

MARYLAND VOTE 2026

MARYLAND PRIMARY ELECTION CANDIDATE SURVEY GENERAL ASSEMBLY DISTRICT 17

VOTE JUNE 11-18 (early voting) | JUNE 23 (Election Day)

ABOUT THE SURVEYS

The Maryland Catholic Conference surveyed candidates seeking office in the General Assembly (as well as Governor and Congress; see separate documents).

Candidates could choose “agree” or “disagree” and/or provide a statement for these questions:

ASSISTANCE TO THE POOR. Funding in Maryland’s budget should be maintained, and when necessary, increased to provide low-income residents access to basic necessities, such as food, housing and healthcare.

ENVIRONMENT. The State of Maryland should support initiatives such as tax credits or grant programs to encourage Maryland residents, businesses and non-profits to reduce their carbon footprint.

K-12 EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS. The State of Maryland should continue to expand existing funding to provide scholarships for low-income students who wish to attend the K-12 nonpublic school best suited for their educational needs.

PHYSICIAN ASSISTED SUICIDE/MEDICAL AID IN DYING. In 1999, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation making it a felony for an individual to assist in another individual’s suicide. Maryland should uphold the law in its current form and reject legislation to legalize the practice of physician-assisted suicide/medical aid in dying.

WHY SHOULD MARYLAND CATHOLICS VOTE FOR YOU?

We encourage you to use these materials and the resources at mdcatholic.org/elections, to help you inform your conscience before voting.

Please note: The Maryland Catholic Conference does not endorse or oppose any candidate, under any circumstance, and no inference of endorsement or opposition should be concluded as a result of the information provided here.



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The positions and statements provided by candidates to a Maryland Catholic Conference survey, plus materials at mdcatholic.org/elections, are resources to help you inform your conscience before voting. **Please also see the separate Governor and U.S. Congress surveys.**

The Maryland Catholic Conference does not endorse or oppose any candidate, under any circumstance, and no inference of endorsement or opposition should be concluded as a result of the information provided here.

Candidate statements follow grid

DISTRICT 17			Candidate statements follow grid				Addl. Comments
			Poverty	Environment	Education	Against Physician Assisted Suicide	
STATE SENATE CANDIDATES							
17	D	Philip Cook	●	●	●	●	Yes
17	D	Cheryl C. Kagan					
17	R	Helene Meister	●	●	●	●	Yes
STATE DELEGATE CANDIDATES							
17	D	Julie Palakovich Carr	●	●	X	X	Yes
17	D	Christopher S. Reed	●	●	●	●	Yes
17	D	Ryan Spiegel	●	●	X	X	Yes
17	D	Joe Vogel					

D = Democrat | R= Republican : Green = agree | Red = disagree | Blank = no response



1. ASSISTANCE TO THE POOR

Funding in Maryland’s budget should be maintained, and when necessary, increased to provide low-income residents access to basic necessities, such as food, housing and healthcare.

DISTRICT 17 SENATE CANDIDATES

17	R	Helene Meister	I support maintaining Maryland’s core programs and investing in healthcare, education, and safety-net services like energy assistance. Many of these programs are federally supported but administered by the state, and they should be preserved and run efficiently. When needs increase, funding should be adjusted accordingly. Public funds should be used in a transparent and accountable way, with a clear focus on delivering meaningful benefits to residents.
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DISTRICT 17 DELEGATE CANDIDATES

17	D	Julie Palakovich Carr	I strongly agree, especially given the harmful actions of the federal government to remove millions of people from Medicaid, SNAP, and other social safety net programs. The State has a duty to act to ensure that all of our residents have daily essentials. In spite of Maryland having a \$1.5 billion budget deficit this year, we were able to expand SNAP benefits and child care scholarships, while maintaining critical health and human services, such as Medicaid, housing, energy assistance, and free school meals. I’m proud that in Maryland we are prioritizing people.
17	D	Christopher S. Reed	I believe it is advantageous for us all to support those less fortunate in what ways we can. Having low in-come housing is an important step towards preventing homelessness. As someone who grew up with my family relying on foodbanks, I believe the need to be supported monetarily by both government funds, and public donations.
17	D	Ryan Spiegel	I am proud of my record as a member of the House Appropriations Committee ensuring that our state budget continues to provide robust funding for a wide array of safety net programs, from food and housing assistance, to healthcare and child care support, to aid for laid-off federal workers, and much more. We have been able to balance our budget without sacrificing these basic tenets of our values. In many cases, we have been able to increase assistance during these challenging economic times. I have also championed legislation to reduce medical debt and expand financial empowerment programs.

2. ENVIRONMENT

The State of Maryland should support initiatives such as tax credits or grant programs to encourage Maryland residents, businesses and non-profits to reduce their carbon footprint.

DISTRICT 17 SENATE CANDIDATES

17	R	Helene Meister	I support targeted incentives, such as tax credits or grants, that help residents, businesses, and nonprofits adopt practical energy-efficient solutions. These programs should be designed with clear, verifiable outcomes and focus on cost-effective measures like energy efficiency and lower utility costs. Any public funding should remain transparent and tied to measurable results.
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DISTRICT 17 DELEGATE CANDIDATES

17	D	Julie Palakovich Carr	Climate change is happening and its harming our planet. During my time in the state legislature, I've voted for numerous bills to tackle climate change, including programs to help residents and businesses to increase their energy efficiency, to promote walking and cycling instead of driving, and to invest in renewable energy. As a result of our collections actions, Maryland's greenhouse gas emissions have been declining year over year. As a state, we should continue to foster ways for further reductions in our carbon footprint.
17	D	Christopher S. Reed	Caring for our shared environment is a tentpole of my campaign. As someone who grew up spending lots of hours outside, I feel deeply that its important for our collective mental health to have access to green spaces. I think tax initiatives, if done correctly, can be a powerful tool to help lower pollution, while allowing residents, business, and non-profits, to adopt cleaner technologies without bearing the full weight of the upfront costs. These incentives can drive technological innovation, create new jobs in emerging clean energy fields, and assist in long term economic growth.
17	D	Ryan Spiegel	As a member of the Subcommittee on Transportation & Environment, I closely review our state environmental agency budgets every year to ensure we are maximizing our existing environmental programs across multiple agencies and making progress toward our bold climate goals. I have also cosponsored legislation to help incentivize efforts to reduce our carbon footprint, expand clean energy projects, improve energy efficiency, and promote cleaner modes of transportation such as transit and electric vehicles.

3. K-12 EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS

The State of Maryland should continue to expand existing funding to provide scholarships for low-income students who wish to attend the K-12 nonpublic school best suited for their educational needs.

DISTRICT 17 SENATE CANDIDATES

17	R	Helene Meister	I support expanding educational opportunity for low-income students, including providing scholarships to help students access the school environment that best meets their needs. Having experienced a system where nonpublic schools operate with public oversight, I believe such programs should be well-regulated, targeted to those in need, transparent, and designed so they do not divert resources from public schools.
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DISTRICT 17 DELEGATE CANDIDATES

17	D	Julie Palakovich Carr	I'm going to be very transparent and say that I am a believer in public school education. My son attends public school here in Montgomery County. That said, families should be free to choose a different education for their children, including private schools. Although I believe that taxpayer dollars should be focused on public education, I have supported the inclusion of independent schools in legislation I'm sponsoring to provide universal free school meals to all K-12 students in Maryland. Hungry kids should be fed no matter what school they attend.
17	D	Christopher S. Reed	Providing educational scholarships gives low income families real educational choice, allowing students to attend the school that best fits their individual needs or goals rather than being limited by home towns. It helps close opportunity gaps by making high quality education more accessible to families who otherwise could not afford it.
17	D	Ryan Spiegel	I attended a parochial school and a Maryland public high school. I understand the importance of supporting public education while creating space for independent schools to thrive. I have been committed to funding the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, our K-12 public education reform. I have also supported the Nonpublic School Health & Security Program and a pilot program for transportation for nonpublic school students, and this year I voted for bills that will improve and expand access to Maryland's Child Care Scholarship Program, giving more families access to private preschool programs.

4. PHYSICIAN ASSISTED SUICIDE/MEDICAL AID IN DYING

In 1999, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation making it a felony for an individual to assist in another individual's suicide. Maryland should uphold the law in its current form and reject legislation to legalize the practice of physician-assisted suicide/medical aid in dying.

DISTRICT 17 SENATE CANDIDATES

17	R	Helene Meister	I support maintaining Maryland's current law prohibiting physician-assisted suicide. At the same time, end-of-life care should remain under physician oversight, with a strong focus on palliative and hospice care to support patients, including those who choose at-home care, and their families.
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DISTRICT 17 DELEGATE CANDIDATES

17	D	Julie Palakovich Carr	To date, 13 other states plus DC have legalized medical aid in dying. I have previously voted for legislation that would allow terminally ill patients to have the choice of how and when they die. This legislation included stringent requirements and safeguards. If the bill had passed, likely many Marylanders would not have wanted to use this option, but some who are facing painful deaths might. I stand by my prior vote to allow people to make the right choice for themselves in consultation with medical professionals.
17	D	Christopher S. Reed	I believe the law should stay as it exists currently, and that Assisted Suicide should not be legalized in Maryland. Maintaining the current law protects vulnerable individuals, including the elderly, disabled, and those facing mental health challenges from coercion during moments of distress. It reinforces the principal role of medicine is to heal and provide compassionate care, not to intentionally end life. The state can prioritize expanding palliative care, pain management and mental health support so no one feels their only option is to die.
17	D	Ryan Spiegel	I believe that recent legislation introduced on this matter contains very significant guardrails sufficient to protect human life and dignity while balancing the need for progress and compassion in recognizing the informed self-determination of a very limited population of individuals suffering from terminal illnesses. Guardrails must remain strong and clear, with powerful protections for vulnerable populations and vigorous prosecution of any abuses to deter bad actors.

5. WHY SHOULD MARYLAND CATHOLICS VOTE FOR YOU?

DISTRICT 17 SENATE CANDIDATES

17	D	Philip Cook	Maryland Catholic should vote for me because I am a Maryland Catholic! As a practicing Catholic I am called to help the most vulnerable individuals among us. I will fight for universal pre-k, universal school lunches, and universal healthcare.
17	R	Helene Meister	As a Catholic, I share a commitment to protecting human dignity, supporting families, and serving those most in need. I support strong healthcare and safety-net programs, expanding access to quality education, and ensuring public funds are used responsibly and transparently. I approach public service with compassion, accountability and respect for all Marylanders, along with a commitment to policies that deliver real, measurable support for families.

DISTRICT 17 DELEGATE CANDIDATES

17	D	Julie Palakovich Carr	My work as a state Delegate has focused on helping the most vulnerable Marylanders. I've sponsored bills to help low-income families with a Maryland Child Tax Credit, fought for protections for immigrants, and made roads safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. Although I may not agree with the Catholic Church on issues like reproductive rights, I am a staunch believer of government working for the people who need the most help. If elected to a third term, I will continue my work on economic insecurity, fixes to our tax code to help families, and pro-democracy election reforms.
17	D	Christopher S. Reed	Maryland Catholics should support my campaign because I respect the dignity of every human life defend the vulnerable and believe public policy should strengthen our families and communities. My priorities align with key principles of Catholic social teachings such as caring for the poor, promoting the common good and supporting ethical leadership. I feel I offer a balanced approach that upholds moral responsibility while addressing real-world challenges facing Maryland families. I was raised Methodist and explored converting to Catholic in 2020, though COVID interrupted it. I'd like to finish.
17	D	Ryan Spiegel	With two decades of experience as a thoughtful, hardworking public official -- first as a Gaithersburg City Councilmember and now as a State Delegate -- I believe I have demonstrated the ability to listen to people's concerns; delve into the complex details of policies and budgets; develop careful and creative solutions and strike reasonable compromises; operate with respect for stakeholders and work cooperatively with others; and deliver real investments and measurable results driven by my values. My long record is the best evidence of how I will continue to serve if re-elected.