



The Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

1015 18th Street, N.W., Suite 200, Washington, D.C., 20036 | 202-349-1498 | www.CaribbeanPac.org

Caribbean-American Political Action Committee (C-PAC) Montgomery County, Maryland – 2018 Candidate Questionnaire

Please return the completed form via email to cpac.dmv@gmail.com by Friday, April 13, 2018.
Responses will be shared with C-PAC’s membership.

Office Sought: County Executive

Candidate’s Name: David Blair

Current Occupation: Candidate for Montgomery County Executive

Party: Democrat

Campaign contact information (Address, Phone, Fax, Email, Website):

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1. Please explain your plan or approach to improve agency responsiveness, outreach, and the quality of the Montgomery County’s constituent services.

A common theme I have been hearing as I talk to business owners, environmentalists, and community leaders is that they feel they are not being heard. And to run a business, you need transparency from your government officials in order to properly prepare for the future. As County Executive, I will make sure that the decision makers hold transparent discussions with community activists and business owners on issues affecting County land use and businesses.

I want to improve outreach with new parents, community leaders, and the business community. One example of how we can connect more families to social services available in the county is through a program called Durham Connects that assists new mothers and newborns in the 18 months after birth and helps identify how the county can best help these families raise healthy children. We also need a debrief session for local business contractors turned down for county work to give them every opportunity to win County business next time.

I will provide a fresh perspective to the voters and an alternative to the status quo through innovative policy solutions that look at best practices from around the world. I am looking to convey a message to the voters that a good county government should work for everyone. My focus will be meeting face-to-face with people all over our county. Montgomery County residents are raising their voices about many important issues, and I will listen – throughout this campaign and after I’m elected.



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2. Are there any legislative or policy proposals, which you support that would strengthen the opportunities and rights of Caribbean immigrants in Montgomery County?

I will promote policies that focus on improving the lives of county residents: more affordable housing, increased education funding, and an economic plan that expands our tax base and creates good paying jobs. Our diversity is a strength. President Trump's embrace of a politics of fear and division nationally makes it all the more important that we foster a community of inclusion and diversity at the local level. A third of our county's population was born outside the U.S. -- that diversity is part of what makes Montgomery County a great place to live.

We should ensure that 100% our high school graduates are college or career ready and that all residents have access to training that enables them to move beyond minimum wage jobs and into the middle class. I will prioritize expanding workforce training, apprenticeship, and internship programs, so that Montgomery County residents can access multiple pathways into higher paying jobs. To address the needs of our immigrant populations, I fully support resources like the Gilchrist immigrant resource center that provide social, educational, and legal services for immigrants. Language and cultural barriers can prevent immigrant entrepreneurs from seeking government assistance. I'll work with the nonprofit community to identify economic opportunities and collaborate on winning methods and techniques to connect these small business owners with services they need.

I recently released a comprehensive program identifying my full jobs and economic development plan. It highlights my initiatives to support the small business community, make Montgomery County more business friendly to new and growing businesses, expand training and workforce development programs, and reengineer our procurement process to make it easier for local and minority, women and disabled-owned businesses to compete for county work. This plan will fundamentally expand and accelerate local Caribbean entrepreneurship.

3. What do you intend to do to strengthen small business access to government contracts?

We need to overhaul our procurement process and make it easier for small businesses to access government contracts. As a CEO, my company was awarded business from dozens and dozens of state and local governments. I've seen good procurement and I've seen bad procurement. We need to be supporting our existing businesses with a robust outreach plan, expanding our marketing initiatives, creating accelerator and wet lab space to support our growing industries, and conducting an aggressive buy-local campaign to shift more spending to local businesses to grow our local economy. We need a debrief session for contractors turned down for county work to give them every opportunity to win next time, as part of my strong buy local campaign. As County Executive, I'll develop a procurement process that promotes our businesses to steer more county dollars to our own. I'll conduct an aggressive marketing campaign to encourage businesses to procure more goods and services from businesses in the County. Des Moines, Iowa embarked on



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a similar initiative and discovered shifting 5% of spending to local vendors could generate more than \$1 billion in economic benefit and as many as 6,500 jobs. If they can do it, so can we.

4. What policies will you support to address the challenges facing DREAMers, the administration's suspension of temporary protective status for many County residents, and the threats facing sanctuary communities?

Immigrants represent a vital segment of our workforce, both as business owners and employees, and contribute to our economy. In 2015, immigrants accounted for half of all business owners in the DC area. As it stands, residents are living in fear. They are afraid of being arrested and separated from their families because of simply going to the doctor, reporting a crime, or grocery shopping. This does not make us any safer – in fact, it forces immigrants into the shadows and allows any potential crime to fester in silence. Immigrants involved in deportation proceedings are not guaranteed the right to a court-appointed attorney forcing people to pay for their own legal defense. We cannot allow beloved members of our community be rounded up simply because they cannot afford legal defense. I will ensure that a fund is established to help pay for the costs of lawyer's fees for undocumented immigrants.

As County Executive, I'll create the MoCoKey, similar to Chicago's CityKey municipal identification card, to provide all residents access to libraries, parks and other county services in order to create a greater sense of community and ensure no one is locked out of benefits. I'll lead a county that supports inclusion and integration of all people and ensure that our local law enforcement resources aren't used to enforce federal immigration laws.

5. How will you support the viability and competitiveness of the Maryland's small, minority, veteran, women, and especially Caribbean-owned business?

We must have salary transparency initiatives to reduce the gender wage gap. We must also work to create a new generation of female and minority leaders through entrepreneurship education. We need to encourage more youth into STEM (Science, Technology and Engineering and Math) classes, we've also got to inspire them to be entrepreneurial from an early age, but encouraging them to innovate, create and imagine. Starting early will help reduce income gaps. We shouldn't be educating the next worker, but rather educating the next CEO and this is especially true for girls.

My economic plans will focus on uplifting minority, women, and disabled-owned businesses by eliminating barriers that make it difficult to open a business that contracts with Montgomery County. Small businesses create more jobs than any other sector of our local economy. We need to support our small businesses by building a strong business outreach and retention program, so we can find out what is not working for our businesses before they leave. Expanding our micro loan program for small businesses, minority owned, and immigrant owned businesses will give



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struggling businesses the tools to grow. We need to eliminate bureaucracy - too often I hear of small business owners are told conflicting information from government officials - we need to be held accountable. To me, that means if an inspector “misses” something that causes our start-up businesses out-of-pocket expenses – the County will be held accountable and pay to remedy the issue.

6. The Caribbean is a strong trading partner with the U.S., and there are opportunities to create economic benefits for both Maryland and Caribbean residents. How do you support strengthening business, social and cultural relations and exchanges between County residents and the Caribbean?

Montgomery County has become one of the most welcoming communities for immigrants because of our strong school system, access to social services and healthcare, and our encouragement of strong cultural relations with nations around the world. We need to not only be welcoming, but also address the needs of our immigrant residents who comprise one-third of Montgomery County residents and half of all business owners in the DC area. The median household income for native born is 38.6% higher than for immigrant and this income gap is getting worse. This needs to change. As County Executive, I will build upon Ike Leggett’s Montgomery Sister Cities, which sends a message that we will continue to be welcoming to these communities, including the Caribbean.

7. What specific actions have you taken or will you take to support the Caribbean-American community in the Montgomery County?

Based upon extensive conversations with County residents, priorities identified by the immigrant community are access to high quality education, high paying jobs, and the safety of their families.

As County Executive, I will work to ensure that 100% of our high school graduates are college- or career-ready with technical and professional training options that enable them to move beyond minimum wage. I will expand workforce training, apprenticeship, and paid internship programs, so residents can access multiple pathways into higher paying jobs. I support pre-K in all our Title I schools and programs for children ages 0-4 to better prepare them for kindergarten.

We will create more jobs here in Montgomery County by supporting our small business community. I’ll reengineer our procurement process to make it easier for local, minority, and women-owned businesses to compete for county work. I’ll embark on a major buy-local initiative that will generate local business growth.

Another issue that has been identified by the immigrant community as a priority is a more affordable county. Affordable housing options increase quality of life, economic diversity and boost educational performance. However, the current options in Montgomery County are too



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limited, forcing some residents to wait an average of 43 months for affordable housing assistance. We need to work collaboratively with developers to find localized solutions that increase affordable housing options. For example, the county owns dozens of parking lots; we could lease the air-rights above these lots to develop housing at a discounted rate, generating more Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDU).

8. Over 3,000 children of immigrants enter Maryland schools every year. Many of them are children of color with cultural idiosyncrasies and language accents or differences, which earn them labels such as "troublesome" or as having ADHD or other disorders. Still others end up in the juvenile justice system. What are your plans to ensure that we have a cadre of well-trained, culturally competent and sensitive teachers who understand and are willing to help these children succeed in school?

As our student population becomes increasingly more diverse, new resources are needed to meet the needs of every student. Closing the achievement gap must continue to be a priority. All students deserve a quality education providing them opportunity for workplace success. As County Executive, I'll ensure every high school student graduates college- or career-ready. Ensuring that teachers have adequate support staff equipped with strong cultural competency backgrounds will be a part of my administration's education plan.

We must also recognize that learning starts at birth, so we need to start early. Studies show that children who engage in formal or informal education in a home setting arrive at school ready to learn and succeed. Access to education at an early age is also essential for closing the vocabulary gap and can make the difference in a child's performance on standardized language tests. While we've made inroads here through programs like Baby Steps, a program that connects new parents to community health services and provides follow-up consultation, we could do more.

I want to connect more families to social services available in the county to educate them on the importance of nutrition and brain development. For example, Durham Connects in Durham, North Carolina provides three nurse home visits to new parents during the first 18 months to support newborns and their families. They recommend community-based programs and services to parents based on demographic risk, including early learning. As County Executive, I'll create a home nursing program to provide free home visits to new parents educating them on ways to enhance their child's development. I'll also establish public-private partnerships to expand early learning and school readiness programs for children preparing to embark on the transition to school.

9. What initiatives will you champion or support to strengthen services and programs for Montgomery County's senior citizens?

Montgomery County is blessed with a growing population of seniors. Our walkability, transportation infrastructure, and quality of life are a big reason so many older adults retire here.



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That's why our county must control rising health care and housing costs that threaten the economic security so many seniors have worked their whole life to achieve.

I will work to protect seniors on a fixed-income by growing our economy and will not increase property taxes to fund our county services. I will also work to expand senior assistance programs that support older adults who want to stay in their homes as they age.

And as County Executive, I will create a county medication management program to reduce prescription drug costs and put more money in seniors' pockets. Throughout my career in business, I made lowering the cost of prescription drugs a personal mission. Better prescription management not only reduces health risks, but it also lowers health costs.

10. What issues are you most concerned about in your run for political office?

1. Closing the achievement gap and investing in our public schools

As County Executive, I will work to close the achievement gap by increasing funding for students in low-income areas, including expanding afterschool programs, creating more summer learning programs, and providing more apprenticeship and internship programs. I want to recognize and expand upon our existing early learning programs, with a goal of making Pre-K available in all our Title I schools. I spent my career building a business in Montgomery County that created hundreds of jobs – I will bring our education and business leaders together to strengthen career readiness programs, so that all Montgomery County high school graduates are on sustainable pathways to economic success.

2. Creating well-paying jobs, increasing economic growth and expanding our tax base

Our recently released Jobs and Economic Growth Plan incorporates discussions with hundreds of employers, government officials, community groups and residents, as well as my own experiences as founder and CEO of a Fortune 500 company with one goal in mind: to identify the best ideas to move Montgomery County forward. Some of the highlights from the plan focus on:

- Making Montgomery County the startup capital of the East Coast by providing incubator space where entrepreneurs can work and live, increasing competitive grants, and providing more educational opportunities in our schools to promote entrepreneurship.
- Supporting our existing businesses with a robust outreach plan, expanding our marketing initiatives, creating accelerator and wet lab space to support our growing industries, and conducting an aggressive buy-local campaign to shift more spending to local businesses to grow our local economy.
- Changing the culture to put Montgomery businesses first by overhauling procurement to steer more county dollars to local companies, increasing our investment in economic



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development to improve our competitiveness, and rewarding businesses that create high-wage jobs with tax credits.

Right now, we are not growing our economy sufficiently nor adding enough jobs to support our population growth. Adding more jobs will expand our tax base and produce new revenue to fund our priorities.

3. Improving our infrastructure and reducing traffic

Montgomery County has some of the worst traffic in the nation. Too many of our residents leave the county each day for work and our economic growth depends on having an efficient and 21st Century transportation network.

To address our transportation issues, I believe there are short-term and long-term solutions. Some of the short-term solutions include making BRT free to incentivize public transportation use, making reversible lanes on I-270, installing adaptive traffic lights that anticipate daily traffic patterns, and creating a local emergency quick action response unit to manage traffic accidents and keep our residents moving. We must get more out of our budget, using proven technology to deliver services more efficiently and at less cost.

The long-term solutions include following through on our transportation Master Plans and creating new transit options for Clarksburg residents, who have been struggling with severe traffic due to the county's inability to follow through. I would work closely with state, local, and federal officials to extend the Red Line to Clarksburg and develop dedicated funding and accountability reforms for Metro. I would also like to see the county follow through with M83, which has been in the Master Plan for decades. For the future, we need to promote jobs and smart growth here in Montgomery County – to help ease traffic congestion for the half-million commuters in Montgomery County and reduce the number of commuters going to Virginia or DC for work.