



# The Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

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

[www.CaribbeanPac.org](http://www.CaribbeanPac.org)

## Caribbean-American Political Action Committee (C-PAC) 2026 Candidate Questionnaire

Please return the completed form via email to [cpac.dmv@gmail.com](mailto:cpac.dmv@gmail.com) by 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, March 31, 2026. Responses will be shared with C-PAC's membership.

**Office Sought: Montgomery County Council, District 4**

**Candidate's Name: Rocky Whitesell**

**Current Occupation: Former NIH policy analyst**

**Party: Democratic**

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

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1. *If elected, how would you proactively and consistently engage with Caribbean-American constituents, groups, local leaders, and organizations in your constituency?*

There is a wide gap in civic participation between wealthier, well-connected residents and working-class immigrant communities. Too often, the council hears from the same small group of highly engaged voices while others are effectively invisible in the policy process. That is not acceptable, and I will not govern that way.

Many Caribbean-American residents are juggling multiple jobs, family responsibilities, and sometimes language barriers. They cannot always spend a weeknight testifying at a hearing, so I will go to them. I will spend time in every part of District 4, in apartment complexes, small shops, and neighborhood streets, speaking directly with individuals about what they are experiencing. I will also hold informal listening sessions in community spaces and meet with Caribbean-American organizations and leaders. If those groups are willing to take the time to organize and speak with me, I will make sure I am there and that they are heard.

I will use real-time translation tools so that residents who are more comfortable in Haitian Creole or other languages can speak directly to me. Hearing firsthand experiences, even imperfectly translated, is far better than relying



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solely on filtered reports. Those conversations will directly shape the policies I pursue on housing, public safety, education, and small business support.

*2. How would your office address barriers Caribbean immigrants face when accessing public services such as healthcare, safe, affordable housing, education or social programs that disproportionately affect them?*

I believe we need to focus much more on outcomes and service gaps, not just identifying needs and allocating funding based on assumptions. It's not enough to create programs and assume they're working. County government has to deliberately look for where the system is failing, and that responsibility includes me as a councilmember.

That means examining services from the outside in the way Caribbean immigrants actually experience them. If someone is trying to apply for health coverage, housing assistance, or school support, is the information clear? Is the website understandable in their language? Are in-person staff prepared to help them navigate the process? I would push for regular outreach to immigrant communities in different languages to test whether our public information is actually usable, particularly with the widespread reliance on machine translation. That feedback should be used to make actual adjustments, not just collected. If people cannot navigate a service, that is a failure of the system, not the individual.

*How do you ensure culturally responsive services for Caribbean-American residents across agencies (e.g., health, education, law enforcement, etc.)?*

We need to make sure smaller communities are represented within the systems meant to serve them. Immigrant families benefit when they see doctors, teachers, social workers, and case managers who understand their culture and language. That means being intentional about hiring, but also thinking long term. Our county can support workforce pipelines that help immigrants and first-generation students enter these professions, whether through scholarships, credential recognition, or targeted training partnerships.

*3. What initiatives will you lead and/or support that benefit Caribbean-American small business owners and workers, particularly in industries where they are heavily represented?*



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Caribbean-Americans, many of them immigrants, are heavily involved in small, neighborhood, and family-run retail businesses in Montgomery County, especially in District 4. Commercial areas like Silver Spring, Wheaton, and Takoma-Langley draw people from across the region precisely because of the incredibly vibrant diversity these communities have built. These businesses are unique economic anchors and a key part of our county's economic strength, and we should be actively supporting and strengthening them. That benefits the entire community, not just the businesses themselves.

As a councilmember, I would focus on two priorities: improving their access to customers and making county rules clearer and more navigable.

First, infrastructure matters. Many of the corridors where immigrant-owned businesses operate have seen chronic underinvestment or inconsistent attention. Sidewalks and streets fall into disrepair, construction lingers for long periods, and transit reliability is uneven. When infrastructure fails, small retailers feel it immediately. I am running on the principle that no part of District 4 should be neglected. Reliable transit, safe walkability, and timely project completion are economic development tools for neighborhood businesses.

Second, we need more regular and direct coordination with small retail owners to identify where county regulations are unclear, duplicative, or unnecessarily burdensome. Inspections, permitting, and licensing should be predictable and understandable. The county often talks about expanding business growth, but that effort cannot stop at large developers or wealthy firms. Smaller entrepreneurs deserve the same level of attention and practical support, including clearer guidance, better outreach, and a genuine feedback loop to improve how regulations are implemented.

#### *4. What support would you provide for Caribbean-American students and parents, including language assistance and help navigating the school system?*

A major focus of my education agenda is early literacy. If children are not strong readers by the end of third grade, the odds of long-term academic success drop sharply. That is where we have to intervene most aggressively.



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In a county as diverse as ours, supporting early literacy should not mean pushing home languages aside. Research shows that strong literacy skills in a child's first language reinforce English acquisition rather than undermine it. For many Caribbean-American families, maintaining language and cultural connection matters, and we should treat that as an asset rather than a barrier. Strengthening early-grade literacy instruction, expanding high-quality dual-language options where feasible, and supporting bilingual educators can help close persistent achievement gaps while building trust with families.

At the same time, literacy reforms alone are not enough. Students and parents need people in the system who can help them navigate it. The county's recent reductions in Pupil Personnel Workers and similar support roles are concerning. PPWs serve as a critical bridge between families and schools, helping address attendance issues, connect students to services, and resolve barriers before they derail learning. When those roles are cut, the impact falls hardest on families who are still learning how to navigate the system.

*5. How would you advance partnerships with Caribbean-American community organizations to promote mental health, chronic disease prevention, or other wellness initiatives?*

Different populations face different health risks and pressures, and the county cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach. The most effective way to address that is by working through community organizations that already understand what is and isn't working.

For Caribbean-American communities, that means partnering with local organizations, churches, and leaders to shape outreach and deliver services in ways people will actually engage with. I would prioritize stronger support for community health workers and similar efforts that operate within these networks and can tailor outreach around issues like chronic disease management and mental health.

Health outcomes depend as much on whether people are reached and trust the system as on treatment itself. That is why funding for community-based outreach and prevention has to be treated as just as critical as funding clinical care in the County.



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6. *How will you build trust and conduct robust oversight on local, law enforcement to protect the rights, security, and safety of Caribbean-American residents?*

A central policy of my campaign is the active defense of civil rights, particularly in response to federal actions that have created fear and uncertainty in immigrant communities. The County has an obligation to protect all residents from overreach, and that responsibility extends beyond simply declining to participate.

Building trust starts with clarity. County police should have clear directives to protect residents and their communities, and to ensure that routine interactions do not put people at risk. Officers should also have regular opportunities to connect with and hear concerns directly from the communities they serve.

At the same time, the Council must be responsive in investigating and acting on issues when they are raised. Trust is built when people see that concerns are taken seriously and addressed consistently.

7. *What programs, funding opportunities, or policy efforts will you champion that are aimed at improving outcomes for Caribbean-American communities?*

My priority is making sure Caribbean-American residents have access to just as responsive and usable local government as any other residents. That includes workers, community organizations, and especially small businesses.

In practice, that means improving how county programs are delivered, making permitting, licensing, and services clearer, more predictable, and accessible, including through better language support and direct outreach. It also means ensuring that community-based organizations can actually access county funding and play a role in delivering services.