



## 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: **Sunday, May 3rd**

### 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?

***Montgomery County has a long tradition of protecting free speech, and I'm proud of that. But I've been troubled by reports of Arab and Muslim community members facing doxxing, student suspensions, and unequal police response based on what they were advocating for. Doxxing is harassment, plain and simple, and it has no place here. And when the response to a protest depends on the viewpoint being expressed, that's not neutral enforcement.***

***Demonstrations continue to go forward. What hasn't worked is that we haven't been consistent about pushing back when community members face retaliation for peaceful advocacy. Most of the time, the police have handled***

***situations appropriately but I've also seen a situation where they should have been more protective and they've been told that they have to be even handed. Schools are outside the jurisdiction of the county, they are state agencies and affected teachers/staff will have to follow appeal systems there. The county has tried to provide guidance and to urge people to respect each other, but some unpleasant behaviors are not illegal and are beyond our ability to control.***

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?

***I've been clear about where I stand. I went to my first protest when I was 11 and protesting is a fundamental right. As long as it doesn't involve violence or incite violence people have a right to free speech. These rights exist in current laws, we don't lack legal protection. Elected officials set a tone, and I'm not going to stay quiet when people are being silenced or harassed for peaceful advocacy on local or global issues. What applies to one group has to apply to all groups, period. On student suspensions, the Council has to be more proactive in working with the BOE and our unions to work out sensible solutions that don't target specific groups or communities. Students don't give up their constitutional rights when they walk into school. I'll also make sure the Muslim and Arab communities in this county know they have a Councilmember who will stand with them when those rights are threatened.***

## 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've always believed that nonprofits are virtually an extension of government in this county. They deliver services we couldn't provide on our own, and that absolutely includes our faith-based organizations. Our grants are pretty broadly distributed, but the requests are far in excess of available resources - and that's true even with significant increases in grants in my term. Adding more groups has led to discontinuing existing grants in some cases. I want to see more focus on supporting grants that meet our greatest needs. There are lots of things we could fund that aren't essential, and I think prioritizing is important.***

**When the council directed grant staff to focus on new applicants, important long standing programs got axed and I needed additional funds to prevent damage. And my recommendations have been reduced when going through the council in their efforts to balance the budget.**

**I'll push for active outreach (in multiple languages) to faith-based and community organizations about available funding, rather than just posting opportunities and waiting. I'll also look hard at whether our application processes are unnecessarily complicated.**

### 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?

***The core problem is that we've been building the wrong housing for the wrong people. The affordable new units we produce near transit are priced as "affordable" based on area median income, but that AMI figure covers everyone in the county. For immigrant and minority families, the actual median income is often about half the countywide figure, so what looks affordable in the data isn't actually affordable for the people who need it most. We've focused too much on high rise development which is the most expensive housing to build and it requires huge subsidies to make it affordable.***

***What I'll push for: raising the MPDU requirement from 15% to 30% on new developments (that's the single most powerful lever we have), strengthening rent stabilization by lowering the cap and reducing the time period for exemptions for newer buildings, and using county-owned land for affordable development rather than selling it off to private developers at market rates (that is actually something I'm doing now as Executive.). I also support a no-net-loss policy, meaning any development that removes affordable units has to replace every one at pre-existing rents, with permanent affordability.***

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

***Displacement is happening right now, not hypothetically. I've been pushing just-cause eviction protections for over 20 years, which means landlords can't simply get rid of long-term residents without a legitimate reason. I'll keep pushing that. I'll also work to expand the county's right-of-first-refusal so we can acquire properties before they flip to private investors, keeping them in affordable use.***

***On zoning, I'll oppose upzoning plans in immigrant and low-income neighborhoods that threaten to displace the people who live there today.. Density without affordability protections doesn't help the people who actually need help.***

#### 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?

***Transit is a lifeline for a lot of families in this county, and Up-County residents have been underserved for too long. I've proposed the county's first special taxing district to fund BRT, and I support expanding BRT on key corridors including Frederick Road/MD355, Connecticut and Georgia Aves. The Purple Line is coming and I'll make sure connecting bus service (especially Ride-On) is there to make it actually useful for people who don't live right on the line. In the Up-County, I've pushed the state to add an extra lane on 270 from Frederick to the ICC. I'm pushing for adding a lane to 355 as well as accelerating the BRT in the upper county.***

***On Ride-On reliability, frequency and coverage in Up-County are issues of financial resources. As I've said numerous times, the county government is under-resourced and lacks the funding to expand services as quickly as we should. I've been fighting for years to get the council to enact a different funding model that would allow us to expand our services. We did make Ride-ON fare-free which removed a barrier to increased ridership.***

***As for pedestrian safety, too many of our roads (especially Up-County) were designed entirely around cars, and people are getting hurt. Immigrant and low-income residents are disproportionately the ones walking those roads because they don't have other options. When you see the flex posts all around the county at intersections, that was my push to get our transportation dept to rapidly expand their use - something I saw being done in the District of Columbia when I got elected 8 years ago and I pushed to bring those practices here. I'll push for dedicated pedestrian infrastructure funding where the need is greatest.***

#### 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?

***The county maintains health services for residents who don't have access to employer-based insurance, and I've consistently funded those programs throughout my time as Executive. The state has primary responsibility for Medicaid and broader coverage, but the county fills gaps the state doesn't, and in the current federal environment (with cuts threatening Medicaid and other programs), that County role matters more than ever. My budget this year included expanded funding to address the expected influx of new uninsured patients who are losing their health care under Trump's insurance cuts. I'll fully fund the county's public health system and fight any cuts that would shift costs onto uninsured residents.***

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)?

***Faith-based health clinics reach people who don't access the formal healthcare system, whether because of language barriers, immigration status, or simply because they trust their mosque or community center. That's a real, valuable service that the county should be supporting. I've increased funding for nonprofits providing health services throughout my time as Executive, and that commitment carries to the Council. I'd look specifically at whether our grant programs are reaching faith-based health providers and make sure they are. Organizations like MCC and ICM that are already serving uninsured and underinsured residents shouldn't be fighting for scraps every budget cycle. There is no way to significantly raise funding for our clinics without increasing revenues. Once you take Fire and Police out of the budget total, almost everything else that is a service, is a human service - one way or another -that we provide services to people.***

## 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?

***I support fixing the structural imbalances in how we raise revenue. Right now the county taxes residential and commercial property at the same rate, which is unusual in the region and shifts too much burden onto homeowners. Northern***

**Virginia charges significantly higher commercial property tax rates. Fairfax County also has a business licensing tax that generates \$200 million a year. Montgomery County has neither. Those are fixable problems, and fixing them is how we fund what we need without constantly going back to residents.**

**But you need to understand how our taxes compare. All of the major jurisdictions around us have higher property tax on residents than we do. We're currently about \$1.03, while Frederick is \$1.11, Howard County is \$1.34 and Prince George's is \$1.37. Even Fairfax is \$1.15. Only in DC is it lower at \$.85, but that's only possible because their commercial property rate ranges from \$1.66 to 1.89. Fairfax counties commercial property tax goes from \$1.27 up to \$1.50. My proposals would raise commercial rates to levels similar to Fairfax which would allow us to rely less on residents and would also give us the capital that we don't currently have to build the necessary transit.**

**I've also been willing to raise taxes when the alternative was cutting services for people who depend on them. Budgets are moral documents, and I'm not going to balance the budget on the backs of the people who can least afford it.**

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

**The structural fixes I just described are the starting point: commercial property taxed at a higher rate, a business licensing tax like Fairfax has, and special taxing districts to fund transportation infrastructure for BRT, keeping it out of the general fund). I also want to fund capital projects through bonds from development districts rather than pulling everything from the general fund and IMPACT taxes.**

**The county has been chronically underinvesting in revenue structures that other jurisdictions figured out years ago. Getting that right is what makes it possible to fund housing, health, transit, and education without always being in crisis mode.**

**The fact is that property taxes are lower here for commercial property than any place around us. The effect is that Virginia is able to pour money into transportation that drives development while we can't finance anything. We are the cheapest date in the region, but businesses aren't coming here. Companies going to Virginia are going there because they get infrastructure and that drives growth, even if they pay higher property taxes.**