

Office Sought: Montgomery County Council District 4
Candidate's Name: Kate Stewart
Current Occupation: Mayor, Takoma Park
Party: Democrat
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1. What have you done, or will you do to ensure the interests of the Caribbean community in Montgomery Country are being adequately addressed?

As Mayor of Takoma Park since 2015, I have experience representing a diverse and vibrant community with a substantial immigrant population. Over 30% of our residents were born outside of the United States. Ensuring that the needs of our entire community are adequately being addressed requires constant, culturally appropriate communication and outreach.

During my time in office, I have championed and defended our Sanctuary City status, protected our rent stabilization policy, reformed our police department and worked on reimagining public safety. Under my leadership, Takoma Park became one of the first cities in the country to adopt a racial equity framework for decision-making. I also worked to share learning from our work regionally and across the country. I currently chair the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC) Taskforce to Develop Racial Equity Learning Series for regional leaders and previously served as co-chair for the National League of Cities Racial Equity And Leadership Council (REAL), which brought together elected officials to advance racial equity in cities across the country.

During the years of the Trump Administration, I was an outspoken advocate for immigrant rights at the federal, state and county level, appearing on national television to address threats to immigrants and others in our community. I also worked to proactively advocate for and support communities across the country looking to extend voting rights to non-citizens. Takoma Park has had this policy in place since the early 1990s.

At the state level, I have advocated in Annapolis for key legislation supporting immigrant communities include the police reform efforts, just cause eviction, the Trust Act, and others.

Locally, I have spearheaded programs in Takoma Park to connect our local school councilors, principals, and other residents with legal assistance to assist families with questions about immigration.

2. The Caribbean- American Advisory Group (CAAG) was established by former County Executive Isaiah Leggett and continued by the current County Executive Marc Elrich, if you are elected will you support continuity of CAAG in its current form as an autonomous group

Absolutely! It is critical that County government work with groups like CAAG that can inform County government about issues confronting the Caribbean community,

collaborate on programs and policies of interest to the community, and help connect members of the community to government services and programs.

3. Will you proactively encourage and facilitate members of the Caribbean community of Montgomery County to be appointed to County Boards? Please explain what mechanism your office would establish to give effect to this policy.

Yes. It is important that County Boards are representative of the community. That means that we need to actively recruit diverse board members and ensure that the boards operate in a way to facilitate diverse membership (for example, by meeting at convenient times and locations, facilitating childcare during meetings, and taking other steps to encourage participation by a range of residents). In the City of Takoma Park, we recently updated our Committee structure and started to provide stipends for community members.

4. Please explain what policies you would espouse and implement to make Montgomery County **a safe haven** for undocumented Caribbean immigrants.

First, as we have done in Takoma Park, we need to make Montgomery County a sanctuary county, which focuses on helping residents, rather than determining their documentation status.

Second, we need to make sure county resources are available for immigrants in need, regardless of their documentation status. I have seen first hand the toll that barriers to assistance can put on a community. When people are worried to ask for help because they are in a mixed-status household or because they worry that the request will count against them if they apply for citizenship, the community as a whole suffers. We need to eliminate these barriers.

Third, we need work with trusted advisors in the Caribbean community to make sure we understand the undocumented residents' needs, where the needs are not being met, and how we connect to county resources to address those gaps.

5. Will you support continuity of Montgomery County as welcoming Caribbean immigrants and settlement of the Region's refugees?

Yes. Ensuring that the County is and remains welcoming to Caribbean immigrants is critical to creating a just and fair County. It also supports a vibrant and diverse population and culture in the County.

6. Will you support availability of books by Caribbean authors and about the Caribbean in libraries and in the schools?

Yes. All of our children (and adults) deserve access to a broad range of books in our public libraries and schools. And, it is especially important for people to have access to materials that reflect their rich and varied histories and cultures.

7. *It is difficult to balance crime prevention and community safety with trust and improved relations with local law enforcement. How will you work to strike this balance?*

As the Mayor of a City with its own police department, I have worked on public safety reform throughout my time in office. Improving public safety requires working closely

with impacted communities, businesses and the police to address constantly changing needs.

When I was first elected, I worked to end practices such as the former police chief's practice of photographing young Black men for little to no reason and the use of tinted windows on police vehicles.

In July of 2017, as we were beginning our search for a new police chief, I led the Council in establishing goals and priorities for the Department (with input from the community). These included but were not limited to the top three priorities: (1) promoting public safety while upholding the rights and dignity of all residents, (2) adherence to the guardian, rather than warrior, model of policing, and (3) fostering a culture of transparency and accountability.

In addition, in 2017 the Council also formally committed to forwarding racial equity and applying an equity framework to our decision-making. Members of the Council and City staff, including the police department have attended trainings on implementing racial equity into our decision-making. And last year, we convened a Task Force on Reimagining Public Safety, which provided recommendations to the City, which we are implementing and discussing.

Specifically, one area in which we have implemented changes is traffic stops. Over the last few years, we have reduced the number of stops by declining to make stops for less serious violations and revamped the evaluation and reward system for police officers to promote community safety rather than quantity of enforcement. We have seen a drop in stops without reducing traffic safety.

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