a county health care plan and municipally-owned hospitals. Several counties around the country offer this to residents, and I think Prince George's County should join them. South County is a care desert for mental, physical, and even child care. The county executive has taken the step to add mental health services to the MedStar Southern Maryland Hospital, which I commend. But she and the council can take this much further and comprehensively.