

Ballot Questions on the 2024 General Election Ballot for Frederick County

On the 2024 General Election to be held on November 5, 2024, Frederick County voters will consider three ballot questions. The First ballot question, Question 1, if enacted, would enshrine an individual's right to reproductive freedom in the Maryland Constitution and limit the State's authority to restrict such right in the future. The other two ballot questions, Questions A and B, if enacted would amend the Frederick County Charter to make changes to how our county government operates. Many people have asked for some additional information of Questions A and B.

Question A would require the County Council to hold an additional public hearing for any supplemental budget appropriation in excess of \$1,000,000. This Amendment was proposed by Councilmember Steve McKay, R-District 2. Currently, Section 510 of the County Charter allows the County Council, upon recommendation of the County Executive, to "make supplemental appropriations from any contingency appropriations in the Budget; from revenues received from anticipated sources but in excess of budget estimates; or from revenues received from sources not anticipated in the Budget." Currently, there are no additional requirements in the Charter regarding a supplemental appropriation and the Council may, if it desires, hold a public meeting on this or any other issue at any time. If enacted, this Amendment would require that the Council hold a public hearing before any supplemental appropriation exceeding one million dollars, potentially resulting in substantial delays and additional expenditures from the current practices. According to the county's Chief Administrative Officer, only a small number of supplemental appropriations exceed \$1,000,000. This amendment brings Section 510 into accord with Section 505 of the Charter that requires a public hearing be held prior to any action by the Council on the annual proposed budget submitted by the County Executive. The County Council voted unanimously to add this proposed amendment to the general election ballot.

Question B grants the County Council the authority "to remove the head of a Department, Agency, or Office appointed by the County Executive, after a public hearing and upon the affirmative vote of at least 5 Council Members." This Amendment was proposed by Councilmember Mason Carter, R-District 5. This amendment would grant expanded powers of the legislative branch of county government, the County Council, over the executive branch departments, agencies, and offices headed by the County Executive. According to Councilmember Carter, this proposal would compare to the power of the U.S. Congress to impeach a member of the president's Cabinet. Currently, Section 412 (a) of the county charter states that heads of executive departments, agencies, and offices "serve at the pleasure of the Executive," meaning that the County Executive has the sole power to appoint and remove such county employees. If enacted, this Amendment would grant the County Council considerable oversight powers over the executive branch county employees not currently contained in the current County Charter, and it may undermine the power of the County Executive to manage their employees. This amendment passed the County Council on a split vote.