

NAACP Candidate Questionnaire

Supervisors

Will you support the renaming Robert E. Lee High School? (For School Board candidates “support” means voting to change the name?)

Yes, I fully support the renaming of Robert E. Lee High School. Children should not be forced to go to school under the name of a man who fought to keep their ancestors enslaved. No child should read in her textbook about what Lee stood for and then walk through community buildings honoring his name.

Earlier this year, I wrote a Letter to the Editor in Covering the Corridor where I called on the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, School Board, and Democratic Committee to take this issue up and pass resolutions to change the names of Robert E. Lee High School and the Robert E. Lee RECenter and implement the changes in 2020. The RECenter’s name change has been voted on and approved, and FCDC has passed a resolution to change the name of the high school. I continue to fully support the renaming of the high school.

What is your opinion of the current AAP program?

As someone who from an early age understood that education was my way out of poverty, I support the investment and opportunities that quality education can provide to our Fairfax County students. AAP and higher level classes can allow students to gain credits for their college education and cut down on some costs and may also help them earn a higher GPA. However, what I do not support is the form of segregation that is taking place in our schools through the AAP program. Families that can afford it are going to expensive lengths to have their children evaluated by psychologists, taking private exams, and filing appeals to get their children into advanced academic programs. Other students are being left behind because they don’t have the resources to keep up and access these opportunities.

Moreover, students are entering elementary schools with the cards already stacked against them because of the lack of adequate preschool and early childhood development programs. There needs to be a serious reevaluation of the AAP program and a reevaluation of our priorities in our public schools, with a priority on and investment in universal pre-school and early childhood development in order to level the playing field. We also need a more inclusive and equitable AAP process, which will benefit all of the students in it.

Do you support the use of police body worn cameras? (For Supervisor candidates “support” means voting to fund use of body worn cameras for all Fairfax police)

Yes, I do support and would vote to fund the use of body worn cameras for all Fairfax police. We know that our communities and our police officers are in favor of body worn cameras. In

businesses, nonprofits, and our government, we expect accountability and that is a reasonable expectation for our police force. It also increases their safety.

The use of body worn cameras, when used properly, ensures a proper documentation of all law enforcement stops, which is not just helpful for residents being stopped, but also for officers. The additional training, review, and evaluation between officers and their supervisors will also be beneficial for the police force.

The county has determined a need for new housing to shelter 15,000 new families making less the \$70,000. Because of rising land and construction costs, new units in that price range require some form of public loans or grants. How many of these families should Fairfax County attempt to accommodate and how would you do it? What should happen to those who can find no affordable housing here?

Fairfax County should attempt to accommodate 100% of the 15,000 families who need affordable housing. This does not mean that the county or developers have to bear the whole burden. We must encourage public/private partnerships when it comes to housing by bringing nonprofits, investors, developers, and, most importantly, representatives of the communities that need affordable housing to the table. No one group should bear the costs of the housing crisis - we must work together to share the burden and the opportunity to improve our community together.

Affordable housing is a multidimensional issue in this county -- particularly in Lee District. It's an issue of income inequality with workers being unable to afford rents because they are being paid well below the living wage. It's an issue of rising rents and falling subsidies, causing workers to spend more and more of their paycheck on rent and having less for healthcare, childcare and savings. It's a property tax issue for homeowners and homebuyers who are being priced out of the market. And the inequity is passed down to the next generation - children who grow up in areas of concentrated poverty are disadvantaged on nearly every measure, from school quality to violence to social mobility. Decades of these trends, together with federal, state & local policies that disproportionately impact marginalized communities, have resulted in a systematic shift of homeownership to older, richer and whiter Americans and a housing crisis that is wiping out savings, increasing inequality and reducing the ability of workers to weather the next serious illness, furlough or recession.

The only way to bridge that gap is for cities to deliberately build, fund, preserve and encourage housing that is affordable to the low and middle income workforce. In addition, we must pay our workers a living wage, fund childcare for our working poor, and developing innovative programs to help our residents pay for higher education or receive vocational training so that they can improve their lot in life.

For those living in or seeking affordable housing, we cannot just have a goal of "no net loss" of affordable housing in this county with the development projects that are upcoming. We must be

working to significantly increase the number of affordable housing units. We must plan & build affordable units in places that are accessible to mass transportation. And we must be transparent and proactive when it comes to assisting our residents who are going to be impacted by the loss of current affordable housing to planned development. This should be our number one priority.

Would you support increasing the power of the civilian review panel?

Yes, I would support increasing the power of the civilian review panel. I believe that the panel has been a step in the right direction when it comes to transparency between the police and the community, but there is room for improvement. There needs to be a larger effort on the county's behalf to make residents aware of this program. In Fairfax County, we are often excellent at forming commissions and committees and panels (and having meetings) but bringing that information to residents can be a challenge and we must put equal resources into that effort. Residents need to know where they can file a complaint and what the process looks like. We must make it clear and safe for undocumented immigrants and their families to report complaints and not be in danger of retaliation. Finally, I think the civilian review panel should be able to hear cases that involve shootings.

What do you believe county should do to address the overcrowding in schools?

Overcrowding in schools is something that we need to address practically and urgently because this is a safety issue for our children and our teachers. The School Board has funding in place to build new schools, make minor interior changes, and add temporary classrooms but none of this will fully address current overcrowding. There are schools that are under capacity that could take on new students by changing the boundaries and doing it in a way that does not completely disrupt students' learning and sense of community. There are also government buildings that are significantly underutilized.

We must be committed to proactively planning for and addressing problems like school overcrowding and affordable housing before they become crises and safety hazards. When we wait until students have to go from building to building to get to class or have classes in trailers, we end up with temporary solutions that in the end will cost us more money. If we were proactive in this situation, if we had set aside money to build new schools years in advance, if we had explored changing boundaries of schools and making improvements to existing buildings and classrooms years in advance, we would not be in this situation.

Many jurisdictions have stopped prosecuting possession of marijuana, do you believe Fairfax County should adopt a similar policy?

Yes, I do believe Fairfax County should stop prosecuting possession of marijuana. We know that the prosecution of this offense disproportionately impacts minority communities. While Fairfax County has become more lenient in recent years when it comes to charging a first time offender, there are still policy changes we should be pushing for.

Many jurisdictions are ending the use of cash bail, what is your position on this issue?

I believe that we should end the use of cash bail. Bail should be an incentive to return to court, it should not be used as a tool to incarcerate people who cannot afford their freedom. People now sit in jail because they cannot afford to pay for their freedom as they wait for their court date. This “wealth-based incarceration” disproportionately impacts minority communities. If you cannot afford your cash bail and have to wait days, weeks, months, or even years for your court date, you are in jeopardy of losing your job, your home, and your family.

And when you cannot afford your bail, you must turn to a for-profit bail company and end up paying an expensive, up front nonrefundable fee to simply get out jail. This is a predatory system. We must institute an overhaul to our bail system and encourage our judges to make more informed decisions when it comes to bail options. This will not only lead to a lower incarcerated population, but also communities that can keep their residents employed and providing for their families.

Do you believe that Amazon moving to the area will have a negative impact on Fairfax County? If so, please explain what should be done. If not, please explain.

I believe Amazon has the potential to have a negative impact, but it can have a positive impact, depending on the involvement of the Fairfax County government, businesses, and community members. It is naive to think that Amazon coming to the area will have zero impact on Fairfax County or that there are not proactive steps that we can take to be prepared for this move.

This is an incredible opportunity to attract businesses and potential homeowners to the area, especially Lee District, which will see the development of the EMBARK project, the expansion of mass transportation, and a series of revitalization projects. However, if our leaders are not actively involved in the process in the same way that Arlington and Alexandria’s boards, councils, and business leads are, then we will be left behind and will only be negatively impacted by Amazon.

What is the most important policy the County can promote or adopt to live up to the One Fairfax resolution?

Fairfax County is an incredible place to live, work, and start a family, but we know that this statement is not true for all of our residents. People living here are suffering in myriad different ways. One serious illness, one car accident, or a government shutdown, puts you back in the hole and struggling to make rent or car payments. We struggle to pay for housing, we struggle to choose the right doctors and pay medical expenses, and we struggle to find time for our families after working long hours and navigating long commutes.

Our teachers, police officers, firefighters, nurses, small business owners and government employees can’t afford to live in the areas in which they work. We are persecuting

undocumented immigrants who work hard every day, pay their taxes, and do the best they can for their families. Fairfax County is the 2nd wealthiest county in the United States. And we currently have 46 Title I elementary schools. That's 46 schools with about 50% of its students living in poverty.

The focus of the Board should be, and my main focus is, improving the lives of the residents in our District who are struggling to survive. This includes seniors, struggling homeowners, unemployed workers, and all those in our community who feel unseen, unheard and marginalized. We need continuous incremental improvements and victories that get more high paying jobs in the hands of our residents, more roofs over the heads of our families, and more services for those in significant need -- services that progressively taper off as workers start earning more money so that they are not punished for their success.

If I have to pick one policy - it would be a policy aimed at the elimination (or the lessening) of the so-called "benefits cliff." Current county policies have what is known as a "cliff effect" – when a minor increase in income can cause a swift and total loss of services that make child care, housing and healthcare affordable. The cliff, sometimes called the "benefits effect," can occur when a low-wage worker gains more skills and training, starts earning more money, and then sees a dramatic cut in child care subsidies, housing assistance and other benefits. This cut vastly outpaces the value of the increase in income and leaves a gap in funding that forces parents to choose between the needs of their children and income increases, leading to the potential loss of critical supports. This is a significant issue for a large number of our residents - from millennials to seniors, but disproportionately affects our minority communities.

When the Housing and Community Development office opened its housing choice voucher waiting list this winter, 12,000 people applied and 2,000 were chosen by lottery to be on a wait list of about 2 years. What should be done to assist the other 10,000 very low-income people who applied to the list?

Voucher waiting lists are a symptom of a larger problem: rental assistance funding falls far short of need. Unless funding is increased, thousands of our residents — including children in their most formative years — will continue to spend years waiting. We should be prioritizing the money we spend to ensure that more of our residents have access to decent affordable housing. More money dedicated to county-funded vouchers would help reduce homelessness, cut foster care placements (which are often triggered by parents' inability to afford suitable housing), sharply reduce moves from one school to another, and cut rates of alcohol & opioid dependence, psychological distress, and domestic violence victimization. Significantly investing in housing will help reduce the need for funding of other services.

Alternatively, by reducing families' costs for other basic needs, we would allow them to devote more of their limited resources to meeting their housing needs. Funding that can provide assistance with food, clothing, health care and/or transportation would leave more funds available to pay rent.

Finally, by championing a living wage and/or prevailing wages, the Board can help the working poor in our County have more capability to meet their housing needs.

A new survey shows there are 9,500 market rate housing units affordable to families making less than \$70K in Fairfax County. As land values rise driving rents up and many of these older units are turned into townhouses, we are in danger of losing affordable housing. The county policy is that there should be “no net loss, if possible” of affordable housing. What does “if possible” mean to you? To the county?

I am unsure what “if possible” means to the county. When I am on the Board, I will interpret that to mean that housing is our highest priority and whatever we need to do to make it possible is what I would advocate to do. We have the funding and the capability to place every family who needs affordable housing into affordable housing or to otherwise provide the resources they need to bridge the gap between renting or owning their own home and putting food on the table, paying for transportation, and affording their healthcare.

As I previously stated, for those living in or seeking affordable housing, we cannot just have a goal of “no net loss” of affordable housing in this county with the development projects that are upcoming, the businesses that are booming, and the wealth that is being accumulated. We must be working to significantly increase the number of affordable housing units. We must plan & build affordable units in places that are accessible to mass transportation. And we must be transparent and proactive when it comes to assisting our residents who are going to be impacted by the loss of current affordable housing to planned development.

We can plan and build inclusive affordable housing communities. It will take a Board made up of diverse skill sets, fresh new perspectives and a willingness to be creative and move the community forward - something I am uniquely prepared and qualified to do.