



2026 Board of County Commissioners
Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE: AnnMarie K. Abell
OFFICE SOUGHT: County Commissioner President
CAMPAIGN ADDRESS: [REDACTED]
PHONE NUMBER(S): [REDACTED]
CAMPAIGN EMAIL: [REDACTED]
CAMPAIGN WEBSITE: abellforstmarys.com

I confirm that the responses provided here are my official positions in seeking local office and I understand that EASMC reserves the right to share my responses with members and interested parties.

CANDIDATE SIGNATURE: *Please see separate file with signed Cover page* DATE SUBMITTED:

Candidates: To be considered for a recommendation, you must indicate your response to each of the questions. You may use more space than is provided to elaborate on your answers and provide clarification, explanation, and other context, but please be certain to clearly indicate the questions(s) to which you refer. Please return your completed and signed questionnaire to EASMC.

Education Funding and Local Budgets:

1. Do you commit to prioritizing public education funding in future county budgets? What are your top three budget priorities for the public school system?

Yes, I do commit to prioritizing public education funding in future county budgets. In so many ways, public education is a collective investment in the whole of our community's future. My top three budget priorities for the public school system are based on what it takes to educate students now; and for students *and* educators to be prepared for the future as it unfolds. #1 Educator Salaries and Benefits—Taking care of our educators through honoring negotiated agreements and benefits; #2 Facilities and Programs—Ensuring educators have the resources, training, facilities, tools, building maintenance, etc. needed to educate and train our students; and ensuring students' education needs are met too. #3 Upkeep and Improvements—Removing barriers to supporting our educators and students and for getting those necessary resources; keeping what we know works; letting go of what is failing or no longer value added; being innovative; and active monitoring of processes and implemented solutions in support of the education mission.

2. How do you plan to fund public school priorities? What are your thoughts on the current county tax and revenue structure and any actions you would take to update the tax code to promote fairness and equity?

I plan to fund public school priorities primarily from the county's tax revenue collected from residents, businesses, developers and possibly other entities. I believe a fair and equitable equation needs to be developed that shares the responsibility and takes into account the effects of growth on our infrastructure. I'll be the first to admit, I need to get smarter on this topic

I think the last several years have seen an approach from the CSMC that has lacked foresight, continuity, and stability into what should be in the revenue equation for funding public schools. The county income tax has gone up and down a number of times. The past amounts for the impact fees varied exacerbating the situation including ignoring the estimated impact costs nearing \$24,000 per dwelling to fund the county services impacted by the growth we have going on here. The impact fee is gone and in its place, the excise tax. Now, the excise tax of \$6700 maybe be changed because its failing to meet the moment. This all seems to me a band aid approach and a mess to be cleaned up. It seems that there are some developers and chain stores getting tax breaks at our expense.

I'll lead the discussion and action on the creation of a fair and equitable equation. We should seriously consider whether square footage of the building gets factored in. The goal is to ensure the equation covers as close as possible the estimated impact to our county services as is realistically possible.

It is my responsibility as President, and that of the CSMC Board to work with our state delegation on this.

3. How would you utilize your budget authority to address shortfalls facing our schools if the state or federal government reduces their commitment(s)?

This is happening now; we have to always be prepared for this reality. I'm committed to prioritizing public education in our county budget. I'll constantly work on finding ways to prevent and address exposed shortfalls within what is my county budget authority. I foresee many discussions about "What If" scenarios and analyses of budget compromises and tradeoffs. I'll lead the CSMC in exploring other potential sources of revenue. I'll advocate for our county with both our state delegation and congressional representatives to follow-through on their commitments and to work with them on a continuous basis.

4. In many schools, educators are dealing with high class sizes and caseloads. How will you help address critical concerns with educator recruitment and retention in order to ensure we can increase staffing to reduce class sizes and caseloads?

Why haven't we been able to achieve the goals of reducing class sizes and caseloads? Two reasons cited—educator recruitment and retention.

I'm open to having a conversation about the challenges of our 2nd largest employer in the county. I want to get to and understand the root causes for why and what are the challenges to educator recruitment and retention. What are the educators saying? What are the recruiters saying? What are the reasons for them leaving? What data has been gathered and analyses conducted to date? What actions have been taken and what were the results? I'll need to know and understand the answers to these questions to know how to tackle these critical concerns together.

I know we have a serious shortfall in workforce and low income housing inventory. I know our workforce is facing difficulties with access to financing and matching that with a dwelling that meets their needs to either buy or rent. I understand we compete with our sister counties for the same pool of workers and their jobs paying more. We compete with those related to the base too. Has there been any kind of county-led or community effort to find out all the why's?

Its very important that we, the entire community, pay attention to these issues so we can be proactive and address the identified barriers to successful educator recruitment and retention, then, help by putting solutions in place to resolve them. I realize these solutions are likely to require funding.

5. Do you commit to honoring the role of your elected body in upholding the policy and funding mandates associated with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future?

X _____ YES

_____ NO

How can you help with the shortfall?

Either use a current revenue mechanism (if doable/allowable) or create a dedicated revenue mechanism specifically for the Blueprint.

6. Please discuss your philosophy related to charter schools. Do you believe they should be expanded in our county public school structure?

I like innovative ways of doing things as long as they get the desired results. A public charter school seems to me to be another way to educate students. I believe there is room for charter schools in our public education system.

The Chesapeake Public Charter School, which opened in 2007, has grown in enrollment and class offerings. I need more information about our current public charter school outcomes and an understanding of what the demand is for expansion.

7. How will your budget address increased needs for mental health supports for students and educators in our community, where mental health access is so limited?

This is part of an overall health and wellness issue for our county. We should address mental health support like we support physical health for our students. It should be prevalent in our schools and it should be included in the budget. The recent stabbing at GMHS underscores this as do other incidents in the schools.

As a Commissioner, I need to see mental health addressed and provided for the community at large.

8. What is your opinion on local efforts to create and support community schools?

Community schools make sense to me and local efforts should continue to create and support them. They are a caring and accessible resource for the children and families who need them. My understanding is they provide for meeting basic needs so the child can focus on learning. As a parent, it must be comforting to know that your neighborhood school community has your back and your children too.

9. SMCPS is in a period of enrollment decline. Our newest building is 10 years old. What should influence any decisions to redistrict?

The responses to these questions should influence the decisions for redistricting. Why is enrollment declining? What factors are contributing to the decline and what is the probability they'll remain? What are the trends? What is our county's rate of population growth and do we anticipate continued growth? How far into the future? Where in the county? Is it concentrated? What new developments are coming online, where and when? What is the current state of our buildings including their maintenance and upkeep? What are the school's capacities and current enrollment? What is the feedback from the community about the proposal? What makes sense and what does not from the community's perspective? What is the timetable and what parts of the proposal can be delayed? What is the cost outlay or avoidance in a redistricting proposal? Is it worth the costs?

Public Funding for Private Schools:

10. Do you support or oppose allocating public funding to non-public school students through voucher programs?

_____ SUPPORT X OPPOSE

Additional comments:

Public education, as a public good and service, is provided to all children and parents through our taxes as a collective investment in our community, state and country. Parents are free to choose how they want their children educated including their willingness to pay for a non-public school. Public schools then become an education safety net for those parents and children whenever it becomes necessary. By disallowing vouchers, public funds remain dedicated to the purpose of public education.

11. Do you support or oppose allowing non-public school students to participate in public school extracurricular activities (sports, clubs, etc.)?

 X SUPPORT _____ OPPOSE

Additional comments:

I need more information about the pros and cons about this especially for the increased costs and demand for resources associated with an increase in participation. What counties or states are doing this now? I think I could support this because I want children to have the opportunity to participate and benefit from these activities. It's like a hybrid approach. What is the current demand in our public schools?

Collective Bargaining:

12. Do you support or oppose school employees gaining the right to strike?

 X SUPPORT _____ OPPOSE

Additional comments:

I think if I support an employees union, I should support their right to strike too. I understand its use as a negotiation leverage for unions. However, I'm unsure about an educators union. It does make me think about what does this mean for school days and the impact to students and parents. Please tell me more.

13. What is your understanding of the nature of the relationship between the Board of Education, Superintendent, county government, and union as it relates to negotiations, budget development, and administration of schools? How do you see yourself utilizing the power of your office in working within this structure?

The Board of Education members are elected by the county. They hire the Superintendent who has responsibility for administering the county public schools system including developing the yearly school and CIP budgets which the county government funds through tax revenues, fees,

and bonds. The Board of Education members ensure the needs and priorities of the students, parents, educators, and community are met in the school budget. A large portion of the school budget is the cost of salaries, benefits, and pensions which are in a negotiated contract with the union looking out for the well-being of all educators. I believe when we take care of our educators they take good care of our students.

I see myself using the power of my office to provide my genuine and deserving respect for our educators in what I say and what I do. I want to be a partner, to help how I can, and most of all avoid being non antagonistic.

14. Do you commit to meeting with union leadership to talk about the needs facing our schools (including salary and staffing levels) and the revenue or other budget actions necessary to meet those needs?

YES **NO**

Additional comments:

I welcome the opportunity to having regular conversations with union leadership, now and continuing into my term as County Commissioner President.

Racial and Social Justice:

15. EASMC supports honesty in education. To encourage critical thinking within our classrooms, we believe educators should have professional autonomy on how to implement curriculum to meet the needs of our students. Do you support or oppose this position? How would you respond to political pressure threatening that professional autonomy?

SUPPORT **OPPOSE**

Additional comments:

IMHO, Critical thinkers tend to make for engaged citizens. As Commissioner President, I'll respond by emphasizing that educators are professionals and experts in teaching subject matter and developing critical thinking skills in our students. We need to trust them to practice their profession because the future of public education, our community and beyond depends on it.

16. Do you support or oppose a curriculum that reflects the perspective and background of diverse learners? How would you respond to political pressure requesting changes to content and curriculum?

SUPPORT **OPPOSE**

Additional comments:

I'll pushback on this political pressure especially if it goes against the principles of public education. I know there are people who learn in different ways and it is up to us to meet them where they are and ensure they receive the education they deserve in a fair, inclusive , and safe

manner. We are learning more everyday about how people learn and what our students need to learn about being good humans, civil citizens, and contributing members of our society.

I'll emphasize content and curriculum are in the purview of our educators and I stand with them to know best. I'll continue to support what we are doing now—public education seeks to serve all students in an equitable and inclusive manner to meet the mission and deliver ready students and graduates.

"Know the learner and the learning, expecting excellence in both. Accept no excuses, educating ALL with rigor, relevance, respect, and positive relationships."

17. What specific policy goals and objectives will you pursue aimed at addressing racial and social justice, including support of diversity, equity, and inclusion for all students and providing equitable access, opportunities, resources, and supports?

A look at the SMCPS website leads me to agree to uphold current policy goals and objectives. I'm unsure what needs to be different or additional. If I'm missing something, please tell me. I believe the county government should be an example for us.

18. Immigration enforcement is a matter of federal jurisdiction. What is your position on how local law enforcement should interact with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement? And how will you work to ensure school grounds, bus stops, and other school spaces are safe havens against immigration enforcement actions?

Local law enforcement should interact with ICE when the situation involves an undocumented person who has committed a crime and is in their custody. I believe in no way should local law enforcement aid, assist, or augment the ICE teams in searching for and apprehending targeted individuals. I'll speak out against them doing so. I'll work with whomever and do whatever is necessary to protect our students and keep them safe including showing up.

19. Stable, safe, and affordable housing is necessary for all students to be able to succeed in school and in the recruitment of educators, including education support professionals, to live in the communities they serve. How do you plan to address the housing crisis in the county?

This is a priority of mine and must be a priority for everyone serving as a local public servant in St. Mary's County. We must work on increasing the housing inventory (rent or buy) at the workforce and lower income levels. This is a crisis throughout Maryland, and the entire country. It will require a dedicated and collaborative effort to solve including the necessary investment and financial assistance. I believe New York City is doing something about it now. We should explore what they're doing as well as other places with efforts underway. We can use/adapt their ideas and workable solutions within our own community.

Privatization and Support for Education Support Professionals (ESP's):

20. Are you in favor of contracting out custodial, cafeteria, and maintenance services rather than have those services provided by the Board of Education employees?

_____ **SUPPORT** X **OPPOSE**

Additional comments:

My question: Is it worth the cost as measured by the intangibles of having these services provided by Board of Education employees? They are family. It has been my observation that when privatization occurs, eventually it becomes about the cost as measured by dollars only. The sense of family and taking care of [the students and educators] wanes overtime and it becomes a challenge to get it back. Was it worth the cost?

I agree with the ESP Bill of Rights regarding **Privatization**: "ESPs should be free of the threats of privatization that risk the stability of school communities, silence the voice of employees, and further undermine the value of they contributions and their jobs".

21. Too many ESPs work second jobs and struggle to provide for their families, buy homes, save for their futures, and afford community or four-year college tuition for their children to learn a trade and plan a career. The looming threats of privatization by school districts, which would import even lower-paid workers from outside areas, risk the stability of schools and communities and further undermine the value of ESPs and their jobs.

ESPs across the state are organizing to build presence, strength, and power in a campaign focused on a bill of rights that defines the issues long nagging these dedicated employees and now threatening not only the recruitment of new employees but the retention of dedicated veteran employees. You can read about the ESP Bill of Rights here.

Do you support the ESP Bill of Rights?

 X **SUPPORT** _____ **OPPOSE**

Additional Comments:

This is long overdue. I wholeheartedly support the ESP Bill of Rights.

22. Please share how you would use your office to help make the ESP Bill of Rights a reality in the county.

I'll vocally support and promote the ESP Bill of Rights because it is the right thing to do. We must take care of all our educators who are part of our community. This is part of my Education priority.

Essay Questions:

A. Why are you running for this position? What personal attributes, characteristics, and experiences make you the right candidate for this position?

I'm running to make our local government better and responsive to our community's needs now and for the future. For too long, St. Mary's County has been stuck. Decades of mismanagement and entrenched interests have held our community back. Instead of solving problems, current leadership maintains the *status quo* while families struggle with rising costs, limited job opportunities, and underinvestment in our future.

Everyone in St. Mary's County deserves a fair shot at success.

Too many families are being priced out of the county they grew up in or moved to.

Our county cannot rely on a single economic engine.

It's time to unstick St. Mary's County. New leadership will focus on practical solutions that lift people up, expand opportunity, and move our county forward.

I am new leadership with experience in the business of government administration at the federal level and delivering desired results and improved outcomes to meet the customer's mission as measured by cost, speed, quality, safety, and security. I led diverse teams of people from various Naval Aviation locations and competencies as well as military, civilian, and contractor personnel. Our implemented solutions were frequently innovative and imaginative in order to attain the objective. We have 21st century problems and issues to address and solve. They are non-partisan and so should be the remedies. My mode of thinking abhors the status quo that keeps us captive. We can do better!

The people of St. Mary's County deserve leadership that works as hard as they do. Together, we can unstick our county and build a stronger future.

B. What are the top three things you would like to accomplish in the next four years if you are elected to [county commission/BOE]?

I think about the current state of our Local Economy, our Education System, our Infrastructure and more. I think about how we live in a beautiful county that is our home and everyone who lives and works here. We can do better with new leadership that understands the many interdependencies between the systems and people making this county what it is.

We know Businesses want to come here—but they need:

- A skilled workforce
- Affordable housing
- Strong infrastructure

Without leadership willing to invest in these areas, the county remains stuck in a vicious cycle of limited growth and opportunity.

We will break that cycle.

My top three things I'll accomplish in the next four years as County Commissioner President

1. Better governing and decision making at the CSMC table including by working collaboratively to solve problems and showing up in the community to listen to people about what keeps them up at night.
2. Increase workforce and low income level housing inventory and financial accessibility for people to either buy or rent and ensure the associated infrastructure is in place to support it.
- 3, Increase technology and 21st century service-type small businesses supporting non-defense industries while protecting and preserving our environmental eco-system.

Additional Information:

Along with this completed questionnaire, please provide an up-to-date bio or resume as well as a current list of endorsements for this election cycle.

ATTACH UPDATED RESUME