

# 2022 Baltimore Jewish Council Candidate Questionnaire

**CANDIDATE NAME:** Jeff Garcia

*Briefly tell your personal story and why you are seeking this elected public service position. (Please limit your answer to no more than 250 words)*

The attack on our Capital last year showed me that living up to the oath I swore when I joined the Army would require me to hang up my uniform and run for office. I'm running because I cannot stand on the sideline and watch our nation be attacked from within by those more interested in their own power than the good of the country.

I'm running because I believe that our way of life is never more than one generation away from being lost – and that it is the duty of my generation to rise to the occasion and face the growing threats racial and religious hate, the climate crisis, and the economic failures of the last few decades.

I'm running because my ability to fight means that I must fight to protect and serve those who cannot protect themselves.

This moment of turmoil holds within it the opportunity to create a more just, more equitable, and more prosperous future. I believe that we are capable of creating that future, but we can only do it by coming together and putting in the work to build it brick by brick. I am prepared to put in that work, and I know that our whole community is rolling up their sleeves along with me.

*What are the 2 or 3 biggest challenges facing Maryland (or your district), and briefly describe how would you address those challenges over the next four years? (Please limit your answer to no more than 250 words)*

There is no shortage of crises in this moment. Gun violence, inflation, crime, the climate crisis, and so on. Several of these crises have a common root – the erosion of our democratic institutions. I've spoken with a lot of different people while campaigning and it has reinforced my long-held belief that we are all very similar at our core. Regardless of political party or persuasion, we believe that everyone should have a fair shot, we want to see more affordable and available healthcare, we want to pass down a better world to our children and give them the best opportunities possible, we want to see real action on the climate. We agree on these issues and there is political will towards real solutions on every other issue facing our communities, but we don't see elected leaders reflecting those attitudes because

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our democratic institutions as they are don't reward accountability and results. If we want meaningful progress on any issue, we must start by empowering voters to hold politicians accountable by opening primaries to empower the 20% of independent voters to participate in the electoral process, fixing our broken redistricting process to prevent politicians from being able to pick their voters, establishing public funding for elections to get money out of politics, and implementing ranked choice voting to empower all of to vote for who we actually support, not just who we think is more "electable".

*Baltimore and Maryland are blessed to have so many committed foundations and non-profits. How can government better support the work of these non-profits in providing the care and services needed by vulnerable Marylanders?  
(Please limit your answer to no more than 100 words.)*

I think the government can take a lesson from the front-line non-profits who are assisting our most vulnerable. In my view, a government that is of, for, and by the people is a government geared towards uplifting those citizens who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged by our existing institutions. Put simply – no democracy can exist so long as there are citizens in poverty through no fault of their own. Partnerships with non-profit allows the government to extend support to those most vulnerable hand-in-hand with the people most experienced in protecting the most vulnerable.

*Over the past several years, we have seen a rise of hate and antisemitism in schools, college campuses, and the general community. What could you as an elected official do to help combat this alarming trend?  
(Please limit your answer to no more than 100 words.)*

Antisemitism is a real issue in this country. Over the last 70 years, antisemitism has merged in with racism and right-wing extremism to form this dangerous moment where armed, dangerous, and emboldened domestic terrorists are able to openly preach hate and division. This is not to say that everyone on the right is part of that coalition, but it naïve to turn a deaf ear to the FBI naming out white supremacists and neo-Nazis as the most significant domestic terror threat in the country.

Overcoming this requires a broad approach with layers of policy and community building efforts. First, we can reduce the existing threat by addressing gun violence generally through well designed and implemented gun safety legislation. Going beyond general threats to antisemitism specifically, we need to mitigate the factors that enable radicalization in the first place. Starting early in our schools by teaching our children that people of all religious and racial backgrounds are equal and valid and that our duty as citizens is to continuously create a "more perfect union" through creating a more equitable future over time. Beyond this, working

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with faith groups to conduct outreach to groups and individuals that have started walking the path of extremism, but aren't too far gone to showcase our shared humanity and break down the barriers that are built by that hate. On the government's side, we need to support these activities and ensure organizations within our communities have safe and protected spaces to break down those barriers.

*Do you support continuing the initiatives begun by the state over the past several years to provide security grants to faith institutions, schools, and other entities that are threatened by hate crimes?*

*(Please limit your answer to no more than 100 words.)*

I do. As I mentioned above, antisemitism (along with violence towards Muslims motivated by islamophobia) is on an alarming rise. Our nation has only a few simple foundational principals: liberty, equality, justice. Chief among our liberties is the right to practice each of our religious traditions free of persecution or violence. The practical realities of living up to our values means that we must take additional measure to protect faith groups that are far too often the targets of hate crimes in our communities.

*For more than three decades, Maryland and the Jewish community have jointly invested in developing a flourishing business relationship between our state and Israel – creating jobs and economic activity both here and there. As part of that relationship, Governor Hogan signed an executive order in 2017 prohibiting all executive branch agencies from entering into contracts or conducting official state business with any entity unless they certify that they will not engage in a boycott of Israel during the duration of the contract.*

<https://governor.maryland.gov/2017/10/23/governor-larry-hogan-signs-executive-order-strengthening-marylands-opposition-to-bds-movement-against-israel/>

*Do you support maintaining and enforcing this executive order?*

*(Please limit your answer to no more than 100 words.)*

Israel is a state worthy of our support and assistance, and with my background in the department of defense, I am painfully aware of the very real security and economic threats Israel's sovereignty and continued existence. With that said, I fear I'm too far from the front lines of this very complex security and economic situation to take a long-term stance. I support maintaining enforcement of the order and that I will be working with members of the community to deepen my understanding of the conflict's impact on our community.

*Over the past several years, Maryland has created the BOOST program – a scholarship opportunity to assist low-income families in attending non-public schools. Do you support continuing the BOOST program?  
(Please limit your answer to no more than 100 words.)*

I support fully funding our schools and ensuring that robust and high-quality education is available, for free, to every child in Maryland regardless of their economic status. In practice, this alone is not an effective way to provide that access to high quality education. Rather than focusing on one piece of a loose patchwork of policies, I want well designed and comprehensive investment in our public education. Because anything less than that leaves some of our children behind. Anything less than that is a failure to meet our commitment to prepare the next generation for the challenges and opportunities ahead of them.

*What are your 2 or 3 biggest priorities to help protect the environment?  
(Please limit your answer to no more than 100 words.)*

Fighting the climate crisis, protecting the bay, justice for communities at risk, and economic opportunity are all connected. We need to seize the opportunity by investing in reaching 100% green energy by 2035, and carbon neutral by 2045. And we need to do it with a mind towards advancing labor opportunities and achieving justice for those that will suffer the worst effects of climate change. Within the chaos of the climate crisis, we have a golden opportunity and, if we seize it just right, we can create a more sustainable, more equitable, and more prosperous future for all Marylanders.

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