



## **MCMC: MoCo Council Candidates Questionnaire - 2026 Primary**

The Montgomery County Muslim Council (MCMC) is a 501c(4) civic-engagement organization located in Montgomery County, Maryland, focused on elevating the needs and topics related to the Muslim Community and broader community in Montgomery County. MCMC engages with local elected officials, advocating for and representing our residents, institutions, children/students, and more.

On behalf of the Montgomery County Muslim Council (MCMC), we present the following set of questions to all Montgomery County Council candidates, both At-Large and District seats, who are running during the 2026 Primary elections. We greatly appreciate your participation and responses to these questions, as it will allow our community to be informed about issues pertaining to them, and the positions taken by each candidate. MCMC plans on publishing responses to its website.

Please return your responses via email to: [president@mcmcmd.org](mailto:president@mcmcmd.org)

**\*\*Please return your responses by: Wednesday, April 29 2026 (COB)**

### **Karla Silvestre, Candidate for County Council At-Large**

#### Question 1

Topic: Civil Rights

*Montgomery County is one of the most diverse counties in the nation. Accordingly, many MoCo residents who are members of the Arab and Muslim community have engaged in public protests but have unfortunately experienced a curtailing of their first amendment rights to free speech. This includes doxxing, student and teacher suspensions, unequal response by local police.*

1. What are your thoughts on the county's response thus far, in light of what was just shared? What has worked? What has not worked?
2. What specific steps will you take to protect the free speech of residents and students, regardless of their positions on issues? What is your stance on the county's response to peaceful advocacy and protests? How will you protect the free speech rights of residents on local and global issues?

Freedom of speech is a core American value, and it's something I take seriously. Protecting civil rights means protecting everyone—across every community—equally.

Peaceful protest and advocacy are fundamental rights. Residents and students should be able to express their views without fear of retaliation, doxxing, or unequal treatment. At the same time, every community deserves to feel safe from hate and intimidation.

Right now, too many people feel those protections have been applied inconsistently. That erodes trust.

The role of local leaders is to set a tone of respect and de-escalation and encourage dialogue, not division.

As a Councilmember, I will focus on making sure our policies are clear, consistently applied, and rooted in fairness. That includes strengthening protections against harassment and threats, ensuring viewpoint-neutral standards for protests, and improving transparency and accountability when concerns are raised. Training of our county employees and law enforcement is critical to ensure decisions follow established policies.

My approach is simple: protect peaceful speech, enforce rules fairly, and make sure every community knows they are respected and protected.

## Question 2

Topic: Non-Profit Support

*Many Muslim-led non-profits, like MCMF (Montgomery County Muslim Foundation), provide critical social services that the county cannot. Some may not even be aware of grant funding opportunities let alone have experience applying for competitive grants.*

1. How will you ensure an equitable approach to communicating and granting funding for faith-based community organizations?

Community and faith-based organizations are essential to how Montgomery County works. They meet needs every day that government alone cannot.

But too often, smaller and immigrant-led organizations don't have the same access to information or resources when it comes to county funding.

As a Councilmember, I will use multiple channels to get the word out about grant opportunities including working with trusted community leaders, organizing information sessions, and giving ample time so grant opportunities are not rushed. I will advocate for a more accessible and equitable process—one that includes clear communication, multilingual outreach, and real support for organizations navigating grant applications for the first time. I will advocate for

technical assistance for smaller organizations and opportunities to partner with larger organizations that have more capacity.

If an organization is doing the work—serving families, supporting health, providing food, or strengthening community—it should have a fair opportunity to access county support.

### Question 3

Topic: Housing and Displacement

*Montgomery County is becoming increasingly unaffordable.*

1. What do you propose to prevent current skyrocketing housing costs across Montgomery County, especially with residents facing record high interest rates?
2. What is your plan to prevent the displacement of immigrant and low-income families, who have been disproportionately impacted?

Housing affordability is one of the defining challenges facing our county.

We need to increase housing supply, expand and preserve affordable options, and make it easier for working families to stay in Montgomery County. That means supporting smart growth near transit, protecting existing affordable housing, and helping first-time homebuyers and renters manage rising costs.

At the same time, we have to be intentional about preventing displacement—especially for immigrant and low-income families who are often most at risk.

As a Councilmember, I will ensure that we continue to build affordable housing and increase the supply of housing countywide. I will also support strong tenant protections, eviction prevention, and targeted outreach so residents understand their rights and resources before they are in crisis. I will also expand first-time homebuyer programs and create loans for down payment assistance.

I will expand education and workforce development pathways to in-demand jobs so more residents can earn higher wages and afford to live in the county.

Growth is important—but it has to be inclusive. People who have built their lives here should be able to stay.

### Question 4

Topic: Housing and Displacement

*For many families (1st generation, 2nd generation, immigrant, etc.), transit is a lifeline.*

1. What are your specific plans to improve the reliability of public transportation (such as the Ride-On bus system and completion of Purple Line, and more), as well as pedestrian safety in all parts of the county, but especially in the Up-County region?

For many families, transportation is a lifeline.

As a Councilmember, I will work to improve the reliability of our RideOn buses so people can count on them to get to work on time and improve connectivity so riders can transfer easily from one bus route to another. I will also continue to support free use of our RideOn system to make their transportation costs more affordable. I will prioritize reliable transit, safer streets, and equitable investment across the county. I will support traffic calming measures to reduce pedestrian safety accidents and build more sidewalks to protect our pedestrians.

Upcounty communities in particular need greater attention and investment. Residents should not have to rely on long waits or unsafe conditions to get to work, school, or essential services.

Reliable transportation and safe infrastructure are basic expectations, and they should be delivered consistently across every part of Montgomery County.

#### Question 5

Topic: Healthcare Access

*Health insurance - and healthcare costs generally - continue to rise, making access to healthcare nearly impossible for some in our county.*

1. What legislative measures will you support to bridge the gap in healthcare access for uninsured or under-insured residents in our community?
2. What legislation could you introduce or expand to bolster funding for free or reduced cost health clinics run by nonprofits in our county, such as medical clinics run by MCC (Muslim Community Center) and ICM (Islamic Center of Maryland)?

Access to healthcare should not depend on income, language, or insurance status.

As a Councilmember, I will protect our investment in safety-net services, including nonprofit clinics that provide care to uninsured and under-insured residents.

Community-based providers—like those supported by MCC, ICM, and others—are trusted resources. They are already doing the work, and they should have stable, reliable support to continue serving our communities.

We also need to expand outreach and ensure services are culturally competent and accessible so residents know where to go and can get care before small issues become emergencies.

### Question 6

Topic: County Budget

*Fiscal responsibility and balancing the budget in coordination with the rest of the County Council and County Executive is a paramount responsibility of the County At-Large seat.*

1. Do you support tax cuts, tax increases, or maintaining the status quo? 2. Regardless of your approach, how would you propose paying for many of the county's programs?

As a Councilmember, my responsibility is to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used effectively and aligned with our priorities.

I believe in a balanced approach—one that carefully evaluates spending, prioritizes core services, and looks for efficiencies before asking more of taxpayers.

We have to fund what matters: strong schools, safe communities, affordable housing, reliable transportation, and access to care.

My focus will be on results, transparency, and long-term sustainability—making sure we are investing wisely while being mindful of the impact on working families, seniors, and small businesses.