



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

PO Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827 • wdc@womensdemocraticclub.org

Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club 2026 Advocacy Priorities

The Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC) is one of the largest and most active Democratic clubs in the state with hundreds of politically engaged members, including numerous elected officials. WDC members work collectively to elect Democrats, keep voters informed, advocate for state and local issues of importance to women and their families, and provide community education on critical issues.

On April 7, the 447th Maryland General Assembly session ended after an excruciating and challenging 90 days. Looming over the legislature last year was the \$3 billion-dollar structural budget deficit as well as the chaos and uncertainty triggered by the current administration in Washington. The budget was balanced, and impactful legislation was passed, but many worthy bills were left behind, primarily due to the pressures of the FY2026 budget dilemma.

Over the last year, Maryland has been uniquely impacted by the actions of the Trump administration. Federal public servants and contractors, the heart of our communities, have suffered through furloughs, layoffs, and a shutdown. As DC's nearest neighbor, Maryland and its people are often the target of the Trump administration. Our state leaders face great challenges, but as leaders of a Democratic trifecta, they have an opportunity to demonstrate what democracy looks like when Democrats govern and put people, families, and communities first.

In 2026 WDC will be focusing its legislative advocacy on the following key issue areas:

1) Advancing Democracy in Maryland, 2) Children and Youth, 3) Environment and Energy, 4) Immigration, and 5) The Basics.

WDC acknowledges that governing is hard work during the best of times—and harder work in hard times—but we have confidence that the Maryland General Assembly will meet the moment. We welcome any inquiries about WDC's legislative priorities and questions may be directed to Cynthia Rubenstein, President, or Kate Stein, Advocacy Committee Chair. WDC looks forward to a productive and substantive legislative session working with our Montgomery County State Delegation.

Cynthia Rubenstein
President
cyn.rubenstein@gmail.com

Kate Stein
1st Vice President, Advocacy Chair
katelstein@yahoo.com

WomensDemocraticClub.org | 527 non-profit corporation

Keeping Members Better Informed, Better Connected, and More Politically Effective



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

PO Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827 • wdc@womensdemocraticclub.org

WDC 2026 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Advancing Democracy in Maryland

Children and Youth

Environment and Energy

Immigration

The Basics

ADVANCING DEMOCRACY IN MARYLAND (ADM)

Kate Stein and Dorothy Manevich, Co-Chairs

Wylea Chase, Uma Chivvis, Lucienne Deng, Peggy Dennis, Janay Eyo, Jamila Garrett, Camille di Giovanni, Minh Le, Alison O'Brien, Robyn Robbins, and Leslie Scallet Lieberman, Members

Ex officio: Lisa Fuller, Cynthia Rubenstein *Emeritus:* Lynn Olson, Fran Rothstein

CORE ISSUE:

Democracy thrives only when people defend it. The Advancing Democracy in Maryland subcommittee focuses on strengthening our democratic institutions and protecting civil rights. We advocate for Maryland state and local legislation that strengthens democratic institutions and norms, promotes election reform, and better enables the meaningful exercise of individual and collective rights.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES:

This year, as in prior years, we will support legislation that provides for special elections, enables ranked choice voting (RCV), and reduces physical barriers to voting:

- Legislative vacancies should be filled by elections in most circumstances. The current process disenfranchises voters and undermines the democratic legitimacy of the Maryland General Assembly (MGA). We strongly urge legislators to rectify this injustice. We will again support Delegate Foley and Senator Kagan's commonsense, pro-democracy constitutional amendment (2025's HB174/SB002) which requires a special election to be held when feasible.
- We support ranked choice voting (RCV) in all elections. RCV provides voters with an alternative to the two-party system, increases civility in political campaigning, and may lead to more diverse candidates. Ranked choice voting saves taxpayer money and ensures that all those elected are acceptable to a majority of voters.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

PO Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827 • wdc@womensdemocraticclub.org

- We support continuing to reduce physical and other barriers to voting in both primary and general elections including through curbside voting, open primaries, equitable access to early voting sites, and increased use of vote-by-mail.

In the past nine months, we have witnessed increased efforts by other states to suppress youth and minority voting and to nullify the votes of Democratic voters through gerrymandering majority Democratic districts out of existence. We have also borne terrible witness to the corrosive effects of money in politics. And so this year we also look to the Maryland General Assembly to meet the moment and counter these antidemocratic measures through expansion of the youth franchise, mid-cycle redistricting, and expansion of public financing for elections.

- We support focused engagement of youth in democratic institutions, including bills such HB072 (2025), sponsored by Delegate Vogel, to promote the civic readiness and civic engagement of students in public schools. We also support enabling legislation allowing residents over the age of 16 to register and vote in municipal elections.
- Understanding that meeting the moment requires extraordinary measures, we support legislation to enable redistricting in the state of Maryland prior to the 2026 elections if the newly formed commission recommends redistricting.
- We support expanding public financing to state legislative positions and statewide elective offices. Montgomery County's use of public financing offers an example that can help shape such a bill. The vast sums in legislative races and the influence of deep pocketed special interests must be reduced, and corporate donations should be prohibited.

We must do more to advance democracy than promoting commonsense election reform. We can best advance democracy by promoting the conditions that enable it. This year we seek to explicitly advocate for legislation that promotes democratic engagement and a flourishing civil society. We will look to advocate for legislation that:

- Combats misinformation and promotes the dissemination of accurate information and robust political reporting.
- Supports protections for workers' freedom of speech and exercise of their civil rights outside of their work, including the Off-Duty Civic Activity Protection Act (Delegate Lesley Lopez and Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, primary sponsors)
- Enables unionization of employees, including graduate students, at all state universities.
- Codifies EO 01.01.2023.01 enabling state agencies to require Project Labor Agreements.
- Removes barriers to fair unionization through a state-level Labor Peace Agreement law.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

PO Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827 • wdc@womensdemocraticclub.org

- Simplifies the ability of the state to divest from anti-democratic corporations and to cancel and re-bid contracts when necessary; and allowing cancelling of state contracts, for cause, with any entity that supports, whether in Maryland or elsewhere, data mining for unlawful purposes, election rigging, illegal presidential recissions, the construction of private prisons, or unlawful undemocratic activity of any kind.
- Builds multistate coalitions to advance democratic reforms and collective action.
- Enables state action to preserve the rule of law and hold accountable those supporting authoritarian practices.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Karen Finn, Chair

Uma Chivvis, Lucienne Deng, Camille DiGiovanni, Lisa Fuller, James Montgomery, Seva Gandhi, Jamila Garrett, Tamara Rodriguez, Keisha Smith, Members

CORE ISSUES:

WDC advocates for legislation and policies directed at ensuring the wellbeing of Maryland's children and youth, especially those who are under-resourced and under-served. We support efforts on the state and county level to help children and youth grow up to be thriving and contributing young adults. We support legislation to address underlying family challenges and key drivers of children and youth success.

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM:

[Research](#) shows that chronic absenteeism is correlated with poor educational outcomes. Chronic absenteeism grew dramatically among Maryland primary and secondary students during the pandemic, from roughly 20% in 2018-2019 to 27% in 2022-23. Chronic absenteeism's contributing factors vary by age group, individual child, and family circumstances, but common drivers related to the educational system include school climate; overcrowding; lack of attention to early signs of attendance issues; limited excused absences and lack of physical and psychological safety. In addition, community and family factors can include community safety; family illness; and lack of community resources for families such as transportation and housing.

A school-wide approach to absenteeism through a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)—with engaged school leadership, maintenance of school level attendance data, and its weekly review by an attendance committee—can help reduce absenteeism. The MTSS provides for foundational supports; prevention strategies; early intervention when students start to miss



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

PO Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827 • wdc@womensdemocraticclub.org

school and intensive interventions for severely chronically absent students. Also proven effective are community schools, which serve as hubs for neighborhood families, educators, community partners, and other local assets—all collaborating to provide wraparound services that address barriers to learning and success, thus addressing many of the root causes of chronic absenteeism.

A [recent paper by Attendance Works](#), looks at the application of the unexcused absence code in Maryland that could be hindering system-wide efforts to improve attendance, particularly for the student groups with high rates of chronic absence. This practice provides for punitive approaches instead of supports that students with the current list of excused absences receive.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES:

The Children and Youth Subcommittee proposes the following legislative priorities for 2026:

- Modernizing Maryland's truancy laws to ensure non-punitive responses and better monitoring and reporting of absenteeism data. Expand the definition of an "excused" absence.
- Requiring schools with 10%+ chronic absence to establish site-based attendance teams that develop supports.
- Expanding access to evidence-based interventions, including Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), functional behavior assessments, and culturally competent learning approaches.
- Broadening teen access to mental health services, safe "third spaces," after-school and extracurricular programming, and smaller class sizes.
- Strengthening initiatives to improve school culture, reduce bullying, and build a stronger sense of safety and belonging.

WDC will not support any legislation or policy to address the problem of chronic absenteeism that is carceral.

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

Liisi Fidler, Chair

Eli Brennan, Diana Conway, Janay Eyo, Mary Gant, Enid Light, Susan Lilly, Members

CORE ISSUE: The climate crisis affects every aspect of WDC's advocacy. It exacerbates the inequitable structure of our communities and threatens all sectors of society and the environment. Women and their families are directly affected by climate change across multiple areas, with the



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

PO Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827 • wdc@womensdemocraticclub.org

heaviest burden always falling on underserved and overburdened communities. For example: the cost of heating or air conditioning their homes amid more frequent extreme heat or cold, the cost of food when producers face dramatic climatic change for their crops and livestock, and the cost of goods (including food) given the growing vulnerability of supply chains due to extreme weather events. The climate crisis imposes costs beyond goods and services, notably on community and individual health. We will work with key allies to advance WDC's goals in this area.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES: WDC supports legislation and policies at the state and county level that will focus on the following areas:

- **PFAS in our environment**
- PFAS, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are a class of over 15,000 man-made chemicals dubbed "forever chemicals" and found in thousands of consumer and commercial products. In Maryland and across the US, farmers and scientists are sounding the alarm over PFAS levels, including in biosolids widely used as fertilizer. PFAS are known to cause serious diseases and health problems, from multiple kinds of cancer and reduced vaccine efficacy, to high cholesterol, low birthweight, and endocrine disruption through mimicking natural hormones— interfering with all levels of human biology, particularly reproductive systems.
- **Energy and data centers**
Working with The Maryland Data Center Reform Coalition, led by Nature Forward, WDC will support bills to complete a statewide data center study, to address concerns about increasing ratepayer costs due to data center development, to increase transparency in state regulatory review processes and to support tax incentives that encourage wind, solar, and the best available technology for back-up power and battery storage.
- **Cumulative environmental impact on overburdened communities**
Currently, when considering new permits to pollute, Maryland does not evaluate how multiple pollution sources in one area combine to affect public health. This means new permits are reviewed in isolation, without considering the total (or cumulative) impact on local residents' health. The CHERISH Act will apply new permitting requirements to a list of facilities and permit types of greatest concern to overburdened communities across Maryland. If a permit would increase the burden of pollution on an overburdened community, it would not be granted without meaningful conditions imposed and a meaningful Community Benefits Agreement.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

PO Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827 • wdc@womensdemocraticclub.org

- **Make polluters pay**

Marylanders are already paying the price for climate disasters — floods, heat waves, and storm damage are costing families, schools, and local governments millions of dollars. The RENEW Act will require the Comptroller to conduct a study to assess the total cost of greenhouse gas emissions in Maryland and the cost to adapt to the effects of greenhouse gas emissions.

- **Plastic pollution**

Plastic bottles litter our roadsides and waterways and they do not break down in the environment. Plastic bottles instead break up into microplastics and nanoplastic particles that penetrate every corner of the environment and contaminate water, food, and soil. particles have been found in the brain, liver, kidneys, lungs, placenta and testes. Researchers recently identified nanoplastics within bone marrow where it interferes with healthy bone growth. The Bottle Bill or The Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program will address this issue by creating a beverage container deposit program in Maryland with a 10- or 15-cent refundable deposit on metal, glass, and plastic beverage containers, and will achieve at least a 90% redemption rate, compared to the current average 25% recycling rate of containers. This is needed because Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) does not resolve the plastic litter on our roadways and in our environment.

IMMIGRATION

Shelby Settles Harper and Fatmata Barrie, Co-Chairs

Janay Eyo, Gracie LeFevre, Nancy Frohman, Alison O'Brien, Harry Palley, Tamara Rodriguez,
Members

CORE ISSUE:

Immigrants are our neighbors and enrich our state. Many face systemic barriers and threats that have been exacerbated over the last nine months. Building on the success of the 2025 legislative session, WDC advocates for the swift passage of legislation limiting the role of local law enforcement in federal immigration enforcement and strengthening protections for agency data and sensitive locations. Additionally, we encourage the development of legislation that limits the use of face coverings during law enforcement activities in Maryland.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

PO Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827 • wdc@womensdemocraticclub.org

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES: WDC supports legislation and policies at the state and county level that will focus on the following areas:

- **Limiting Local Law Enforcement's Role in Federal Immigration Enforcement**

WDC continues to be concerned about Maryland counties' participation in 287(g) agreements, in which local law enforcement essentially serve as immigration agents. WDC will advocate for legislation or amendment that prohibits voluntary agreements (e.g., 287(g) Program) between local law enforcement and federal immigration authorities and promotes the "safe community" model across Maryland jurisdictions. State-level legislation will enhance community trust and ensure fair treatment across jurisdictions.

This means we support legislation that:

- Bans new or renewal of formal 287(g) partnerships unless very narrowly defined.
- Requires clear protocols for local jail/agency notification of ICE in serious-crime categories.
- Encourages local law enforcement to adopt trust-building policies, such as not asking about immigration status in routine procedures.

Specifically, WDC supports full adoption of the provisions of the initial Maryland Values Act (2025 HB1222) which sought to ban 287(g) agreements (agreements where local law enforcement cooperates with ICE) so that local jurisdictions cannot act as extensions of federal immigration enforcement.

- **Protecting Sensitive Locations**

Protecting sensitive locations from immigration enforcement actions is essential to ensuring all Marylanders can access basic services and support without fear. When immigrant families — including women, children, the elderly and disabled, and mixed-status households — fear enforcement in these spaces, they may forgo critical services, such as medical care, education, childcare, and places of worship.

WDC will advocate for legislation that strengthens limitations on the access of immigration enforcement (e.g., through the components of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), including but not limited to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Border Patrol) to *sensitive locations* such as schools, hospitals, courthouses, places of worship, public benefit offices, and shelters.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

PO Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827 • wdc@womensdemocraticclub.org

- Define and legally protect “sensitive locations” in Maryland statute.
 - Set clear guidelines or prohibitions on ICE or other enforcement actions at those locations, unless under defined urgent circumstances.
 - Establish oversight and reporting mechanisms for enforcement within such locations.
- **Data Privacy & Protection for Immigrant Service-Interactions**
Many states are unknowingly providing ICE and other law enforcement agencies with “frictionless, self-service access” to the personal data of their residents. (See November 12, 2025, letter to Governors from Democratic Senator Ron Wyden and 39 other Democratic lawmakers.) Without protections, immigrant populations are particularly vulnerable to the possibility of misuse by federal immigration enforcement.

WDC will advocate for legislation that strengthens measures to prevent knowing or unknowing disclosure of personally identifying data with federal immigration enforcement.

We further encourage development of legislation that focuses on limiting Maryland and other law enforcement officers' use of face coverings, such as masks, balaclavas and neck gaiters.

THE BASICS

Deb Williams, Chair

Committee Members-Rachel Cintron, Joan Fidler, Gemma Flamberg, Janet Frank, Shelby Harper, Susan Laine, Sarah Maclaughlin, Dorothy Manevich, James Montgomery, Diana Rubin, Shelby Settles-Harper, Amy Shapiro, Susan Strauss, Members

CORE ISSUES:

We face urgent challenges as a state. In the best of times, too many children go hungry and too many families lack shelter. These challenges have been exacerbated by the cruelty of the current Federal administration and compounded by a slow-brewing crisis in affordability. In Maryland, these challenges have reinvigorated our commitment to shared social infrastructure, to ensuring that Marylanders live with dignity and are able to participate fully in society.

The Basics Subcommittee advocates for legislation that seeks to better meet people's “basic” needs. The Basics are those foundational to a decent human life whatever your age, race, ethnicity, or other demographic difference: food, shelter, healthcare, care for children and elders,



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

PO Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827 • wdc@womensdemocraticclub.org

living and family-sustaining wages, the ability to meaningfully exercise civil rights, personal safety, and a sense of fairness.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES:

The key to a solid, strong economy and overall quality of life is a healthy population. Every person should have the right to control her own body, live free of gender and domestic violence, enjoy physical safety and security, and access physical and mental health care and adequate, culturally sensitive nutrition. Specifically, we will seek to support new or amended laws that address:

- **Health and Healthcare Costs.** We support measures to address rising health and long-term care costs, increase access to mental health services and coverage, improve quality care and prevention measures and curb the cost of prescription drugs. In the current climate, protection of reproductive justice, pregnancy outcome protections and health care rights must be addressed and overseen. We also support new legislation for menstrual product access in public higher education spaces.
- **Nutrition Health.** The source and availability of proper nutrition is key. We must address the most basic, mandatory nutrition standards that will leave no child or adult behind. This includes new program initiatives, increasing existing benefits (such as SNAP) and assisting our farmers and growers who are often under-supported and economically disadvantaged in the “food chain”. Supplementing universal meal programs for students from pre-K to college and for our elders are a top priority as well.
- **Housing Infrastructure and Availability.** More than 50% of Maryland renters are cost burdened. Quick action collaboration with Habitat for Humanity, The Montgomery County’s Renters Alliance and More Housing NOW (housing along corridors initiative) is urgent. We need more affordable housing. We also need more housing of all kinds. The need for new residential zoning for “missing middle” housing and low-income housing must be a higher priority this year. We can repurpose existing/vacant and under-utilized buildings for new housing stock as well as support other ambitious zoning measures. We also support legislation to strengthen the rights of tenants and notification of eviction or lease nonrenewal.
- **Care Infrastructure.** Access to affordable childcare/elder care and laws to protect the rights and safety of children and elders is an essential part of an improved economic



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

PO Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827 • wdc@womensdemocraticclub.org

engine. We are supporting legislation to conduct a feasibility study for implementing direct stipends to family caregivers who receive no payment for their services. We favor a review of Maryland caregiver protections, the reintroduction of a birth certificate modernization bill and the establishment of a pilot program where pre-vetted substitute child-care providers can give support to regular caregivers and help keep childcare centers running smoothly.

- **Economic Justice and Working Families.** Issues related to economic health like fair pay and minimum job benefits (including minimum paid sick leave and fair scheduling), worker's right's protection and worker's freedom of speech are part of this important group of priorities and when implemented or upgraded they improve economic outcomes for many people. We support a bill where the coerced debt of victims shifts the debt repayment responsibility to the abusers. Other bills up for introduction, re-introduction or amendment are: construction of a pre-release center for incarcerated women to bring a necessary measure of rehabilitative parity between men and women in the Maryland prison system, an increase in the required number of days between TPO and FPO hearings for domestic violence victims and consideration for early release and alternative healing modalities for survivors of abuse and trauma.
- **Personal Safety.** Addressing various concerns and support of bills introduced in the current legislative season will, if enacted, protect victim identities, protect the rights of survivors from retaliatory litigation and provide protection orders for survivors to close the gap where firearms are involved. There is specific legislation we support to prohibit the sale of Glock switches for certain handguns. This type of legislation has passed in other states and is supported by Maryland Moms Demand Action.

These basic needs are fundamental to a decent life. They are critical social infrastructure that we have too long failed to provide to many Marylanders. While we are not advocating for any specific tax policy, we do believe that the existing ways of funding the basics have not worked, that budgets are moral documents, and that we must look for new revenue and tax strategies that reflect our desire for fairness and equity. It will take brave leaders and new approaches to revenue and tax policy to enable us to both meet the moment and to build the future so many of us want.