

Who's  
Running?

# 2026 HOWARD COUNTY CANDIDATE GUIDE



DEMOCRAT

DISTRICT 2

**ARINZE IFEKAUCHE**  
**HOWARD COUNTY COUNCIL**

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**What is your vision for strengthening Howard County's competitiveness for business investment, job creation, and private sector growth?**

I have said since May 2025 that my primary focus is increasing affordability and economic opportunity in Howard County. I am the only candidate in this race talking about the importance of increasing business growth, and I've released specific policy proposals to support my vision.

I have a plan to build 500K sq ft of SCIF Space within the next seven years. This is a bid to create DoD contractor jobs in Howard County as the federal government – through HR 1– seeks to deepen its investments in Defense spending in the coming years. This is also an opportunity to relocate U.S. Cyber Command jobs once its Ft. Meade SCIF spaces fall out of compliance in 2028. My Serve America, Protect Our Future plan will generate millions in leasing, construction, and tax revenue for the County.

Additionally I have publicly pledged to support continued investments in the Maryland Innovation Center, the Catalyst Fund revolving loan program, the Cyber Howard Business Accelerator, and Howard County's new Fearless Institute partnership. As well as champion the Howard County Office of Workforce Development, and its efforts to connect residents with job training and apprenticeship opportunities.

I consider myself a pro-growth candidate, and I've been on record supporting the new Howard County Central Library project and the Gateway Innovation District. Howard County cannot thrive without growth and development. And I will be a forceful advocate for the business community—ensuring that regulations are fair; the bureaucracy is efficient; our economic development authority is effective; and our local workforce is prepared to drive local employers towards sustainable growth and prosperity.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **How will you measure progress on your goals?**

Progress on my SCIF Space plan will be measured by Howard County's ability to deliver ~71K sq ft of new SCIFs per year; the number of associated government contracts tied to the new SCIFs; and the County's ability to secure long-term leases for the SCIFs constructed with public subsidy.

My goal to see the completion of the Gateway Innovation District will be measured by the project's ability to remain on budget and on time. And that can only happen if advocates and public officials are able to successfully navigate costly and time consuming fights over density and public infrastructure impacts.

Finally I will measure investments in HCEDA and its initiatives within the County Executive's budget. Revenues within Howard County are slowing, and we will need to make strategic investments in our economy if we are to survive the turbulent economic times ahead that are marked by tariff uncertainty; rising construction costs; dramatic increases in healthcare costs; and multi-billion dollar deficits at the State level. I am the only candidate in this race focused on these important issues. And I look forward to working alongside the private sector to fortify our economy for the tough times ahead.

### **What steps will you take to reduce regulatory barriers and create a more predictable, pro-business environment?**

First I'd like to see deeper investment into the HCEDA. My vision is for our HCEDA to be a beacon not only in Maryland- but the rest of America- that provides concierge level research, advocacy, and facilitation for businesses large and small.

Second, as a former Director at the Baltimore City Department of General Services Right of Ways and Permits Section, I know how important it is to have permitting and inspections taking place on time and in a fair and predictable manner. As a member of the Council I will provide rigorous oversight over DILP to ensure that local projects are moving forward without delay and we continue to show strong permits issued trends on a month-over-month and year-over-year basis.

Finally, I plan to be heavily engaged in MACO as District 2's next Councilman. Through this organization- which I work with regularly as part of my role as Deputy Legislative Director at the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy- I will advocate for a more tax friendly and competitive business environment. We will not close our looming budget deficits without robust growth in our private sector.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT****How do you plan to align economic development with workforce readiness, ensuring residents are prepared for emerging jobs (especially in tech, healthcare, and trades)?**

I am a firm believer in skilled trades. My father was an architect and residential builder. I grew up on construction sites, and worked alongside tradesmen as a teenager. I know how much economic opportunity is available to those who wish to learn a trade.

While higher education is largely a state issue, as D2's next Councilmember, I will work with our State delegation and MACO to support Lincoln Tech, HCC, and local unions to support employment readiness programs. And I am in favor of committing more County resources to our Summer Youth Employment Program that are focused on our emerging employment sectors.

Finally, I would lead a Countywide- data-driven- effort to determine our workforce needs relative to forecasts for our aging population. There is a tremendous opportunity to help our senior population age-in-place by strengthening our pipeline of early-career tradesmen available to make Howard County homes aging ready- as well as the next generation of occupational therapists; home health aides; and nurses.

**What role do you see for public-private partnerships in advancing innovation, entrepreneurship, and inclusive economic growth?**

Daycare costs are driving talented professionals out of the workforce. My Cure for Care plan (modeled after the Michigan Tri-share program) would slash daycare costs for middle class families by 65% by creating a voluntary, employer based, benefit program in partnership with the County.

Under my plan, local employers would determine the number of eligible employees they would like to sponsor. Employers would then pay 1/3rd of the employee's daycare bill. Howard County would pay the second 1/3rd of the daycare bill. And the participating employee would pay the final 1/3rd. In Michigan, more than 70% of surveyed participants reported that they improved their employee retention rates by offering Tri-share to their employees.

I want to offer meaningful childcare relief to middle class families in Howard County. We should not force working parents to choose between their career and caring for their children. My plan would improve employee retention; lower the cost of care; and improve both county revenues and the long-term earning potential of parents who haven't been forced into long career breaks to care for their children.

My SCIF Space plan, as mentioned above, is another example of innovation and development focused public private partnerships. Howard County is aggressively building a science and technology hub, and my campaign seeks to supplement that effort by dramatically increasing the County's ability to host Top Secret research projects and facilities by increasing the number of SCIFs constructed locally.

Again, I'm the only candidate running in District 2 that is releasing specific proposals focused on strengthening our workforce and local economy.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT****How will you ensure that small and minority-owned businesses have equitable access to County contracts, incentives, and support services?**

My father is an entrepreneur. I know first hand the difficulty that minority-owned businesses face accessing resources, loans, and contracts. Strong Council oversight should be used to ensure the County is hitting its MBE prime and sub contracting targets. This is why I applaud CE Ball's efforts to conduct a disparity study to determine where there are opportunities to improve MBE participation. And I will eagerly support the report's findings to eliminate existing disparities.

I applaud the County for meeting and exceeding its 20% prime MBE contracting goal in FY25. And I will be a forceful advocate for MBEs on the Council.

**BUDGETING****What do you see as the biggest challenge for the County budget, and how do you plan to address it?**

The biggest threat to the County budget is our macro-economic conditions. The Trump administration's tariff policy is upsetting global trade, disrupting supply chains, and driving up prices for local businesses. The federal government is also slashing federal jobs and funding, which has a disproportionate impact on Howard County's ~21,000 federal employees.

The State is also struggling to manage the chaos in Washington, and has in turn shifted additional costs onto local jurisdictions to close the FY26 \$3B structural deficit. And lawmakers will once again head into legislative session in 2026 looking to close another \$1B shortfall. These enormous deficits—coupled with ballooning education costs (both operating and capital), an aging population, and a looming revenue crisis brought on by federal layoffs – means that the County's next Council and County Executive must be laser focused on growing our private sector revenues.

That is why I'm proposing that the County partner with HCEDA to subsidize the construction of SCIFs to capture the DoD contracting dollars that will flow to the private sector in the coming years.

Both residents and businesses desperately want tax relief. And when I'm out knocking doors and talking to voters, I tell them that we can't cut taxes until we are able to reliably raise revenues. That is why I have focused my campaign on addressing affordability issues and increasing economic opportunity in Howard County.

## BUDGETING

### **What steps will you take to increase transparency, trust, and civic engagement in budget and policy decisions?**

Much of my 18 years of political and policy experience includes community organizing. I find that the government oftentimes has the tools available to meet the public's needs– but the tools are poorly advertised and are therefore underutilized. As Councilman, I will use my platform to organize and educate residents on the importance of local government and its impact on my constituents' daily lives.

This includes hosting events in community spaces; maintaining a robust social media presence; and establishing partnerships with local institutions (i.e. CA) and businesses to bring policy discussions directly to residents in their communities.

## DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

### **Do you share the concern that our road and transit infrastructure is inadequate to support current and future growth?**

Yes.

### **What are your top three priorities for transportation, infrastructure, and public facilities investment?**

I want to increase ridership on public transit– especially the Columbia commuter bus to the Dorsey Marc Station as well as the 315 route to D.C. and the 310 to Baltimore. And pilot first mile/last mile government supported autonomous vehicle ride hailing services from our village centers to Columbia Mall to connect residents to commuter buses.

From an infrastructure perspective I want to establish regional partnerships that will deliver residents and tourists from Baltimore and D.C. to the Merriweather District. Currently, there are no efficient ways to utilize mass transit to and from D.C./Baltimore to access Downtown Columbia's concert venue, mall, and restaurants on nights and weekends outside of rush hour.

As for public facilities, I testified (1:52:00) in support of the new Central Branch Library– a project that will create jobs and much needed affordable housing in Howard County. We must continue to invest in Downtown Columbia and the surrounding retail businesses. As mentioned above, Howard County has a tremendous opportunity to boost local revenues by investing in its tourism and hospitality sectors.



**DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT****How will you work with regional, state, and federal partners to secure needed resources?**

As I've mentioned, MACO is key to establishing functional partnerships on Howard County's behalf. When I become Councilman, I will seek leadership opportunities within the association.

Furthermore, I will leverage my existing network. I've worked in government for nearly 20 years at the Federal, State, and Local levels. I have deep connections in Baltimore City having served as Field Director for Baltimore City Mayor Stephanie Rawlings Blake- a campaign where I was tasked with supporting aspiring Councilman and current Mayor, Brandon Scott. I later served in the Scott Administration as Director of Communications for the Baltimore City Health Department.

I also served as the Director of Communications for the Maryland Democratic Party, where I worked on strategic communications projects with labor unions, county executives, House and Senate Leadership, and the Maryland Legislative Black Caucus. I also have extensive connections in State government as a member of the Moore-Miller administration. And I am blessed to be married to Maryland's top contract lobbyist- Delora Sanchez Ifekauche (Delora and I are regularly featured on Maryland Matters' annual Political Power Couple list).

I've worked for nearly two decades with elected officials and policy makers across Maryland to improve the lives of residents. This vast network of elected officials will be instrumental in establishing productive partnerships that will benefit Howard County for years to come. Again, I am the only candidate in this race with deep relationships with senior policymakers throughout the State.

**The rewrite of zoning and land-use regulations will shape Howard County for decades. What are your top three priorities in this process, and what is your overall zoning and land use philosophy? What outcomes do you expect to see from this effort?**

The past year has made clear how damaging chaos and unpredictability can be to the economy. Businesses need consistent, predictable, and timely regulatory processes in order to grow and thrive. I want to see a zoning process that embraces stability and supports business development.

Second, I support a thoughtful development plan that prioritizes Downtown Columbia's density and fosters greater connectivity among Columbia's village centers.

Finally, I'd like a strategic plan that responsibly expands public infrastructure West of 29. The abundance of apartments in the 2nd District is leading to higher concentration of poverty. And as you may know, high concentrations of poverty correlate with poorer academic outcomes in schools.

I want to see a process that facilitates the redevelopment of the Long Reach village center, the completion of the Gateway Innovation District plan; the construction of the new Central Library and its associated housing; and a reimagining of the Route 1 corridor.

**DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT****What are your plans to encourage redevelopment of existing commercial properties?**

The County must be strategic in its attempts to create thriving commercial districts, and there is an opportunity to expand the types of projects that can be redeveloped by-right. Far too many projects are stalled by years and years of red tape and obstruction. This attitude throttles economic growth and impacts the amount of resources available to invest in schools, infrastructure, amenities, and programs.

**Development is often framed as a conflict between housing growth and school capacity. How do you believe the County should balance school funding needs with new housing development?**

I am the only candidate in this race that has a detailed multi-faceted plan to address this issue. My First Time Downsizer Plan offers a \$20K local property tax credit to seniors who downsize into smaller homes within the County and sell their previous homes to First Time Homebuyers.

This plan accomplishes a number of objectives:

- Drives down prices by increasing the single family home inventory
- Encourages developers to deliver more aging-ready 50+ units/communities
- Keeps our seniors as taxpayers, rather than losing them to places like Florida and North Carolina (as reported by the Comptroller)
- Sidesteps APFO fights because senior communities generally do not impact school populations

Our housing market is fundamentally broken. And my plan is an attempt at generating more annual transactions; increasing the quantity and quality of our housing stock; and affording longtime residents the opportunity to age in place in the communities they helped build.

Again, I want to reiterate: I am the only candidate in D2 that is matching detailed policy with stated priority in this race. My First Time Downsizer Program has been vetted by local developers, housing advocates, realtors, seniors, current Howard County elected officials and more. There is near universal excitement about this plan.

My 18 years of experience working at the Federal, State, and Local levels of government informed my approach to addressing our housing crisis. This is the type of innovative, pragmatic, and consensus driven leadership you can expect from me on the Council. And I look forward to being a friend to the Chamber and its members as I work to fulfill my campaign promise to increase economic opportunity in Howard County.

## EDUCATION

**How will you support stronger school-to-career pathways that connect students with local employers and internship opportunities?**

As I mentioned above, I am in favor of increasing investments in Howard County's Summer Youth Employment program, as well as expanding partnerships with HCC, Lincoln Tech, and local unions offering apprenticeship programs. HCEDA also has a role to play in creating a pipeline of talent from local universities to our burgeoning Cyber Sector.