

Who's  
Running?

# 2026 HOWARD COUNTY CANDIDATE GUIDE



DISTRICT 1  
**JEAN XU**  
DEMOCRAT  
HOWARD COUNTY COUNCIL

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

Howard County has extraordinary assets, including our highly educated workforce, strong school system, diverse population, exceptional quality of life, and strategic location close to Washington, DC, Baltimore, and BWI Airport. My vision is to build on these strengths by making Howard County the most welcoming and accessible county in Maryland for small businesses, start-ups, and diverse industries.

This vision is shaped by my experience as a former small business owner and federal subcontractor. I understand the challenges entrepreneurs face when building a client base, managing limited resources, and trying to grow. As an immigrant who came here over 30 years ago, I have also seen the entrepreneurial drive within immigrant communities. Many bring global networks, multilingual skills, and a willingness to take risks, yet Howard County has not fully tapped into this potential.

I have spoken directly with business owners in Old Ellicott City, the Howard County Office of Tourism, and small businesses across District 1. Old Ellicott City is a unique economic asset that needs better accessibility, marketing, and infrastructure resilience. Route 1 and Route 40 are prime locations for reinvestment in advanced manufacturing, logistics, trades, and service businesses. The Gateway Master Plan offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build an innovation district that supports jobs, research, and entrepreneurship.

As the county grows, construction and redevelopment will continue to create significant job opportunities. These projects should use local businesses and local contractors whenever possible, supporting our own workforce and keeping economic benefits within the county. At the same time, HCPSS and HCC should expand workforce pathways so students are prepared for jobs in construction, engineering, project management, green infrastructure, and other growing fields. This includes strengthening apprenticeship programs that connect students and young adults directly with local employers and skilled trades.

Emerging sectors such as green energy, energy-efficiency technologies, and sustainable building practices may also be a strong fit for Howard County. These industries align with our skilled

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workforce, our emphasis on environmental stewardship, and redevelopment needs, particularly in upgrading aging buildings and improving stormwater and flood resilience.

Howard County is also well-positioned to attract international business. We can leverage our multilingual population and strong immigrant networks, partner with embassies, trade groups, and global chambers, and provide tailored support for immigrant-owned and foreign-owned firms. Route 1, Route 40, and Gateway offer ideal locations for international companies that want proximity to both Washington, DC and Baltimore, as well as access to a diverse workforce.

To realize this vision, county government must become easier to navigate. A strong business climate requires predictable processes, transparent timelines, and customer-oriented service across all agencies. I will work closely with the Chamber of Commerce and business associations to ensure policies reflect real-world needs.

County government should serve the people and make it easy to start, operate, and grow a business here. By unlocking the strengths of our diverse population, supporting small businesses, strengthening workforce development, and modernizing county systems, Howard County can lead the state in innovation, job creation, and sustainable economic growth.

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

Progress must be measured with clear, transparent, and meaningful metrics. To understand whether we are strengthening Howard County's business climate, I will track indicators that matter to both small businesses and major employers.

#### **Business Growth and Investment**

- Number of new small businesses opened each year
- Growth of minority-owned, immigrant-owned, and women-owned businesses
- Expansion in key sectors such as tech, healthcare, manufacturing, tourism, and hospitality
- Increased investment in Route 1 and Route 40

#### **Efficiency and Predictability of County Processes**

- Time required to obtain permits, inspections, and licenses
- Percentage of applications completed within published timelines
- Customer satisfaction feedback from businesses interacting with county agencies

#### **Economic Strength and Revitalization**

- Reduced commercial vacancy rates, especially in aging corridors
- Increase in redevelopment and adaptive reuse projects
- Measurable improvements in Old Ellicott City tourism activity
- Visible progress in implementing the Gateway Master Plan

#### **Workforce Readiness**

- Student participation in internships, apprenticeships, and career-pathway programs
- Employer feedback on workforce quality and hiring pipelines
- Participation in reskilling and upskilling programs

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### **Community and Business Feedback**

- Regular engagement with the Chamber, business associations, and small business owners
- Continuous feedback loops identifying bottlenecks and opportunities
- Transparent public reporting so residents can track progress

These measurable outcomes will guide decision-making and ensure accountability. Progress should be visible, data-driven, and aligned with the experience of the people and businesses who call Howard County home.

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

A predictable and transparent regulatory environment is essential for business confidence. As a former small business owner who has spoken with many business owners across the county, I know how much time and resources are lost when county processes are slow or unclear. Government should be a partner, not a barrier.

### **Streamline Permitting, Licensing, and Inspections**

- Establish clear, publicly posted timelines
- Require agencies to meet published timeframes except when safety requires otherwise
- Create a “business navigator” to guide entrepreneurs
- Expand online permitting and document submission

### **Improve Coordination Across Agencies**

- Prevent conflicting requirements or duplicative requests
- Identify and eliminate bottlenecks in department workflows

### **Modernize Regulations and Support Redevelopment**

- Simplify approval pathways for redevelopment in aging commercial corridors
- Encourage adaptive reuse in Old Ellicott City, Route 1, Route 40, and activity centers
- Ensure zoning rewrite results in clear, predictable rules
- Support energy-efficient renovations and improved stormwater systems

### **Use Direct Business Feedback**

- Partner closely with the Chamber and business associations
- Establish a feedback system for common permitting issues
- Hold regular business roundtables in key corridors

Predictable, efficient processes allow businesses to invest with confidence and help diversify the county's revenue base.

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

A strong workforce is essential to a strong economy. Howard County must ensure residents are prepared for emerging careers in technology, healthcare, trades, tourism, advanced manufacturing, and other key industries.

### **Strengthen School-to-Career Pathways**

- Align curriculum with industry needs through partnerships with HCPSS, HCC, and employers
- Expand Career and Technical Education programs in high-demand fields
- Increase dual-enrollment opportunities

### **Expand Internships, Apprenticeships, and On-the-Job Learning**

- Encourage more employers to host students
- Work with small businesses to reduce barriers to offering internships

### **Leverage Diversity and Global Talent**

- Support internationally trained professionals
- Provide multilingual outreach and career resources
- Promote entrepreneurship programs accessible to multilingual residents

### **Support Adult Learners**

- Expand reskilling programs through HCC
- Strengthen training aligned with county target industries

### **Engage Employers**

- Hold regular workforce roundtables with the Chamber
- Use employer feedback to shape training programs

These pathways strengthen students' futures and support businesses that rely on a skilled local workforce.

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

Public-private partnerships (P3s) are essential to innovation, entrepreneurship, and inclusive growth. Government cannot meet all economic needs alone; collaboration accelerates progress.

### **Support Innovation and Entrepreneurship**

- Strengthen the Maryland Innovation Center
- Provide shared spaces, incubators, and mentorship networks
- Support start-ups in tech, healthcare, manufacturing, and hospitality

### **Strengthen Workforce Pipelines**

- Align school and college programs with employer needs
- Expand apprenticeships and internships
- Support local hiring within redevelopment projects

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### **Revitalize Commercial Corridors**

- Partner with developers and community groups to reinvest in Route 1, Route 40, Gateway, and Elkridge
- Promote redevelopment in Old Ellicott City
- Use P3s to advance mixed-use, walkable, sustainable communities

### **Expand Tourism and Cultural Growth**

- Work with the Office of Tourism and local businesses to market Old Ellicott City
- Expand festivals and cultural events

### **Attract International Business**

- Partner with embassies and international chambers
- Leverage immigrant communities and global networks

### **Drive Inclusive Economic Growth**

- Support minority-owned and immigrant-owned businesses
- Expand access to capital, training, and mentorship

P3s harness the strengths of business, government, and community to build a more innovative and inclusive local economy.

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

Small and minority-owned businesses are critical to our local economy, yet they often face barriers to information, capital, and county contracting. I will prioritize equity, access, and practical support to ensure these businesses can fully participate in Howard County's economic growth.

### **Increase Access to County Contracts**

- Simplify procurement requirements so small firms can compete more easily
- Provide earlier notice of bids and clearer instructions for responding
- Offer hands-on training to help entrepreneurs understand the contracting process
- Break larger contracts into smaller components so small businesses can realistically bid or subcontract
- Review bonding insurance requirements to remove unnecessary barriers, particularly for minority-owned firms that cannot afford high upfront costs
- Break language barriers by providing procurement materials, instructions, and support in multiple languages so immigrant-owned businesses can fully participate

### **Expand Outreach and Technical Assistance**

- Provide multilingual outreach so all business owners understand available opportunities
- Partner with community organizations, HCC, and the Chamber to reach minority-owned and immigrant-owned businesses
- Increase outreach to the areas where many small businesses operate
- Ensure county agencies proactively communicate with business groups that serve minority and immigrant entrepreneurs



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### **Strengthen Access to Capital**

- Promote state and county incentives and ensure business owners know how to access them
- Partner with lenders, CDFIs, and nonprofit organizations to expand microloans, grants, and credit-building programs
- Support financial assistance for bonding insurance requirements so small firms can qualify for county contracts

### **Improve County Services**

- Establish a small business navigator to help entrepreneurs navigate permitting, licensing, and contracting
- Provide transparent review timelines for county processes
- Ensure county systems work well for first-time business owners who may not have prior government experience

### **Promote Inclusive Economic Development**

- Track participation and contract awards to ensure fair representation of minority-owned and immigrant-owned businesses
- Require redevelopment projects to include opportunities for local small businesses
- Identify systemic barriers faced by minority-owned and immigrant-owned firms and address them through policy and program improvements

Equitable opportunity must be built into how we contract, build, and grow as a county. By reducing unnecessary barriers, expanding outreach, addressing bonding and insurance challenges, and strengthening support services, Howard County can ensure every entrepreneur has a real, fair chance to succeed.

## BUDGETING

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

The biggest challenge for the County budget is that we face fast-growing demands while relying on a revenue structure that is too dependent on residents. Howard County is primarily a residential county, and as costs rise, this imbalance puts increasing pressure on both the budget and taxpayers.

At the same time, we must fund strong schools, support a growing aging population, provide services for vulnerable residents, and invest in transportation, public facilities, and infrastructure, and address the increasing need for affordable and workforce housing. When many essential needs depend on limited revenue sources, the county is forced to stretch dollars too thin.

To address these challenges, I will focus on the following priorities:

### **Align spending with community needs**

- Strengthen investment in education, school construction, and maintenance
- Ensure stable funding for seniors and vulnerable residents
- Prioritize infrastructure in areas where growth has outpaced capacity

**BUDGETING****Diversify our revenue base**

- Grow commercial investment so the tax burden does not fall disproportionately on homeowners
- Support redevelopment and business expansion in Route 1 and Route 40
- Expand tourism in Old Ellicott City and attract small businesses, advanced manufacturing, international companies, and start-ups

**Use taxpayer dollars more effectively**

- Identify efficiencies without reducing essential services
- Use investment income and reserves strategically instead of letting funds sit idle
- Strengthen long-term financial planning to prevent sudden shortfalls

**Increase transparency and public engagement**

- Make the budget easier to understand
- Engage residents, small businesses, and community groups early in the process
- Use performance metrics to ensure spending aligns with measurable outcomes

Howard County is financially strong, but we must adapt to rising needs and an undiversified revenue base. By prioritizing what matters most, expanding commercial growth, and maintaining transparency, we can sustain a budget that supports families, strengthens our economy, and prepares us for the future.

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

Transparency and trust are essential for responsible government. Many residents and businesses feel disconnected from how decisions are made. I will make the process more accessible, understandable, and accountable.

**Make Budget Information Clear**

- Provide plain-language summaries
- Create online dashboards tracking major projects
- Publish clear budget timelines

**Engage Residents and Businesses Early**

- Hold listening sessions before the budget is proposed
- Meet regularly with small businesses, the Chamber, civic associations, and school communities
- Include multilingual outreach

**Report Outcomes, Not Just Spending**

- Use metrics to measure progress in education, transportation, and economic development
- Publish regular updates

**Promote Accountability**

- Ensure departments share clear performance data
- Support independent reviews and audits

A transparent, accessible budget process strengthens public trust and leads to better decisions.

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

Yes. Our road and transit infrastructure has not kept pace with current or future growth. Congestion, safety concerns, unreliable transit connections, and aging infrastructure impact commute times, school transportation, emergency response, and the ability of businesses to attract workers and move goods efficiently. These issues directly affect economic development, quality of life, and public safety.

To remain competitive, Howard County must invest strategically in transportation systems, modern infrastructure, and resilient public facilities.

**What are your top three priorities for transportation, infrastructure, and public facilities investment?****Improve mobility and safety on major corridors**

- Address congestion and traffic flow along Route 1, Route 40, and key intersections
- Upgrade traffic signals, turning lanes, pedestrian crossings, and sidewalks to reduce accidents and delays
- Improve access and safety measures that support business operations and freight movement

Improving these corridors supports both residents and the business community.

**Expand reliable transit and multimodal transportation**

- Strengthen bus routes and service reliability, especially for seniors, students, and workers who rely on public transit
- Improve connections between residential neighborhoods and major employment centers
- Expand safer options for walking, biking, and micro-mobility to reduce congestion and provide more transportation choices

A more accessible and connected transit network helps employers recruit locally and reduces traffic on our roads.

**Invest in schools, stormwater systems, and public facilities**

- Address deferred maintenance across HCPSS facilities so students and staff learn in safe, modern, and well-maintained buildings
- Prioritize stormwater and flood mitigation projects, especially in Old Ellicott City and along Route 1
- Upgrade water, sewer, and utility infrastructure to support redevelopment in Route 1, Route 40, and activity centers

Modern infrastructure supports economic vitality and protects vulnerable communities.



**DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT**

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

**Build strong partnerships with state and federal agencies**

- Collaborate consistently with MDOT, the State Highway Administration, and our state delegation to advance priority projects
- Advocate for increased state investment in school construction, transit improvements, and corridor upgrades

**Pursue federal grants and infrastructure funding**

- Target competitive federal programs that support transportation, stormwater, flood resilience, and clean-energy infrastructure
- Strengthen the county's grant-writing and project management capacity to ensure we secure funding and deliver projects efficiently

**Leverage regional coordination**

- Work with Anne Arundel, Baltimore County, and regional planning bodies to coordinate improvements along shared corridors, especially near BWI
- Participate actively in regional transit and economic development initiatives

**Engage the business community and local stakeholders**

- Partner with the Chamber of Commerce, property owners, and major employers to ensure projects reflect real operational needs
- Use business feedback to help prioritize corridor improvements and multimodal access

Infrastructure investment is foundational to economic growth, business competitiveness, environmental resilience, and public safety. By improving our transportation networks, strengthening public facilities, and leveraging state and federal partnerships, Howard County can support responsible growth and a stronger economic future.

**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 zoning rewrite will shape Howard County for decades. My priorities focus on creating clear rules, responsible growth, and a land-use system that supports both economic vitality and quality of life.

Top Priorities:

**Predictability and clarity in zoning rules**

- Provide clear, consistent standards so residents, small businesses, and developers know what to expect
- Reduce ambiguity that leads to delays or inconsistent decisions
- Improve guidance and permitting so people can navigate the process more easily

Predictability builds public trust and encourages business investment.

## **DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT**

### **Align growth with school, infrastructure, and environmental capacity**

- Ensure development matches the capacity of our schools, roads, water and sewer systems, and public safety services
- Integrate environmental considerations such as stormwater management, climate resilience, and watershed protection
- Focus growth in areas where infrastructure already exists, including Route 1 and Route 40

Growth should follow infrastructure and environmental limits.

### **Support redevelopment, revitalization, environmental resilience, and housing affordability**

- Prioritize redevelopment of aging commercial areas rather than expanding into undeveloped land
- Encourage adaptive reuse, mixed-use development, and walkable, transit-friendly communities
- Promote environmentally responsible design and modern stormwater infrastructure
- Support a balanced mix of housing options, including affordable and workforce housing

Redevelopment is both the most sustainable and the most economically strategic way to grow.

### **Overall Zoning and Land-Use Philosophy**

My philosophy is that zoning should serve residents, strengthen the economy, and protect our environment. A successful zoning framework must support responsible growth, ensure fairness and predictability, and reflect the long-term needs of the community.

I believe strongly in smart growth, with new development focused in existing corridors where infrastructure already exists. This approach reduces pressure on undeveloped land, supports local businesses, and makes the most of our transportation and utility systems. Clear and predictable rules are essential so that residents, small businesses, and developers all understand what is allowed and can make decisions with confidence.

Environmental stewardship is another core principle. Our zoning policies must promote climate resilience, protect forests and streams, strengthen stormwater management, and ensure that redevelopment helps reduce flooding risks. Growth must also be carefully aligned with infrastructure capacity, especially for schools, roads, and public facilities.

Housing affordability is an important part of responsible land use. Families, workers, seniors, and young adults should all have options that fit their needs and budgets.

Finally, meaningful community engagement must guide our decisions. Residents should have a voice in shaping the future of their neighborhoods, and zoning should support communities that are strong, inclusive, and sustainable.

Zoning should help Howard County grow responsibly, protecting what makes us special while supporting economic opportunity for all.

## DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

A well-designed zoning rewrite should create a clear, predictable, and sustainable framework for how Howard County grows. ***The outcomes I expect include:***

### **A more predictable and transparent development process**

- Clear rules that reduce uncertainty for residents and businesses
- Faster, more consistent review timelines
- Greater public trust through decisions based on clear standards

### **Growth aligned with infrastructure and environmental capacity**

- Schools, roads, water, sewer, and public safety that keep pace with development
- Stronger stormwater management and flood resilience, especially in Old Ellicott City, Elkridge, and Route 1
- Smarter growth focused in Route 1, Route 40, community centers, and other established corridors

### **Revitalized commercial corridors and stronger economic opportunities**

- Redevelopment of aging shopping centers and underused properties
- Modern, energy-efficient spaces for small businesses, restaurants, and advanced industries
- Increased investment that creates jobs and supports vibrant local economies

### **A more balanced and affordable housing mix**

- Housing options for seniors, young families, and workers
- Support for affordable and workforce housing near jobs and transit
- Reduced pressure on undeveloped land as redevelopment becomes more feasible

### **A future-ready and environmentally responsible land-use framework**

- Standards that promote walkability, transit access, and green infrastructure
- Better protection of forests, streams, and watersheds
- Growth patterns that support long-term economic vitality while preserving natural resources

The zoning rewrite is a chance to shape Howard County's next several decades. With the right framework, we can support responsible development, protect our environment, expand economic opportunity, and maintain strong, inclusive communities.

## **What are your plans to encourage redevelopment of existing commercial properties?**

Redeveloping aging commercial properties is essential for strengthening our economy, increasing our commercial tax base, reducing pressure on undeveloped land, and revitalizing key corridors. Howard County is largely built out, which means the future of economic growth depends on reinvesting in the commercial areas we already have. My approach focuses on making redevelopment easier, more predictable, and more attractive for property owners, small businesses, and investors.

### **Streamline and modernize approvals**

- Provide clear, consistent standards so businesses and property owners know what is required
- Reduce delays by improving coordination among county departments and publishing predictable timelines

## DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

- Offer expedited review for projects that revitalize aging commercial sites or support priority economic sectors

A more efficient approval process encourages investment and reduces costs for businesses.

### **Target reinvestment in key commercial corridors**

- Prioritize redevelopment in areas with aging shopping centers, vacant buildings, and underused commercial properties, focusing growth where infrastructure already exists and revitalization can deliver the greatest economic and community benefit.
- Ensure these corridors receive the infrastructure upgrades needed to support reinvestment
- Align land-use policy and incentives to promote mixed-use, walkable, business-friendly redevelopment

Strategic corridor investment strengthens the county's economic core.

### **Promote adaptive reuse and mixed-use development**

- Make it easier to repurpose vacant or obsolete buildings into new uses, such as retail, restaurants, offices, housing, or community spaces
- Support mixed-use redevelopment that brings jobs, amenities, and housing together in one place
- Encourage walkability, transit access, and design that creates more vibrant commercial destinations

Adaptive reuse is one of the most efficient and environmentally responsible ways to grow.

### **Encourage environmentally responsible redevelopment**

- Promote energy-efficient upgrades that reduce long-term operating costs for businesses
- Strengthen stormwater and flood-mitigation improvements, especially in Old Ellicott City, Elkridge, and Route 1
- Support redevelopment that incorporates green infrastructure, improved drainage, and resilient building design

Environmentally sound redevelopment protects communities and supports sustainability goals.

### **Provide incentives and small business support**

- Promote existing county and state incentive programs that help finance redevelopment
- Strengthen partnerships with lenders, the Chamber, and nonprofit organizations to support small business relocation or expansion into renovated spaces
- Offer technical assistance to help entrepreneurs navigate redevelopment-related requirements

Incentives help make challenging projects financially viable.

### **Engage communities and businesses in planning**

- Host regular roundtables with property owners, small businesses, and residents to set priorities for corridor revitalization
- Ensure redevelopment reflects community needs and supports long-term economic health
- Build trust by keeping residents informed and involved throughout major projects

Community-supported redevelopment is more successful and more sustainable.

**DEVELOPMENT & REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT**

**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?**

Balancing housing growth with school capacity is not an either-or choice. Both are essential to a strong local economy. High-quality schools attract employers and talent, while a range of housing options ensures that workers, teachers, healthcare professionals, young families, and seniors can afford to live in Howard County. A healthy business climate depends on both. The goal is not to stop growth, but to manage growth responsibly so schools and infrastructure keep pace.

My approach includes:

**Ensure growth matches school and infrastructure capacity**

- Tie development approvals to the availability of classroom space, transportation capacity, and essential public services
- Prevent development patterns that overload schools or require costly emergency fixes

**Prioritize redevelopment in key corridors**

- Focus housing and mixed-use growth in Route 1, Route 40, Gateway, and ElkrIDGE where infrastructure already exists
- Reduce pressure on undeveloped land and avoid leapfrog development that strains schools and utilities

**Strengthen school funding and accelerate construction**

- Advocate for increased state school construction funding
- Ensure county revenues—especially from commercial redevelopment—support long-term capital planning
- Modernize aging schools while building new capacity where population growth demands it

**Support a balanced mix of housing**

- Encourage affordable and workforce housing near jobs, transit, and services
- Provide options for seniors wishing to downsize and young families starting out
- Create predictable zoning that aligns housing growth with realistic school capacity projections

**Improve long-term planning and coordination**

- Strengthen collaboration between the County Executive, County Council, HCPSS, Planning Board, and state partners
- Use more accurate enrollment forecasting and long-range capital planning
- Ensure development decisions reflect school capacity not just today, but 5–10 years ahead

When growth is aligned with infrastructure, supported by strong school planning, and focused in areas with existing capacity, housing development and excellent schools can reinforce each other. This balanced approach protects our education system, supports business competitiveness, and ensures Howard County remains a desirable place to live and work.



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

Preparing students for real-world careers strengthens both our workforce and our business community. Howard County's long-term economic success depends on a strong talent pipeline, and students benefit when they can explore careers, earn credentials, and gain hands-on experience before graduation.

My commitments include:

**Expand partnerships between HCPSS, HCC, and local employers**

- Strengthen collaboration so curriculum aligns with the needs of key industries such as technology, healthcare, skilled trades, hospitality, and advanced manufacturing
- Make it easier for local businesses to participate in school-based programs

**Grow Career and Technical Education (CTE) and dual-enrollment programs**

- Expand high-demand programs tied to regional labor needs
- Ensure students can earn industry-recognized credentials and college credits while in high school

**Increase internships, apprenticeships, and work-based learning**

- Partner with employers to offer more placement opportunities
- Reduce administrative barriers for small businesses that want to host students
- Create pathways that benefit both students and employers who need local talent

**Support earlier career awareness and exploration**

- Introduce career exposure activities in middle school and early high school
- Provide students with information about emerging fields and local job opportunities

**Make opportunities accessible to all families**

- Provide multilingual outreach and communication so every student and family understands available programs
- Work with community organizations to reduce participation barriers for first-generation, immigrant, and low-income students

**Engage employers through regular outreach**

- Hold roundtables and feedback sessions with the Chamber, small businesses, and major employers
- Use employer input to refine pathways and ensure programs match real workforce needs

Stronger school-to-career pathways help students build meaningful futures, support employers who need skilled workers, and strengthen Howard County's overall economic competitiveness. This is one of the smartest and most sustainable investments we can make.