

Latino Democratic Club 2024 Candidate Questionnaire

Campaign Profile:

Peter is an immigrant from Greece who was an orphan before being adopted by a working-class family in Boston when he was 2. His father was a Navy corpsman who served with the Marines and became a member of two unions: the Machinists and Hotel Service Workers. After his parents divorced, Peter and his sister were raised by a single mom. With hard work and determination, he was admitted to Harvard, becoming the first person in his family to go to college. Peter worked as many as three jobs during the academic year to put himself through school, so he knows first-hand the burdens created by the high cost of college education.

When Peter graduated, Harvard awarded him a Sheldon Traveling Fellowship. He went to the Thai-Cambodian border and worked in a war zone for the International Rescue Committee, helping refugees fleeing the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. After that, he went to Sudan and worked for UNICEF during a famine and civil war. Peter later went to Yale Law School and became a lawyer. Much of his work is *pro bono*—devoted to helping people in the U.S. and overseas on human rights cases.

Candidate Name: Peter Choharis

Office You Are Seeking: U.S. Congress, Maryland's 6th Congressional District

Candidate Contact Email: choharis@peterformaryland.com

Candidate Contact Number: (202) 875 4889

Campaign Website and Social Media Handles (Facebook/Twitter/Instagram):

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61557344597610>

IG: peterformaryland

X: @Peter_for_Md_06

Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/@PeterforCongressMd06>

Amount Raised (include as of date):

Within only 6 weeks of campaign operations, we have raised: As of April 1st: \$90,000

Cash on Hand: \$68,000+

Other Endorsements: Pending

Questionnaire:

Below is a candidate questionnaire produced by the Latino Democratic Club (LDC) of Montgomery County. The LDC will distribute the questionnaire to candidates for office in the 2024 Democratic primary in Montgomery County for the 2024 early vote. Please submit your responses by April 5th, 2024, to ldcendorsements@gmail.com. Please limit your response to each question to **200 words or less**. Your response will be shared on our website unless you explicitly opt-out; therefore, we encourage you to submit your responses in English and Spanish to make them accessible to all members of our community.

Latinx Engagement

- **Please provide details of your prior involvement or work with the Latinx/Hispanic community in Maryland.**

My wife Lili is an immigrant from Peru as are almost all of my in-laws. I was an orphan and immigrant from Greece. Our two young daughters are growing up speaking Spanish in our multicultural household.

I have not worked directly with the Latinx/Hispanic community in Maryland. Much of my legal practice is *pro bono* and involves international human rights. I have represented *pro bono* clients from diverse backgrounds, including from Latin America. Within the last few years alone, I have devoted 1,000s of hours to *pro bono* matters as part of my commitment to justice and human rights.

Housing

- **According to a study done by Montgomery County planning, those who identify as Hispanic/Latinx are more likely to pay more than 30% of their income on housing than residents of the County overall. This is most pronounced for Hispanic and Latinx renters, among whom 62% are burdened by housing costs. What would be your solution for affordable and quality housing?**

My goal would be to ensure that everyone in the 6th District has access to safe, affordable housing, regardless of their background or income level. I believe that fostering economic growth and development can help achieve this goal by creating more opportunities for affordable housing and improving overall community prosperity.

I would work to fund low-income rent support, especially for our seniors. To tackle the affordable housing crisis, we must also focus on increasing economic opportunity as a core solution. This means investing in programs that create jobs, raise wages, and provide pathways to financial stability. By boosting economic opportunity, more people will be able to afford housing, reducing the strain on affordable housing stocks and making sure that limited rental assistance dollars are available to those in need.

Additionally, I support smart growth strategies that promote affordable housing and sustainable communities. I will also help introduce Community Development Financing Institutions (CDFIs) to the Sixth District, which will provide concessionary loans for low-income housing and promote economic development through business startups. This approach will help ensure that everyone has access to safe and affordable housing, while also helping to address the root causes of the crisis.

Mental Health and health

- **How would you approach the need to both increase access to mental health services among Latino residents and address the shortage of linguistically and culturally competent mental health care professionals? Especially among Latino youth?**

We need to fund access to culturally competent mental health services and professionals, while also working to reduce stigma and raise awareness within the Latino community of mental health issues.

The Center for Disease Control estimates that 1 out of 5 teens have experienced at least one major depressive episode. Often, they self-medicate by turning to alcohol, vaping, or other substances. Nearly 1 in 3 teenage girls has seriously considered attempting suicide and 1 in 5 experienced sexual violence in the past year. We need to educate young people about the signs of depression and other mental health problems and help them create supportive communities to help each other. Funding for school counseling and supporting religious programs can also help along with more traditional mental health services.

Additionally, initiatives aimed at generating higher-paying jobs and economic opportunities can address family stressors that contribute to mental health issues. Strengthening community policing efforts to build trust and address root causes of crime and mental health crises is also important.

Fentanyl

- **The fentanyl crisis has been devastating our community. In Montgomery County, we have seen it disproportionately affect our Latinx/Hispanic youth. How do you recommend that we address this issue?**

We need a comprehensive approach that includes prevention, treatment, enforcement, and community engagement to address the fentanyl crisis, including among Latinx/Hispanic youth. I will fight for federal dollars to support treatment access, responsible prescribing, and accountability.

We also need to implement international supply control measures rather than just focusing on our southern border, as too many on the Right do.

Education

- **Hispanic/Latinx students are the fastest-growing ethnic group in MCPS, with 34% of the student population. The graduation gap of Latinx students has been exacerbated since the COVID-19 pandemic. How would you address the truancy rate in the Latino community and close achievement gaps?**

Investing in programs that provide support services, such as counseling and tutoring, will help students succeed academically.

As the first person in my family to attend college, I understand the challenges young people face in accessing quality education. My personal experience of working multiple jobs to fund my education drives my commitment to improving educational outcomes for all.

Increasing funding for vocational schools, community colleges, and lowering the cost of four-year colleges are central to attracting businesses to Maryland. I also support expanding scholarship and grant programs to help low-income students. I think high school students should be given a chance to begin vocational training and age appropriate apprenticeships with local businesses if they so choose.

Crime

- **Studies show that crime is one of the most pressing issues for Latinx /Hispanic voters. How will you work to both improve public safety, as crime is**

rising in our communities, and make the criminal justice system in Montgomery County more equitable?

Gun violence remains a threat to public safety both in schools and in our communities. And the availability of guns plus teen depression is a lethal combination in the growth of teen suicide rates which tripled from 2007 to 2018. We need to look at gun safety technology to stop school shootings and the misuse of firearms.

I also support strengthening community-policing relations to build trust and address root causes of crime, especially against seniors, single-parents, and their children.

Finally, offering people a realistic opportunity for economic advancement, instead of falling economically behind their parents, is also important for reducing crime, gang violence, illicit narcotics, and mental health challenges. Providing vocational training, community colleges, and affordable four-year college educations can give people real hope that their work will be rewarded with a good paying job and economic security.

• Small businesses are the engine of economic growth and are critical to the financial health of the Latinx/Hispanic community. What would you do to strengthen and create Latino-owned small businesses?

I am a small businessperson and have helped several U.S. startups. I've also helped U.S. investors as well as foreign countries on development projects overseas.

Small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy. We need to help entrepreneurs have access to more capital, technical support, and mentorship programs. We also need to open government procurement opportunities and advocate for policies that support small businesses.

My plan includes:

- Supporting Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) to provide concessionary loans, investment capital, and financial services. There are 15 CDFIs in Maryland, but none in the Sixth District. I am the only candidate advocating this policy.
- Supporting the "Right to Start" initiative, which aims to make starting a business less expensive and burdensome so that owners can focus on growing their business during those crucial first years. I am the only candidate advocating this.

- *Lowering* the cost of higher education to alleviate the burden of high student debt. I am the only candidate advocating this.
- Promoting community colleges and vocational schools while ensuring robust apprenticeship programs.

By fostering a supportive environment and providing the right tools, we can strengthen and create more Latino-owned small businesses, driving economic growth and prosperity.

Immigration

- **What programs or legislation do you think would best support our immigration residents who do not have access to federal funding in Montgomery County?**

Ever since I worked for UNICEF in Sudan, I have been acutely aware of the dangers posed to unaccompanied minors, including exposure to human trafficking and other predations. That is why I support the Protect Vulnerable Immigrant Youth Act to provide humanitarian protection to abused, neglected or abandoned youth. I also support the Alien Children (UAC) Program, which provides food, shelter, medical care, and other support for unaccompanied minors.

- **Do you support a comprehensive immigration reform that better supports and protects those who have been displaced by war and seek asylum? If elected, what would your priorities be to change our current system?**

I am an immigrant, as are my wife, sister, and almost all my in-laws. I have worked with refugees in Asia and Africa. But our borders are overwhelmed. I would urge the Administration to do as much as it can through Executive Orders, vote for the Senate bill, and then continue to advocate for the Dream Act.

We also need new approaches to our policies in Central and Latin America, where insecurity, drug violence, and poverty are pushing people to seek safety and economic security in the U.S. And secure borders must work both ways: 90% of guns in Haiti come from the United States; US weaponry is helping Venezuelan gangs threaten a civil war.

My aim is to create a more humane and effective immigration system that reflects our nation's values as a land of immigrants, while still protecting our national security.