

Questions for County Council Candidates

Dr. Jennifer Rios, Candidate, Prince George's County Council, At-Large

- What strategies will you use to increase transparency of council proceedings to residents?

Residents deserve to know what's happening in their government before decisions are made, not after. I would push for clearer communication about legislation, development proposals, and major county decisions through plain-language summaries, better public notice requirements, and more opportunities for residents to participate virtually and in person. I also want to hold regular community meetings throughout the district so residents have direct access to their elected officials and can get answers to their questions. Transparency isn't just about making information available, it's about making it understandable and accessible.

- What skills and experience do you have to encourage other legislators to adopt strategies for transparency?

Throughout my career in the military, business, and community leadership, I've worked with people from different backgrounds and perspectives to solve problems and achieve common goals. Building trust requires open communication and accountability, and those are principles I've carried into every leadership role I've held. I know how to bring people together around shared objectives, and I would use those skills to build support for transparency measures that strengthen public confidence in county government.

Our Concerns

I. Mega Data Centers

- a. Can county-level zoning laws protect communities from unwanted development of mega data centers?

County government absolutely has a role in protecting communities from development that doesn't fit the character or capacity of a neighborhood.

- b. How are data centers defined? Can the council develop a cut point of public resource usage (e.g., water and electric power grid), beyond which the project can be forbidden?

As data center development continues to expand across the region, Prince George's County should carefully examine how these facilities are defined and regulated. It makes sense to evaluate projects based on measurable impacts such as electricity demand, water usage, traffic, noise, and strain on infrastructure. If a project places excessive demands on public resources or creates significant impacts for nearby

residents, the County should have the authority to require mitigation measures or deny approval altogether.

II. Support for Small and Local Businesses

- a. What incentives can you advocate for that will help small businesses open, stay open, and be able to fend off huge, billionaire-owned companies?

As a small business owner myself, I understand the challenges local entrepreneurs face. Too often, small businesses have to navigate complicated regulations and compete against companies with far greater resources. The County can help by streamlining permitting processes, expanding access to county contracts, supporting workforce development, and creating more opportunities for entrepreneurs to access capital and technical assistance. When local businesses succeed, the entire community benefits through job creation, stronger commercial corridors, and increased economic opportunity.

III. ICE Invasion of Our County

- a. Will you pledge to speak out against ICE's harassment and arrest of county residents?

Every resident deserves to be treated with dignity and afforded due process under the law. When members of our community are living in fear or feel that their rights are being violated, local leaders have a responsibility to speak up. I will always stand for the fair treatment of residents and support efforts to ensure people understand their rights and have access to reliable information and resources.

- b. What is your plan to prevent ICE from renting/buying space in buildings in the County (as they are trying to do in Hyattsville) to use as they choose, for logistics, staging, or detention centers, for example.

While the County may have limited authority over federal agencies, we should explore every legal tool available through zoning, permitting, and land-use policies to ensure residents have a voice when facilities are proposed within our communities. Major decisions that affect neighborhoods should not happen without transparency and meaningful public input.

- c. How will you encourage the Council to use their platform to speak out against ICE's illegal kidnapping of our residents?

The County Council also has an important platform. When residents raise concerns about civil rights, due process, or the impact of federal actions on our communities, the Council should be willing to listen, engage, and advocate on their behalf.

IV. Protect our County from the Federal Government's plan to sell land at the Goddard Space Flight Center, USDA, and other federally owned land.

- a. What tools are there to prevent sale to unwelcome buyers?

The potential sale of large federal properties could have long-term consequences for Prince George's County, so it's important that residents have a voice in what comes next. While the County cannot control federal land sales, it does have tools through zoning, land-use planning, and development review that can influence future uses of those properties. Those tools should be used to protect community interests and ensure redevelopment benefits county residents.

- b. Can the county order studies on the environmental impact and use of county resources by a potential buyer before any sale is completed?

Before any major redevelopment moves forward, there should be a full assessment of its environmental impacts and its effects on roads, schools, emergency services, utilities, and other public resources. Residents deserve a clear understanding of how a project will affect their communities before decisions are made.

V. Keep Prince George's County affordable and livable for residents

- a. Property taxes are skyrocketing, and the housing market is inaccessible to the majority of residents. Infrastructure such as roads, schools and emergency services have not kept pace with new housing developments.

Growth is important, but it has to be managed responsibly. Too many residents are feeling the pressure of rising housing costs and property taxes while also seeing schools, roads, and public services struggle to keep pace with development. We need to expand housing options, especially affordable and workforce housing, while making sure infrastructure investments happen alongside growth, not years later. We also need to protect long-time residents, particularly seniors, from being priced out of the communities they've helped build. Our goal should be a county where economic growth creates opportunity without sacrificing affordability or quality of life.