

Introduced 03-02-2026
Public Hearing 03-17-2026
Council Action 04-06-2026
Executive Action 04-09-2026
Effective Date 06-09-2026

County Council of Howard County, Maryland

2026 Legislative Session

Legislative Day No. 4

Bill No. 20-2026

Introduced by: The Chairperson at the request of the County Executive

Short Title: Establish – Interfaith Advisory Commission

Title: AN ACT to establish Interfaith Advisory Commission; providing for the membership of the Commission; providing for the purpose and duties of the Commission; providing for the method of appointment and staff; requiring certain meetings and certain reports; providing the expiration dates of the terms of the initial members of the Commission; and generally relating to Interfaith Advisory Commission.

Introduced and read first time Mar 2, 2026. Ordered posted and hearing scheduled.
By order Michelle Harrod
Michelle Harrod, Administrator

Having been posted and notice of time & place of hearing & title of Bill having been published according to Charter, the Bill was read for a second time at a public hearing on Mar 17, 2026.

By order Michelle Harrod
Michelle Harrod, Administrator

This Bill was read the third time on April 6, 2026 and Passed , Passed with amendments _____, Failed _____.

By order Michelle Harrod
Michelle Harrod, Administrator

Sealed with the County Seal and presented to the County Executive for approval this 7 day of April, 2026 at 5⁰⁰ a.m./p.m.

By order Michelle Harrod
Michelle Harrod, Administrator

Approved/Vetoed by the County Executive April 9, 2026

Calvin Ball
Calvin Ball, County Executive

NOTE: [[text in brackets]] indicates deletions from existing law; TEXT IN SMALL CAPITALS indicates additions to existing law; ~~Strike-out~~ indicates material deleted by amendment; Underlining indicates material added by amendment

1 **WHEREAS**, on or about January 25, 2024, the County Executive issued Executive Order
2 No. 2024-02 that created the Howard County Interfaith Advisory Council to address issues of
3 religious intolerance and to discuss ways to better coordinate services provided by faith
4 institutions; and

5
6 **WHEREAS**, based on the hard work conducted by the Council and with extensive
7 feedback from County offices and departments, the County Executive issued “Howard County
8 Interfaith Action Plan: Mapping A Bold Partnership Between County Government and the Faith
9 Community” that the Plan reflects the County Executive’s vision to ensure that compassion,
10 justice, and care for our neighbors guide how the County serves the public; and

11
12 **WHEREAS**, the Plan looks at 12 key areas including health and wellness, economic
13 development, education, workforce, environmental stewardship, veterans, older adults, food
14 insecurity, crime and policing, transportation and youth engagement; and

15
16 **WHEREAS**, in addition to the work laid out in the Plan, there is a need for continued work
17 to address issues of intolerance facing communities of different belief systems and to further
18 coordinate services to address the needs of at-risk populations in our County; and

19
20 **WHEREAS**, the County Executive wishes to establish a permanently created Interfaith
21 Advisory Commission to continue this important work; and

22
23 **WHEREAS**, the Interfaith Advisory Commission can provide a powerful platform for
24 education and awareness and advise on best practices for the integration of traditions of differing
25 communities; and

26
27 **WHEREAS**, the Interfaith Advisory Commission will be an invaluable tool to make
28 strides towards reducing religious conflict and promoting peace locally by bridging divides
29 between diverse communities and encouraging dialogue, combatting extremism, and building
30 trust, while enabling collaboration and coordination on shared social issues.

1
2 **NOW, THEREFORE,**
3

4 **Section 1. *Be It Enacted*** by the County Council of Howard County, Maryland, that the Howard
5 County Code is amended as follows:

- 6 1. *By adding Section 6.352 "Interfaith Advisory Commission" to Title 6. County Executive and*
7 *the Executive Branch.*
8 2. *By adding Section 12.222 "Interfaith Advisory Commission" to Title 12, Health and Social*
9 *Services.*

10
11 **Title 6. County Executive and the Executive Branch.**

12 **Subtitle 3. Boards and Commissions.**

13
14 **SECTION 6.352. INTERFAITH ADVISORY COMMISSION.**

15 THERE IS AN INTERFAITH ADVISORY COMMISSION IN HOWARD COUNTY. ITS MEMBERSHIP, DUTIES,
16 AND RESPONSIBILITIES ARE SET FORTH IN SECTION 12.222 "INTERFAITH ADVISORY COMMISSION"
17 OF TITLE 12, "HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES," OF THIS CODE.

18
19 **Title 12. Health and Social Services.**

20 **Subtitle 2. Human Rights.**

21
22 **SECTION 12.222. INTERFAITH ADVISORY COMMISSION; GENERAL PROVISIONS; PURPOSE;**
23 **MEMBERSHIP; METHOD OF APPOINTMENT; STAFFING; MEETINGS; DUTIES; ANNUAL REPORT.**

24 (A) *GENERAL PROVISIONS.* GENERAL PROVISIONS APPLICABLE TO THE COMMISSION ARE SET FORTH
25 IN SUBTITLE 3, "BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS," OF TITLE 6, "COUNTY EXECUTIVE AND THE
26 EXECUTIVE BRANCH" OF THIS CODE.

27 (B) *PURPOSE.* THE PURPOSE OF THE COMMISSION IS TO PROVIDE ADVICE ON HOW COMMUNITIES OF
28 DIFFERING BELIEF SYSTEMS CAN SERVE AS TRUSTED PARTNERS IN ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS,
29 CONFRONTING HATE AND INTOLERANCE, PROMOTING DIALOGUE, AND STRENGTHENING THE
30 COUNTY'S RESPONSE TO COMMUNITY NEEDS.

1 (C) *NUMBER OF MEMBERS.* THE COMMISSION SHALL CONSIST OF AT LEAST 16 BUT NO MORE THAN
2 20 MEMBERS.

3 (D) *MEMBERSHIP.* THE COMMISSION SHALL BE COMPRISED OF:

4 (1) THE FOLLOWING EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS:

5 (I) THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM OR THE
6 SUPERINTENDENT’S DESIGNEE;

7 (II) THE PRESIDENT OF HOWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE OR THE PRESIDENT’S DESIGNEE;
8 AND

9 (III) THE PRESIDENT OF THE HOWARD COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM OR THE PRESIDENT’S
10 DESIGNEE.

11 (2) THE FOLLOWING APPOINTED MEMBERS:

12 (I) A MINIMUM OF TEN MEMBERS AND A MAXIMUM OF TWELVE MEMBERS WHO SHALL
13 REPRESENT A DIVERSE VARIETY OF BELIEF SYSTEMS BUT NO MORE THAN 4 MEMBERS
14 MAY COME FROM THE SAME BELIEF COMMUNITY;

15 (II) AT LEAST TWO MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC WHERE CONSIDERATION MAY BE
16 GIVEN TO INDIVIDUALS WHO MAY HAVE “LIVED EXPERIENCES” ADVOCATES THAT MAY
17 INCLUDE INDIVIDUALS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCES TIED TO KEY ISSUES INCLUDING,
18 WITHOUT LIMITATION, HOUSING INSECURITY, DISABILITY, AND IMMIGRATION; AND

19 (III) AT LEAST ONE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE, UNDER THE AGE OF 19, WHO ATTENDS A
20 HIGH SCHOOL OR SECONDARY SCHOOL IN HOWARD COUNTY WHO SHALL SERVE A TERM
21 THAT RUNS FROM JULY 1 THROUGH JUNE 30; AND

22 (E) *METHOD OF APPOINTMENT.* EACH APPOINTED MEMBER SHALL BE APPOINTED BY THE COUNTY
23 EXECUTIVE AND CONFIRMED BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL.

24 (F) *EXECUTIVE SECRETARY AND OTHER STAFF.* THE ADMINISTRATOR OR THE ADMINISTRATOR’S
25 DESIGNEE SHALL SERVE AS THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION AND SHALL ATTEND
26 ALL MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION. THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE MAY ALSO DESIGNATE A COUNTY
27 EMPLOYEE TO SERVE AS A LIAISON TO THE COMMISSION.

28 (G) *MEETINGS.* THE COMMISSION SHALL MEET AT LEAST QUARTERLY.

29 (H) *DUTIES.* THE COMMISSION SHALL:

30 (1) *BRIDGE COMMUNITIES AND GOVERNMENT.* ACT AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN COUNTY

1 GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES OF DIFFERENT BELIEFS BY IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES
2 FOR COLLABORATION, COMMUNICATION, AND SHARED PROBLEM-SOLVING ON ISSUES OF
3 PUBLIC CONCERN.

4 (2) *SUPPORT AT-RISK AND UNDERSERVED RESIDENTS.* PROVIDE GUIDANCE ON HOW
5 COMMUNITIES OF DIFFERENT BELIEFS CAN HELP EXPAND ACCESS AND INCREASE
6 ACCESSIBILITY TO COUNTY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS FOR RESIDENTS EXPERIENCING
7 VULNERABILITY, INCLUDING, WITHOUT LIMITATION, HOUSING INSTABILITY, FOOD
8 INSECURITY, HEALTH DISPARITIES, DISABILITY, AND ECONOMIC HARDSHIP.

9 (3) *ADVISE ON INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.* RECOMMEND INCLUSIVE, CULTURALLY
10 RESPONSIVE PRACTICES THAT HELP COUNTY AGENCIES AND PUBLIC-SERVING INSTITUTIONS
11 BETTER ENGAGE DIVERSE RELIGIOUS AND BELIEF COMMUNITIES.

12 (4) *PROMOTE VISIBILITY, EDUCATION, AND DIALOGUE.* ENCOURAGE EDUCATION, DIALOGUE,
13 AND PUBLIC AWARENESS THAT CELEBRATE RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY, COUNTER
14 MISINFORMATION AND FEAR, AND STRENGTHEN SOCIAL COHESION ACROSS COMMUNITIES.

15 (1) *ANNUAL REPORT.* ON OR BEFORE FEBRUARY 28 OF EACH YEAR, THE COMMISSION SHALL
16 SUBMIT AN ANNUAL REPORT WHICH SHALL COMPLY WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF SECTION 22.1000
17 OF THIS CODE TO THE COUNTY COUNCIL AND THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE ON ITS ACTIVITIES DURING
18 THE PREVIOUS CALENDAR YEAR. THE REPORT MAY INCLUDE RECOMMENDATIONS ON ANY MATTER
19 RELATED TO THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION.

20
21 ***Section 2. And Be It Further Enacted*** by the County Council of Howard County, Maryland that,
22 *to establish the stagger of terms required by § 6.300 of the Howard County Code, of the initial*
23 *appointees to the Interfaith Advisory Commission, at least 5 appointees shall have a term of 1*
24 *year, at least 6 appointees shall have a term of 2 years, and at least 6 appointees shall have a*
25 *term of 3 years, as provided in the Resolutions confirming the appointments.*

26
27 ***Section 3. And Be It Further Enacted*** by the County Council of Howard County, Maryland that
28 *this Act shall become effective 61 days after its enactment.*



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUITY

9820 Patuxent Woods Drive, Suite 237 • Columbia, Maryland 21046 • 410-313-6430

Calvin Ball, County Executive, • Brandee Ganz, Chief Administrative Officer
LaKeisha McClendon, Administrator

Subject: Written Testimony regarding the creation of Interfaith Advisory Commission

To: Brandee Ganz,
Chief Administrative Officer

From: LaKeisha McClendon, Administrator
Office of Human Rights & Equity

Date: February 19, 2026

The Office of Human Rights and Equity, OHRE, is in support of the creation of the Interfaith Advisory Commission, which will be contained in the Howard County Code, Section 12.219.

Faith communities across the country and in Howard County have long served as anchors of compassion, service, and stability. They are thriving hubs of community engagement and are trusted voices in times of both celebration and crisis. Howard County faith organizations have organized food drives, opened their congregations to support residents in need, and hosted business and community events that strengthen neighborhood connections. In recent years, they have provided safe havens during both natural and spiritual storms, stepping forward when our Ellicott City and Columbia neighbors needed help.

During the COVID 19 pandemic, congregations and similar organizations were critical partners in testing and vaccination distribution efforts. These groups were vital in health outreach, food distribution, and strengthening community resilience. Building on this established trust, County Executive Ball convened the County's first Interfaith Advisory Workgroup in January 2024 to ask a simple but transformative question: What more could we accomplish if government and faith communities worked hand in hand, intentionally and strategically, across every major challenge facing our residents?

The Interfaith Advisory Workgroup was created with a mission of strengthening collaboration between County Government and faith communities across Howard County. Since its formation, the Workgroup has provided insight on matters impacting faith communities, promoted dialogue during times of crisis, and offered guidance on strategies to confront hate, bias, and discrimination.

The creation of the Interfaith Advisory Commission now formalizes and codifies this body within the Howard County Code, ensuring long term sustainability, clear structure, and continued partnership between community leaders and County Government. The Commission will serve as a bridge between government and diverse communities of different beliefs, advising on policies and initiatives that promote inclusion, respect, and shared responsibility for the wellbeing of all residents.

The Office of Human Rights and Equity respectfully request favorable consideration of this legislation.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The first year of this Commission will focus on setting priorities, evaluating community needs, data collection, and establishing strategy and structure for outreach, initiatives, partnerships, and programming. With the OHRE's currently funded positions the office will be able to manage this additional workload. However, OHRE is requesting a minimal budget allocation of \$5,000 in comparison to other OHRE-led Commissions to support the initial term, with any additional expenses in FY27 covered by OHRE's budget. This amount will cover the development and distribution of educational materials, marketing, and outreach essential to establishing and publicizing the work of the Commission.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email, lmccleendon@howardcountymd.gov or by phone at 410-313-6430.

BY THE COUNCIL

This Bill, having been approved by the Executive and returned to the Council, stands enacted on April 9, 2026.

Michelle R. Harrod
Michelle R. Harrod, Administrator to the County Council

BY THE COUNCIL

This Bill, having been passed by the yeas and nays of two-thirds of the members of the Council notwithstanding the objections of the Executive, stands enacted on _____, 2026.

Michelle R. Harrod, Administrator to the County Council

BY THE COUNCIL

This Bill, having received neither the approval nor the disapproval of the Executive within ten days of its presentation, stands enacted on _____, 2026.

Michelle R. Harrod, Administrator to the County Council

BY THE COUNCIL

This Bill, not having been considered on final reading within the time required by Charter, stands failed for want of consideration on _____, 2026.

Michelle R. Harrod, Administrator to the County Council

BY THE COUNCIL

This Bill, having been disapproved by the Executive and having failed on passage upon consideration by the Council stands failed on _____, 2026.

Michelle R. Harrod, Administrator to the County Council

BY THE COUNCIL

This Bill, the withdrawal of which received a vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the members of the Council, is withdrawn from further consideration on _____, 2026.

Michelle R. Harrod, Administrator to the County Council