

**TO: Interested Voters**  
**FROM: Tamara Davis Brown**  
**DATE: October 6, 2014**  
**RE: 2014 November Ballot Questions Summary**

***Question 1 Constitutional Amendment (Ch. 422 of the 2013 Legislative Session)  
Transportation Trust Fund – Use of Funds***

(Amending Article III by adding Section 53 to the Maryland Constitution)

Limits the use of Transportation Trust Funds to the payment of principal and interest on transportation bonds and for constructing and maintaining an adequate highway system or any other transportation-related purpose. Also prohibits the transfer of Transportation Trust Funds into the General Fund or a special fund of the State, except for: (1) an allocation or use of highway user revenues for local governments or (2) a transfer of funds to the Maryland Transportation Authority or the Maryland Transportation Authority Fund. Transportation Trust Funds may be used for non-transportation related purposes or transferred to the general fund or a special fund only if the Governor declares a fiscal emergency and the General Assembly approves legislation, by a three-fifths vote of both houses, concurring with the use or transfer of the funds.

*For the Constitutional Amendment*

*Against the Constitutional Amendment*

***This question seeks to limit the use of the money placed into the Transportation Trust Fund to uses only related to transportation projects. Transportation Trust Funds are derived from the gas tax, driver's license fees, including renewals, vehicle title and tag registration, etc. The funds are used for road maintenance and repair and new road construction. Typically, when the state legislators are faced with a budget deficit or a***

***“pet” project that needs funding, the Transportation Trust Fund is often raided to pay for those efforts. This Constitutional Amendment seeks to eliminate this often-used practice.***

***Voters should consider voting For the Constitutional Amendment to limit use of the funds solely for transportation purposes.***

***Question 2 Constitutional Amendment (Ch. 261 of the 2014 Legislative Session) Special Election to Fill Vacancy in Office of Chief Executive Officer or County Executive***

(Amending Article XI-A, Section 3 and Article XVIII, Section 2 of the Maryland Constitution)

Authorizes charter counties to provide for special elections to fill a vacancy in the office of chief executive officer or county executive, and exempts a special election to fill a vacancy in the office of chief executive officer or county executive of a charter county from the constitutional requirement that elections for State and county officers be held on a specified four-year cycle. Under existing law, charter counties may only authorize special elections to fill vacancies on the county council.

*For the Constitutional Amendment*

*Against the Constitutional Amendment*

***This question allows counties with a charter<sup>1</sup> to fill a vacancy of the County Executive in non-election years (every 4 years).***

***Voters should consider voting For this Constitutional Amendment as it will give voters the immediate ability to elect county leadership at the executive level to fill a vacancy without having to wait until the next election cycle.***

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<sup>1</sup> Not all Maryland counties are charter counties. For example, Charles and Calvert counties do not have home-rule and are governed by the Maryland Annotated Code (state legislature). Generally, counties that have a County Executive like Prince George’s and Montgomery counties are charter counties (i.e., they have their own governing document called a Charter which acts like a constitution for the county).

Prince George's County

**The following are questions (A-F) are bond bills that seek authority to further indebted the County to Wall Street investors for the sole purpose of raising money to construct, renovate and restore the County's infrastructure primarily its buildings. See commentary after Question F below for analysis.**

***Question A Charter Required Referendum (CB-44-2014) Public Safety Facilities Bonds***

An Act enabling the County to borrow money and issue bonds in an amount not exceeding \$240,839,000 to finance the design, construction, reconstruction, extension, acquisition, improvement, enlargement, alteration, renovation, relocation, rehabilitation or repair of Public Safety Facilities (including Fire/EMS Department Facilities), as defined therein.

*For the Charter Referendum*

*Against the Charter Referendum*

***Question B Charter Required Referendum (CB-45-2014) Library Facilities Bonds***

An Act enabling the County to borrow money and issue bonds in an amount not exceeding \$32,243,000 to finance the design, construction, reconstruction, extension, acquisition, improvement, enlargement, alteration, renovation, relocation, rehabilitation or repair of Library Facilities, as defined therein.

*For the Charter Referendum*

*Against the Charter Referendum*

**Question C Charter Required Referendum (CB-46-2014) Community College Facilities Bonds**

An Act enabling the County to borrow money and issue bonds in an amount not exceeding \$93,617,000 to finance the design, construction, reconstruction, extension, acquisition, improvement, enlargement, alteration, renovation, relocation, rehabilitation or repair of Community College Facilities, as defined therein.

*For the Charter Referendum*

*Against the Charter Referendum*

**Question D Charter Required Referendum (CB-47-2014) County Buildings Bonds**

An Act enabling the County to borrow money and issue bonds in an amount not exceeding \$238,182,000 to finance the design, construction, reconstruction, extension, acquisition, improvement, enlargement, alteration, renovation, relocation, rehabilitation or repair of County Buildings, as defined therein.

*For the Charter Referendum*

*Against the Charter Referendum*

**Question E Charter Required Referendum (CB-48-2014) Public Works and Transportation Facilities Bonds**

An Act enabling the County to borrow money and issue bonds in an amount not exceeding \$122,385,000 to finance the design, construction, reconstruction, extension, acquisition, improvement, enlargement, alteration, renovation, relocation, rehabilitation or repair of Public Works and Transportation Facilities (including roads and bridges, parking lots, and maintenance facilities), as defined therein.

*For the Charter Referendum*

*Against the Charter Referendum*

### **Question F Charter Required Referendum (CB-50-2014) Proposed Charter Amendment**

To clarify that general obligation bonds shall be in serial and/or term form.

*For the Charter Referendum*

*Against the Charter Referendum*

***Most voters vote for these so-called bond bills because they raise the necessary funds to improve our public buildings without directly raising taxes. However, it is our tax dollars that repay the bonds with interest to Wall Street investors, which is why our County's bond rating is so essential (the higher the rating, the lower the interest rate). In light of the slow recovery of the housing market (many homes in the County are still in foreclosure), the County's primary tax revenue generator are residential property taxes. One must ask whether a hiatus on issuing more bonds that future generations will have to repay is necessary and prudent. Is it better stewardship of our tax dollars to pay down our existing (or a significant portion of) bond indebtedness than to continue to borrow money from Wall Street? During the last recession, we saw cities, like Detroit, file for bankruptcy because they could not repay their municipal bonds.***

***One must ask whether we want to repay what we have or continue to improve our public facilities. If former, vote Against the Charter Referendum and if the latter, vote For the Charter Referendum.***

### **Question G Charter Required Referendum (CB-51-2014) Proposed Charter Amendment**

To provide that immediately upon a vacancy in the Office of the County Executive, the Chief Administrative Officer shall become the Acting County Executive until a County Executive is chosen by the methods established in this Section of the Charter.

*For the Charter Referendum*

*Against the Charter Referendum*

***This question seeks to fill the role of the County Executive with the Chief Administrative Officer, an appointed position. The current County charter is a vague in this area, which is why Question 2 is essential to support. However, filling the important position of County Executive by a person appointed and not elected by the people does not bode well for***

**democracy. Instead, the Council Chair, who is voted by both the electorate and his colleagues on the Council to serve in this capacity, would be a more democratic solution.**

***For this reason, I encourage voters to vote Against the Charter Referendum.***

#### **Question H Charter Required Referendum (CB-52-2014) Proposed Charter Amendment**

To change the number of designated newspapers of record from three to one or more; and to designate two or more primary sources of County maintained electronic media available to the public for publication and transmission of official County notices.

*For the Charter Referendum*

*Against the Charter Referendum*

***This question seeks to reduce the number of newspaper posting of important notices from 3 to 1 or more, but also provides for electronic posting as well. As long as one of the newspapers remains the Gazette or other paper that our seniors will read (who are unlikely to get their news from electronic media), I see this question as favorable.***

***For this reason, I encourage voters to vote For the Charter Referendum.***

#### **Question I Charter Required Referendum (CB-53-2014) Proposed Charter Amendment**

To include disability and sexual orientation as additional bases of prohibited discrimination in the County personnel system.

*For the Charter Referendum*

*Against the Charter Referendum*

***This is will make the employment discrimination laws more comprehensive.***

***I encourage voters to vote For the Charter Referendum.***

## **Question J Charter Required Referendum (CB-54-2014) Proposed Charter Amendment**

To increase the number of consecutive terms that a person may serve on the County Council or as County Executive from two terms to three terms.

*For the Charter Referendum*

*Against the Charter Referendum*

***This is probably THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL ballot question on the 2014 November Ballot. Here are the Pros and Cons (as edited but eloquently stated by IHHAAC):***

**Pro #1.** Since other Metropolitan Washington jurisdictions do not have term-limits, Prince George's political leaders are at a disadvantage when working in regional organizations like the Council of Governments (COG).

**Con #1.** This is a 'solution' in search of a problem: leadership positions in COG rotate among jurisdictions; those few who have chosen to participate have not found themselves disadvantaged when working in regional organizations. Further, term limits also apply to the President of the United States, the Governors of Maryland and Virginia and five counties in Maryland. This is at best a self-serving excuse for wanting to maintain power for 12 instead of 8 years. Further, the 2014 Charter Review Commission which made this recommendation acknowledges that this is an "intermediate step" to the complete elimination of term limits (see Claim #2).

**Pro #2.** The Prince George's Charter Review Commission, a 7-member panel appointed by the County Council and County Executive, recommended the three term limit stating: "The Commission believes that it is in the interest of democracy and voter empowerment to move away from term limits, and recommends adding a third term as an intermediate step" to eliminating term limits.

**Con #2.** This is actually anti-Democratic. If there was a viable 2-party system in Prince George's County, people might have a real choice. Since there is not a 2-party system, there is almost no competition. Since term limits passed in 1992, no County Executive or County Council member has lost re-election. Many have run unopposed. Those with challengers have mostly won in landslides. Further, the longer politicians remain in office, the more they become beholden to and captive of special interests, developers, financial backers, slates and slate makers. We must rid ourselves of this Culture of Corruption.

**Pro #3.** The learning curve is steep and newly elected leaders need more time to learn their jobs so that they can effectively represent their constituents.

**Con #3.** Candidates for County Executive and County Council ought to have significant experience as citizen activists before running for these offices. With that background, the learning curve should be shallow. If a newly elected leader has not learned his/her job within a year's time, s/he is intellectually lazy and not qualified to be holding that office. Further, many Council Members and County Executives historically have shown no sense of urgency in addressing the County's problems, like roads which have not been repaired in 40+ years. An eight-year term limit (versus 12 years) incentivizes those who care to press ahead on critical issues.

***I strongly encourage voters to vote Against the Charter Referendum as undemocratic (and coupled with the fact that the County Council recently introduced legislation (CB68-2014) to increase the salaries of both the County Executive and the County Council, this is greedy).***