MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB
PO Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827 • wdc@womensdemocraticclub.org

Montgomery County

Women's Democratic Club

2027 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 13, the 448th Maryland General Assembly session. The legislature faced then, as it faces now, a $3 billion-dollar structural budget deficit. Looming over the deficit were continuing threats to immigrant communities, Federal programmatic changes and underfunding of essential programs, and ongoing threats to our democracy. The MGA passed: significant protections of immigrants, including a ban on 287(g) agreements; the Maryland Voting Rights Acts; and, in a special session, a constitutional amendment to enable the state to redistrict.

However, much work remains. Bills advancing additional state-level democratic reforms, such special elections, open primaries, and protections for workers' free speech did not pass and remain urgent issues. Many of our Maryland family, friends and neighbors need support. Public education, affordable and moderately priced housing, small businesses, and solar energy all need significant state investment and new policies.

In 2026 WDC will be focusing its legislative advocacy on the following key issue areas: 1) The Basics, 2) Children, Youth, and Education, 3) Democracy and Combatting Authoritarianism Environment and Energy, 4) A Just Economy, and 5) NextGen. NextGen is WDC's youth cohort.

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, Kate Stein, or Tazeen Ahmad. WDC looks forward to a productive and substantive legislative session working with our Montgomery County State Delegation.

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WDC 2027 ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

The Basics
Children, Youth, and Education
Advancing Democracy and Combatting Authoritarianism
Environment and Energy
A Just Economy
NextGen

THE BASICS

Co-Chairs: Izola Shaw and Janet Frank

CORE ISSUES: The basic cost of living is too high for too many Marylanders. Families are struggling to pay for food, housing, healthcare, and care for children, older adults, and people with disabilities. Federal policies that cut support and threaten families are making those costs even harder to manage.

The Basics Subcommittee supports legislation and budget allocation that helps people afford what they need to live with dignity. We fight for lower costs, wages that support a family, safe and affordable housing, accessible care, and strong protections for workers and families. Everyone in Maryland should be able to meet their basic needs, regardless of income or background.

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 their 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:

- **Food Security and Nutrition Health**. Everyone in Maryland should have access to nutritious food. We support strong nutrition standards, new food assistance programs, and increased benefits through programs such as SNAP. Assisting our farmers and growers who are often under-supported and economically disadvantaged in the "food chain". Our priorities include expanding community gardens, strengthening meal programs for older adults, providing free meals for students from prekindergarten through college, and investing more resources in community food providers.
- **Affordable Housing**. More than half of Maryland renters spend over 30 percent of their income on housing, leaving less for food, healthcare, and other essentials. We support the formation of tenant associations, rent stabilization, and stronger protections that help

people stay in their homes. Rental assistance and housing navigators can prevent evictions and help residents find the support they need. We also support making homes safer and more accessible so renters and homeowners can remain in their communities as they age. To expand housing options, we advocate for more affordable homes and homeownership opportunities for residents with low to middle incomes, explore responsible investment in affordable housing by the state pension fund, and push for updates to local zoning laws to allow more homes at a range of prices.

- **Health and Healthcare Costs.** We support restoring funding and care services for refugees, asylees, people with disabilities, and others who have lost access. We support universal healthcare, reproductive justice, and pregnancy outcome protections. We also support legislation to make menstrual products available at public colleges and universities, and better coverage, training, research, and support for women experiencing menopause.
- **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 engine. We support 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**. We support issues related to economic health like gender pay equity and job benefits (including minimum paid sick leave and fair scheduling), the right to organize and bargain collectively, and worker's freedom of speech. 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. We support workers in care, service, and other jobs where women are often underpaid and undervalued.
- **Freedom from violence and discrimination** We will look to support bills that:
    - Protect victim identities protect the rights of survivors from retaliatory litigation
    - Provide protection orders for survivors to close the gap where firearms are involved.
    - Prohibit the sale of Glock switches for certain handguns

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- Protect immigrant families, safeguard their access to essential services, and oppose policies that separate parents from their children
- Confront violence and harassment rooted in all forms of oppression and hate.

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.

CHILDREN, YOUTH AND EDUCATION

Co-Chairs: James Montgomery and Joan Fidler

CORE ISSUES: We will help develop and support legislation in Annapolis and Rockville that improves the prospects of all our children from birth through high school as they engage with all our educational institutions and experiences. We will carefully evaluate legislative proposals emerging from the Blueprint and its five-year assessment. We will focus on early childhood, Early Care and Education (ECE), kindergarten readiness, efforts to support readiness through shared reading, and educational equity in kindergarten and beyond.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES:

Because our children deserve high-quality early education and language learning, we will advocate for:

- Dedicated funding for ECE, our youngest children with disabilities, and dual language learners
- Wage parity and state benefits for early childhood educators
- Increased investment in shared reading and literacy programs offered by our libraries and Imagination Library

We will advocate for policies that provide safe places and meaningful opportunities for all our children to be successful. We will advocate for:

- Universal expansion of school breakfast and lunch programs and SNAP benefits for students in higher education.

- **Mandated student-teacher ratios** paired with scaleable, cost-effective teacher recruitment programs like Teach for Maryland so that every child receives **differentiated instruction**
- Universal access to advanced and specialized curricula and after school enrichment and summer programming
- Increased **wraparound** supports and **mental health and health services** in schools
- Evidence-based interventions in school culture to address racial, religious, cultural, and gender-based threats, bullying, and violence
- Universal access to free public pre-kindergarten

ADVANCING DEMOCRACY AND COMBATTING AUTHORITARIANISM

Co-Chairs: Shelby Settles Harper, Alicia Contreras-Donello, and Dorothy Manevich

CORE ISSUE: We can't take democracy for granted - it's up to us to defend it. This subcommittee works on policies that block authoritarianism and strengthen democratic institutions, civil rights protections, democratic guardrails on technology, and humane immigration policy.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES: We will review, monitor, and advocate for legislation and policies that include:

- **Voting reforms** like special elections, ranked-choice voting, and open primaries
- **Youth enfranchisement** in state elections
- Protections for workers' **freedom of speech**
- **Economic conditions that support democratic participation** – worker protections, access to economic opportunity, and policies that prevent concentrated economic power from undermining political participation
- State actions to **preserve the rule of law** and hold accountable those supporting authoritarian practices, such as government accountability, ethics, transparency, and protections against political interference
- State divestment from corporations that enable unlawful surveillance, privacy violations, and illegal national actions
- **Guardrails on technology**, including worker protection and privacy rights
- **Humane immigration** policies, including increased protection of sensitive locations, data privacy, and regulation of ICE flights entering Maryland domain

- **Coalition-building with pro-democracy groups** to advance democratic reforms across states

ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY

Chair: Liisi Fidler

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 heaviest burden always falling on underserved and overburdened communities. 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** -- Maryland farmers and scientists are sounding the alarm over PFAS, commonly known as forever chemicals, showing up in biosolids used as fertilizer. PFAS, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, is a class of over 15,000 man-made chemicals dubbed "forever chemicals" and found in thousands of consumer and commercial products. PFAS is 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– affecting all levels of human biology, particularly reproductive systems.
- **Energy and data centers** -- Working with The Maryland Data Center Reform Coalition, WDC will support bills in 2027 legislation to pause data center development until stronger regulations will be in place. The strong regulations should 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 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. The CHERISH Act is in direct alignment with environmental justice goals set forth in Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction plan and in MDE's recent Climate Implementation Plan.

- **Make polluters pay** -- Marylanders are already paying the price for climate disasters — floods, heat waves, and storm damage are costing families, schools, state, and local governments millions of dollars. Passed in 2025, the RENEW Act study bill required a comprehensive analysis of climate damages in the state to be completed by December 2026. We expect legislation in 2027 that will shift the fiscal burden of climate adaptation from local taxpayers onto major global polluters.
- **Plastic pollution** -- Plastic bottles litter our roadsides and waterways, and they do not break down in the environment. Plastic litter breaks up instead into microplastic particles that penetrate every corner of the environment and contaminate water, food, and soil; and they have even been found in the human body. 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.

A JUST ECONOMY

Chair: Deb Williams and Claire Everhart

CORE ISSUE: This subcommittee will advocate for fairer tax, budget, investment, labor, and other policies that allow women and their families to have meaningful choices--and enable all of us to build a decent society. We believe that a fairer tax system leads to growth and development. A Just Economy affects every aspect of our lives and of our children and grandchildren.

The current political landscape gives us a rare opportunity to shift the conversation from "How will we pay for it?" to "How do we build a fair system?" And so, we will research alternative approaches to revenue-raising, educate ourselves and our representatives, and build coalitions within government and activist organizations.

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LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES:

We will also support legislative proposals that

- address clear inequities in the tax system,
- invest state revenue and pensions **in our people and our infrastructure**, and
- identify **funding** for essential programs like education and childcare, food, housing, and medical care.

To galvanize conversation around existing tax policy, much of our energy will be focused on education.

EDUCATION: We have an opportunity for big change. Here are some of the learning sessions we hope to offer, some of which will be in the first half of 2027:

1) From "costs" to "investments" -- flipping the script on social programs to balance budgets and prioritize physical and social infrastructure that benefits everyone;
2) Federal, state, and local tax structures – how they are connected and where we should decouple Maryland;
3) Overcoming the roadblocks to tax reform – how scarcity mindsets, systemic distrust, and status quo bias keep us stuck.

The state and country are demanding big change. Poised for big change. We are looking forward to this kind of discussion either as single subject presentations or part of other ones. Our hope is you will see opening these "emotional doors" wider will be sometimes uncomfortable but will also serve to decrease our anxiety and fear of the future.

We will reach out to youth-driven organizations being formed in our county and assist with their creation, mentoring and support for social gatherings and outreach and bringing especially them into the educational process for conversations that are too often missing in school curriculum.

NEXTGEN

Chair: Uma Chivvis

CORE ISSUE:

Students live with decisions made by local and state governments every day, yet most high schoolers lack a vote or a seat at the table. NextGen is a student-led advocacy committee of high schoolers from across Montgomery County pushing for state and county legislation that gives

youth a real voice in local democracy, prepares us for climate change, protects immigrant classmates, and meets students' basic needs at school. Building on 2026 wins that student advocates helped secure, including the Maryland Civic Excellence Program, we will continue pushing for new legislation and full implementation of existing laws.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES:

This year, we will support legislation and policies that focus on the following areas:

Your School, Your Voice Act. We strongly support the reintroduction of the Your School, Your Voice Act (2025's HB 52, sponsored by Delegate Vogel), a constitutional amendment that would authorize counties to allow residents 16 and older to vote in elections for members of an elected county board of education. Students are the people most directly affected by board decisions on curriculum, school safety, start times, and budgets. If passed, the amendment would go to Maryland voters for ratification, and we urge the Montgomery County Delegation to champion it.

Voting rights for 16- and 17-year-olds in municipal elections. Maryland law already allows cities and towns to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds, and Takoma Park was the first city in the nation to do so in 2013. We will support local Vote16 campaigns in Rockville and other municipalities, and support state action to reduce the administrative and cost barriers municipalities face under state election rules. Hagerstown, for example, has faced an estimated $100,000 cost to implement a lower voting age.

Climate literacy in the curriculum. In 2011, Maryland became the first state to adopt an environmental literacy graduation requirement, but climate change itself is not taught consistently and implementation remains uneven. Past efforts, including the Climate Education Week bill (2024's HB 993) and the Climate Education Month bill (2026's HB620), died in committee. We support legislation that:

- Embeds climate literacy across subjects, including science, social studies, and civics
- Funds professional development and teacher preparation for teaching climate science
- Allows student-led climate action projects to count toward the environmental literacy
- requirement and the Seal of Civic Excellence capstone

Protecting immigrant students. No student can learn when they are afraid that going to school could separate them from their family. The Maryland Values Act of 2026 (SB810/HB 1341) designates public schools, school bus stops, and school vehicles as sensitive locations and bars school personnel from assisting immigration enforcement or sharing student data without a valid

judicial warrant. We will advocate for full and transparent implementation in Montgomery County Public Schools, including:

- Training for all school staff, including security personnel and bus drivers.
- Clear communication of students' and families' rights in the languages families speak at home.
- Public reporting, without identifying information, of any enforcement activity at or near schools.
- Protections ensuring that education technology vendors and other school contractors cannot share student data for immigration enforcement.

Free menstrual products in every school restroom, fully stocked. Since 2021, Maryland law (HB 205/SB 427) has required public middle and high schools to provide free menstrual products through dispensers, and since August 1, 2025, in all women's restrooms. But a dispenser only helps if it is stocked. In 2026, Senators Hettleman and Love introduced SB 307 to require restocking. We support legislation that:

- Requires schools to regularly restock dispensers.
- Expands access to all-gender restrooms and at least one men's restroom in every school.
- Provides dedicated state funding for products and dispensers.