

2022 Baltimore Jewish Council Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE NAME: Benjamin Brooks

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)

Being reared in a family of thirteen children, my mom gave us three edicts; (1) don't do anything to bring shame or embarrassment to the family; (2) always be in a position to take care of self, and (3) make at least one contribution to society. Hopefully, I did not violate the first two, and I thought the legislature would offer an ideal platform to work on the third. As a Vietnam veteran, I served my country with honor. As a legislator, I serve my community with pride and as a believer, I serve my maker with reverence. I have lived in my district for the past 44 years and successfully ran a business for 40 years. Additionally, I was the first African American Liquor Board Commissioner in the history of Baltimore County. I represented my district at the grassroots level on the Baltimore County State Democratic Central Committee and as a state delegate for the past two election cycles. This variety of experiences has given me the opportunity to view situations objectively and has influenced my approach to the legislative process.

Examples of my method of governance are displayed through policies that reduce income tax and penalties, environmental greenhouse gas emission reductions and renewable energy and storage initiatives.

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)

To be a competitive economy, Maryland does not only need job growth and economic development, but also living wages, equal access to jobs and a diverse, well-trained workforce. Quality of life begins with economic prosperity.

Based upon conversations with my constituents, community associations and fellow leaders, major concerns of my district are the lack of thriving businesses, the need for healthy food options and economic development. I will continue to work on initiatives to revitalize this area and stimulate the economy. During the 2022 legislative session, I sponsored 2 measures to work towards that goal. HB680 provides a tax incentive in the form of a property tax credit to grocery stores that open or renovate in food deserts. SB557 (I cross-filed the House bill) creates the

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West Baltimore Redevelopment Authority. Both measures successfully passed this session.

Another major priority for me is Financial Literacy. Each year I host a Financial Literacy Forum bringing together financial institutions, consumer protection entities, law enforcement, tax professionals and college admissions panel for a community event. This forum provides an opportunity to arm our community with valuable knowledge about finances before they make life-long decisions. I introduced legislation during the 2022 legislative session to establish a Financial Literacy Pilot Program in our Maryland high schools. While this measure didn't pass this session, it continues to be a major priority of mine. Teaching our students these basic personal financial concepts lay the foundation that enables them to make informed decisions as adults.

*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.)*

We need to work in partnership with foundations and non-profits to advocate for policies that foster prosperity for our most vulnerable communities. Offering funding will strengthen these nonprofit organizations and networks for greater quality of life and equity in Maryland.

*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.)*

As a legislature, we need to be alarmed by this trend, raise awareness, educate our communities and be an advocate for stronger protections against such actions of hate. I will work to create communities that amplify our diverse Maryland population and establish neighborhoods in which all Marylanders can feel safe.

*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.)*

Yes. Having witnessed some of the most devastating attacks on our schools over the past several weeks, it is important that all of our children feel safe in an educational environment. A safe and prosperous setting lends to our students'

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growth and success.

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.)

Yes, Israel is a great ally and trading partner to Maryland. We need to continue to preserve and enhance that relationship.

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 have supported funding in the Maryland State budget allocated for the BOOST programs. I think it is important to strike a balance between such funding and the funding of public schools to confirm we are allocating resources to have the largest impact on the most children possible. Quality education for every student will always be one of my highest concerns in the legislature. Securing funding that brings high-need students to private schools is only one avenue to accomplish that goal. Balancing state funding for various initiatives helps to increase educational opportunities of our children.

What are your 2 or 3 biggest priorities to help protect the environment?

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

We must recognize the impacts of Climate Change on our environment. I have supported and will continue to support measures that reduce the greenhouse gas emissions, secure net-zero statewide by 2045, increase renewable energy production and increase residential and commercial storage facilities. I have introduced legislation that offer tax incentives for the installation of energy efficiency products and installation of indoor air quality (IAQ) equipment in residential and commercial properties to move Maryland closer to reaching its renewable energy goals.

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