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

**Office Sought:** Montgomery County Council At-Large

**Candidate's Name:** Karla Silvestre

**Current Occupation:** Director of Community Engagement, Montgomery College/ Board of Education Member

**Party:** Democrat

### **Campaign Contact Information:**

Elect Karla Silvestre

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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?**

I am a community engagement professional and this is fundamental to my work at Montgomery College where I am director of Community Engagement and as a School Board member for MCPS. Engagement must be continuous, authentic, and rooted in relationships. It should not be limited to election seasons or ceremonial events. If elected, I will maintain regular communication with Caribbean-American residents, faith leaders, nonprofit organizations, small business owners, parents, and youth advocates through community roundtables, neighborhood office hours staffed by multilingual staff, and consistent participation in cultural and civic events.

Montgomery County is home to vibrant Caribbean communities, and strong engagement already exists through community organizations, faith institutions, and advisory groups. My office will actively partner with these networks and with county departments that are critical to providing services to our community to ensure concerns raised by Caribbean-American residents are heard early and addressed effectively.

Engagement must also be accessible. That means meeting residents where they are, including churches, schools, community centers, and small businesses, and ensuring communication is multilingual and culturally responsive. During my eight years serving countywide on the Montgomery County Board of Education, I learned that trust is built through consistency.

Showing up, listening carefully, following through, and reporting back are essential. That is the approach I will bring to my work with Caribbean-American residents across Montgomery County.

**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 worked for five years in the County's Office of Community Partnerships as a community liaison and helped county government remove barriers while helping communities access needed services.

Access barriers often arise not because services do not exist, but because families cannot easily find them, trust them, or navigate the systems required to receive them. Caribbean immigrants may face challenges related to language access, complex bureaucracy, work schedules, transportation, or uncertainty about how to interact with government agencies.

My office will focus on reducing these barriers by strengthening service navigation, expanding outreach through trusted community organizations, and ensuring agencies are accountable for reaching the residents they are intended to serve. Information must not only be translated but also clearly communicated and shared through channels that residents trust.

Montgomery County already has important infrastructure to support immigrant communities, including language access policies and immigrant resource programs. As a Councilmember, I will use both the budget and oversight process to strengthen these efforts, improve coordination between agencies, and ensure services are accessible to working families.

On healthcare and social services, I support expanding community-based outreach and preventive care initiatives. On housing, I will continue advocating for policies that increase housing supply while preserving affordability so working families can remain in Montgomery County. On education, I will ensure immigrant families have the support they need to navigate the school system and access opportunities for their children. Government services should work for the people they are meant to serve, and I will work to make sure they do.

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

I am an immigrant from Guatemala and served as Director of the Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center under the Leggett administration. I use both my lived experience and my professional experience to guide my work in ensuring that services are delivered in a culturally appropriate manner.

Culturally responsive services must be embedded in how agencies operate, from hiring and training to communications and accountability. Language access is essential, but cultural

responsiveness also requires agencies to understand the lived experiences of the communities they serve.

Montgomery County's diversity is one of our greatest strengths, and government must reflect and respond to that diversity. Agencies should prioritize hiring staff who reflect the communities they serve, provide meaningful cultural competency training, and ensure communications are clear, respectful, and accessible.

As a Councilmember, I will support stronger cross-agency coordination and consistent evaluation of language access implementation. I will also work closely with community organizations that can provide direct feedback about how government services are functioning in practice.

Transparency is also critical. Communities are too often grouped together in ways that mask disparities in outcomes. When possible, data should be disaggregated so we can better understand how different communities are being served and where improvements are needed. A culturally responsive government requires respect, competence, and accountability. Residents deserve nothing less.

**4. 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?**

Caribbean-American entrepreneurs and workers contribute significantly to Montgomery County's economy, particularly in industries such as hospitality, health care, transportation, construction, childcare, retail, and personal services. Supporting these businesses and workers strengthens the entire local economy.

I support efforts to streamline permitting processes, reduce unnecessary regulatory barriers, and expand access to technical assistance for small businesses. Many small business owners are focused on running their businesses and do not have time to navigate complicated government systems. Programs designed to support entrepreneurs should be straightforward, accessible, and responsive.

I will also support expanding opportunities for minority-owned and women-owned businesses to compete for government contracts and participate in economic development initiatives.

On the workforce side, I strongly believe in connecting education to career pathways. In my work at Montgomery College, I have focused on helping residents access training, credentials, and workforce programs that lead to stable, good-paying jobs. Strengthening these pathways benefits both workers and employers and helps create a more inclusive and resilient local economy.

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

I have served on the Board of Education for eight years and am uniquely positioned to continue to help the school system be responsive to our immigrant community so that our students have the opportunities they need to graduate ready for college or the workforce.

I understand how confusing school systems can be, even for families who are very engaged. I support hiring more teachers, staff, and principals that reflect our community, reducing language barriers, and effective use of our parent community coordinators.

For immigrant parents, language barriers and unfamiliarity with the system can make that process even more difficult. Strong language assistance services, interpretation support, and culturally responsive family engagement are essential.

I support continued investment in language access services that allow parents to communicate with schools in their preferred language. Families must be able to understand enrollment processes, academic expectations, special programs, and opportunities available to their children.

Beyond translation, families also need guidance on how to navigate the system, how to ask questions, advocate for their children, and access resources when challenges arise. Parent Community Coordinators provide this support and I will continue to emphasize their efficient deployment in the schools and that they reflect the community they serve. I will continue to support strong partnerships between schools and families, along with programs that connect students to college and career pathways so every young person has the opportunity to succeed.

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

Community health initiatives are most effective when delivered through trusted community partners. Faith organizations, cultural associations, nonprofit groups, and grassroots leaders often have strong relationships within the community and are well positioned to connect residents with important health resources.

As a Councilmember, I will support partnerships that bring health education, screenings, and preventive care directly into community spaces. This includes initiatives focused on mental health, hypertension, diabetes prevention, maternal health, and senior wellness.

Mental health is especially important. Many communities face stigma around mental health services, which can prevent people from seeking help when they need it. By working with trusted community organizations, we can create culturally responsive outreach efforts that normalize conversations around mental health and connect residents with appropriate care.

I also support funding opportunities and grant programs that strengthen the capacity of community organizations to lead outreach and health education efforts. Investing in community partnerships leads to better health outcomes and builds long-term trust between residents and public institutions.

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

Public safety and community trust must go hand in hand. Residents are less likely to report crimes, cooperate with investigations, or seek assistance if they fear unfair treatment or immigration consequences.

As a Councilmember, I will support policies that protect due process, ensure fair treatment, and make clear that local government is focused on community safety and wellbeing.

Strong oversight is an essential part of that work. Oversight includes reviewing policies, examining data, listening to residents, and ensuring transparency around policing practices. Mechanisms such as police accountability boards, complaint review systems, and public reporting help strengthen trust and ensure law enforcement agencies remain accountable to the communities they serve.

Every resident deserves to feel safe and respected regardless of immigration status, background, or accent. Building that trust requires clear policies, consistent oversight, and ongoing dialogue between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

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

I will champion policies and investments that expand opportunity, strengthen community partnerships, and ensure equitable access to public services.

Key priorities include strengthening language access services, expanding immigrant support and resource navigation programs, supporting small and minority-owned businesses, and investing in workforce development and career-connected education programs.

I also support continued investment in community-based organizations that provide culturally responsive services in areas such as health, youth development, housing stability, and family support. These organizations play a critical role in helping residents access services and navigate government systems.

Montgomery County already has many of the tools needed to support immigrant communities. The work ahead is to ensure these programs are well funded, well coordinated, and

accountable for results. As a Councilmember, I will work closely with Caribbean-American community leaders and organizations to ensure these efforts reflect the real needs and priorities of the communities they serve.

Throughout my career in public service, I have focused on expanding opportunity, strengthening community partnerships, and ensuring government remains accessible and responsive. As a member of the County Council, I will continue that work and ensure Caribbean-American residents remain an essential and valued part of Montgomery County's future.