



Laurie-Anne Sayles, County Councilmember At-Large

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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

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, and 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?**

For many in our Arab and Muslim communities, feeling safe, respected, and heard in Montgomery County is essential, so I am disheartened by the experiences shared above.



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I find the County's response has been inconsistent, highlighting the need for stronger engagement between public safety agencies and the communities they serve. Trust can only be built through ongoing efforts, not just in times of crisis.

We have seen positive actions, with residents supporting free speech and opposing discrimination, which reflects our County's values. However, we must also recognize our shortcomings. We need to strengthen the right to free speech, especially on difficult issues, by reviewing policies that may hinder lawful expression, promoting dialogue instead of censorship.

Furthermore, residents should be able to exercise their rights without fear of retaliation or unfair treatment. In the end, building trust requires accountability, transparency, and consistent engagement, and I am dedicated to this important work.

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?

Protecting free speech requires clear, consistent standards rooted in the First Amendment and applied without favoritism. Decisions should be based on viewpoint neutrality, meaning the government does not privilege or penalize speech based on opinion, and any limits must be content-neutral, narrowly tailored, and legally justified as time, place, and manner restrictions.

In schools and public institutions, that means strengthening clear free expression policies so students and residents understand their rights and protections. It also means safeguarding the ability of student and community groups to organize across all viewpoints, preventing situations where events are effectively silenced by disruption or opposition, and ensuring disciplinary rules are specific and not vague or overbroad.

Public access to civic spaces must also be fair and transparent. Permitting systems for demonstrations and events should be standardized, with clear criteria, consistent timelines, and equal access to public facilities regardless of political perspective.

Equally important is preventing indirect censorship, including any pressure on schools, employers, or institutions to punish lawful speech or the use of funding decisions to influence viewpoints.



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Speech protections must also include due process, with clear documentation of enforcement actions, accessible appeals processes, and oversight to ensure consistency.

Finally, protecting free speech means investing in training for public employees, supporting de-escalation and neutrality in protest response, and modeling restraint by defending the right to express even unpopular views. A healthy democracy is strengthened not by limiting speech, but by encouraging more of it through civic education, dialogue, and constructive engagement.

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?

I value the crucial role Muslim-led organizations like the Montgomery County Muslim Foundation (MCMF) play in our community. As Political Director of the Black Ministers Conference and Vice Chair of InFaith Partners for the Chesapeake, I've seen firsthand how faith-based organizations provide vital support to families before government assistance arrives.

MCMF and similar organizations stabilize families, prevent crises, and strengthen our community's social fabric. We must treat them as essential partners.

My equitable funding approach focuses on three commitments: access, capacity, and partnership.

Access entails proactive communication of grant opportunities through trusted community networks. Capacity involves providing technical assistance to smaller Muslim-led nonprofits that may lack grant-writing resources. Partnership emphasizes building relationships before funding cycles to empower all organizations to apply.



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Investing in the long-term sustainability of Arab and Muslim-led nonprofits will enhance their impact. Trust and fairness are key; the government must engage with these communities transparently and collaboratively.

Question 3

Topic: Housing and Displacement

Montgomery County is becoming increasingly unaffordable.

- 1. What do you propose to prevent the current skyrocketing housing costs across Montgomery County, especially with residents facing record-high interest rates?**

Montgomery County is facing a serious affordability crisis, and I hear from residents every day who are working harder than ever but still struggling to stay in their homes and communities. As Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee, I view housing not only as an economic issue, but as a foundation for health, stability, and opportunity.

We have to both increase housing supply and preserve what we already have. Back in 2023, during my first year on the Council, I passed the **Opening Pathways for Economic Necessity (O.P.E.N.) Zoning Text Amendment**, which speeds up the approval process for affordable mixed-use developments. This helps reduce delays so that more housing can be built faster and closer to jobs, transit, and essential services.

At the same time, I have worked to secure major investments to preserve and expand affordability, including **\$57 million for the Housing Initiative Fund**, an **\$8 million allocation for the Housing Opportunities Commission**, and more than **\$77 million for the Department of Housing and Community Affairs in the FY24 operating budget**. These resources directly support the preservation of existing affordable housing and the creation of new units in a rapidly rising market.

I also recognize that high interest rates are making homeownership increasingly out of reach for many working families. That's why we need a comprehensive approach to: strengthening rental affordability, preserving existing housing, and expanding pathways to homeownership.



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There is no single solution to this crisis. Still, I am committed to a sustained, compassionate, and data-driven strategy that ensures Montgomery County remains a place where working families can live, stay, and thrive.

2. What is your plan to prevent the displacement of immigrant and low-income families, who have been disproportionately impacted?

Montgomery County is becoming increasingly unaffordable, and I hear that directly from immigrant families, seniors, and working households across our community. As Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee, I see how rising costs force families to make painful tradeoffs between rent, food, transportation, and health care.

That is why I supported Montgomery County's rent stabilization law. With homelessness increasing by 30 percent, we needed immediate action to provide stability in a volatile housing market and protect residents from sudden rent spikes that can lead to displacement.

At the same time, passing a law is not the finish line. Good governance requires ongoing oversight and a willingness to adjust as we learn what is working and what is not. We must closely track whether families are staying housed, whether small housing providers can maintain their properties, and whether we are still encouraging the housing production our county needs.

If we see unintended consequences, I am prepared to work with colleagues and stakeholders to make thoughtful improvements, including simplifying compliance, improving transparency, and ensuring fair and consistent enforcement.

Ultimately, affordability requires a balanced approach. We must protect residents from displacement today while also expanding housing supply and strengthening the supports that keep families stably housed. My commitment is to ensure Montgomery County remains a place where people can live, work, and thrive.

Question 4

Topic: Housing and Displacement

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



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- 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?**

Transit is a lifeline for many families in Montgomery County, especially first-generation, immigrant, and working households. As Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee, I approach transportation as a core equity and public health issue that connects people to jobs, schools, healthcare, and opportunity.

I have strongly advocated for increased investments in Vision Zero, because safe streets are the foundation of mobility. That means designing roads that protect pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, and drivers through safer crossings, traffic calming measures, improved lighting, and stronger connectivity across neighborhoods and business corridors.

I have also supported efforts to make our transit system more accessible and user-friendly, including the County's commitment to making Ride On fare-free. Removing fare barriers is a direct investment in economic mobility for working families who rely on transit every day.

At the same time, Montgomery County has improved rider experience through technology. Ride On buses now offer real-time tracking through the Ride On Trip Planner app, powered by Moovit, as well as the web-based RideOn.app. These tools provide GPS-based arrival estimates and crowdedness indicators to help riders plan trips more effectively. The system is generally reliable, though some riders report occasional delays or tracking inconsistencies.

Additional tools such as Moovit also support trip planning across buses and rail and include multimodal options like bikeshare and scooters. The web-based RideOn.app is also widely used for fast access through five-digit stop codes.

Looking ahead, I remain committed to strengthening Ride On reliability, expanding transit access in Up-County communities, and building a safer, more connected, and more equitable transportation system for every resident.

Question 5

Topic: Healthcare Access



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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?

Access to health care is not a privilege. It is a basic necessity for a safe and stable community, and right now, too many families in Montgomery County are being priced out of care or forced to delay treatment because of rising costs and gaps in coverage.

As Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee, I have taken direct action to respond to this crisis rather than simply talk about it.

In January 2026, I proposed a \$1 million special appropriation in the FY 2026 operating budget to immediately stabilize essential health and human services that were disrupted by federal funding cuts. Those cuts were not abstract. They resulted in paused services, closed intake programs, and growing waitlists that left seniors, families, and vulnerable residents waiting for care they urgently needed.

Doing nothing was not an option.

This investment is designed to stop immediate harm and protect access to care right now. It directs funding where the need is most urgent. That includes \$300,000 for Minority Health Initiatives to address persistent disparities in access and outcomes, \$400,000 for the Senior Nutrition Program after a major loss of federal COVID-era support, and \$300,000 to reduce the home care waitlist affecting more than 300 residents who need daily assistance to remain safe and independent at home.

In addition to stabilizing these core services, I have also supported expanding community-based and mobile health access so care reaches residents where they are. That includes investment in the Office of Food Systems Resilience to strengthen the connection between local farmers, food security, and health outcomes, and support for mobile health clinic strategies that bring preventive and primary care directly into low-income neighborhoods, reducing barriers like transportation, cost, and scheduling.



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I have also supported strengthening our community-based provider network, including funding the Primary Care Coalition, which plays a critical role in coordinating care for uninsured and under-insured residents across the region. This also includes support for weekend and specialty access points such as the American Diversity Group's specialty clinic, which helps expand culturally competent care when traditional systems are not accessible, and the ICM Cares Clinic, which provides critical services for residents who might otherwise go without care entirely.

But this also speaks to the broader direction I will continue to push as a Councilmember.

We must strengthen our local safety net so that uninsured and under-insured residents are not falling through the cracks when federal systems weaken or fail to keep pace with need. That means investing in prevention, expanding community-based care, supporting home- and neighborhood-based services, and targeting resources to the communities experiencing the deepest inequities.

It also means recognizing that health care access is connected to everything, including housing stability, food security, and economic opportunity. These issues cannot be separated.

My approach is simple. When costs rise and systems are strained, the government must step forward to stabilize care, expand access points, and ensure no one is left behind because they cannot afford to be sick.

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)?

As Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee, I see firsthand how rising healthcare costs are putting real pressure on families across Montgomery County—and for some, it's creating barriers that are simply unacceptable.

Community-based clinics, including those led by organizations like the Muslim Community Center and the Islamic Center of Maryland, are essential partners in closing those gaps. They are trusted, culturally competent providers that meet people where they are.



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My approach starts with partnership and action. I would work directly with these clinics to identify their most urgent needs, whether that's staffing, equipment, behavioral health services, or expanded hours, and ensure those needs are reflected in our County's budget and policy priorities.

At the same time, we have to be strategic about how we use every available resource. That means strengthening partnerships between nonprofit clinics, hospital systems, and public health agencies so equipment, expertise, and services can be shared more effectively. Not every clinic needs the same support at the same time, and we can build a more coordinated system that responds in real time.

From a policy standpoint, I'm focused on expanding funding streams for community-based care, increasing support for preventive and primary care services, and strengthening the infrastructure that allows these clinics to grow sustainably.

This is about more than funding. It's about building a connected, equitable healthcare system where no one is left behind. And I'm committed to making sure that happens.”

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?

Fiscal responsibility is one of the most important duties of the County Council, especially in an At-Large role where we are accountable to all residents. As Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee and member of the Economic Development Committee, I see every day how budget decisions affect real people, from access to health care and housing to support for seniors, families, and vulnerable residents.

I do not support shifting a greater tax burden onto residents who are already facing rising costs. That includes increases in property or income taxes and the expansion of special taxing districts. Affordability is a daily concern for working families, seniors on fixed incomes, and small businesses.



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At the same time, we cannot meet our obligations by cutting critical services that people rely on. The answer is disciplined budgeting and prioritization.

That starts with a thorough review of spending to identify duplication, inefficiencies, and programs that are not producing results. It also means pacing new initiatives responsibly so we fully fund and evaluate existing commitments before expanding further.

We should strengthen procurement practices, improve vacancy management, and modernize operations so taxpayer dollars are used more effectively.

Long-term fiscal health also depends on growing the economy. By supporting small businesses, workforce development, and job creation, we can broaden the tax base without raising rates.

My goal is a fiscally responsible budget that protects essential services and keeps Montgomery County affordable for the people who live and work here.

2. Regardless of your approach, how would you propose paying for many of the county's programs?

As a member of the Economic Development Committee, I believe it is vital to create opportunities that enhance funding for essential services without overburdening working families. By partnering with the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation, we aim to boost our competitiveness and reclaim our status as a regional leader in innovation and economic growth. Building a strong and equitable local economy is key to expanding our revenue base and making responsible investments in County programs.

I would prioritize economic development and essential services in the operating budget. I will increase funding for affordable housing through the Housing Initiative Fund to support low-income families and expand investments that promote local businesses and job creation, especially in underserved areas. At the same time, I will reduce non-essential discretionary spending to redirect resources toward critical programs, ensuring our budget advances equity and strengthens our community.



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The key to paying for many of the County's programs is leveraging my S.M.A.R.T. agenda. This effective and sustainable economic plan will revitalize our economy and position us for future success.

That is why I strongly support the 20 million dollar Jobs, Opportunities, and Business Support Initiative to strategically invest in high-quality job creation, innovation, and equity to strengthen our economy. It is a beacon of hope for our community and a pathway to a brighter future with more opportunities for all.

To address office vacancies after the pandemic, I co-led the Make Office Vacancy Extinct grant program. This program provides financial assistance to businesses that relocate to our County or expand their footprint to fill empty office space. In FY23, we assisted 22 companies in revitalizing our commercial areas and bringing energy back to underutilized corridors.

I also passed legislation to extend the County's minority-owned business purchasing program for five more years, which contributed to more than 30 million dollars in increased business activity across multiple sectors in just the past fiscal year.

As the Council's lead for eliminating disparities in public health, I have worked to ensure our recovery efforts are inclusive, equitable, and focused on long-term prosperity for all residents. I will continue working to ensure the health and well-being of our community remains central to our economic recovery.

I would prioritize workforce development by promoting partnerships between the public and private sectors that prepare both young people and adults for future jobs. I work to connect unemployed and underemployed workers, as well as active retirees, to meaningful and empowering job opportunities.

As an active member of the National Association of Counties, I will continue strengthening relationships with federal agencies and corporate partners to expand opportunities in our growing biotech corridor and position Montgomery County as a premier innovation hub.

I also set clear goals to build healthier communities, including supporting Congressional Bill HR 1976, which aims to expand access to affordable healthcare. I remain committed to long-term



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solutions for vulnerable populations impacted by the pandemic, including women and non-English-speaking households.

In addition, I prioritize our creative economy by supporting initiatives that use art and culture as drivers of economic growth in Montgomery County.

I introduced Bill 4-24 to establish the Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund Commission, which guides how cannabis tax revenue is reinvested into communities most harmed by the War on Drugs, ensuring those communities have the opportunity to recover and thrive.

Finally, I proudly supported the Great Seneca Plan, Viva White Oak, and the Clarksburg Master Plan Redevelopment, which strengthens our BioTech Corridor, the third largest in the nation, and ensures Montgomery County remains a top destination for research, innovation, and economic expansion.

To answer the question directly, we fund County priorities by growing a stronger, more inclusive economy, investing in people, and making disciplined budget decisions that align spending with long-term impact and equity.

That is how we ensure Montgomery County remains both fiscally responsible and future-ready.