**1) Name\***

Thiru Vignarajah

**2) Email address\***

[thiru@votethiru.com](mailto:thiru@votethiru.com)

**3) Party\***

Democrat

**4) Date of birth** – *This will only be used to show your age at the time of the election. Your DOB will not be published.*\*

12/18/1976

**5) Residence** – *Please indicate your neighborhood, town/city, and/or county of residence.*\*

Baltimore, MD

**6) Current occupation\***

CEO, Capital Plus Financial (a certified community development financial institution)

**7) Education\***

Woodlawn High School

Yale University

Harvard Law School

**8) Previous political experience\***

Served as Assistant U.S. Attorney (U.S. Attorney’s Office, 2009-2011), Chief of Major Investigations Unit (State’s Attorney’s Office, 2011-2014), and Deputy Attorney General of Maryland (2015-2016)

**9) Why are you running for office? (145)**

Violent crime in Baltimore has never been worse. I spent my life as a prosecutor and public servant, and I am confident I can help turn this tragedy around. In a time of crisis like this, Baltimore does not need a politician or a defense attorney—it needs a proven prosecutor. I am running because my unique career as a federal, city, and state prosecutor matches the demands and urgency of this moment.

I am also running because I remain indebted to Baltimore. This city gave my parents jobs as teachers. I am myself the product of public schools, from Edmondson Heights Elementary to Woodlawn High. After studying at Yale University and Harvard Law School—and after serving as president of the Harvard Law Review and law clerk to Justice Stephen Breyer—I returned home to make a difference in the place that made me. For me, this is a calling.

**10) What is the most pressing issue Baltimore faces regarding crime and criminal justice?\***

Crime in Baltimore has skyrocketed because police and prosecutors no longer work together, the community’s trust has been broken by the lack of progress on police reform, and criminals know there are no consequences for their crimes. There are deeper problems too, from poverty and disinvestment to segregation and broken schools. These entrenched obstacles must be overcome if we are to reduce murders from over 300 to less than 100, and that work must begin now. But, to drive murders from over 300 to *less than 200*, we can start with the pressing threshold problems of getting police and prosecutors to constructively work together, convincing the community to trust police again, and to make clear to criminals that it is their turn to be afraid. On these priorities, the State’s Attorney must lead the charge, not stand in the way.

**11) Would you continue the current policy not to prosecute low-level, nonviolent offenses such as drug possession, open container and prostitution? Why or why not?\* (149)**

I would rescind Marilyn Mosby’s blanket policy that certain crimes will no longer be prosecuted.  Her announcement—with no preparation or coordination with police—has created confusion amongst law enforcement, improperly usurped the legislature’s prerogatives, and emboldened criminals.

Instead, we will return to using common-sense judgment to decide which cases to pursue. For instance, only in exceptional cases would we prosecute loitering or trespass, crimes often identified as an instrument of racial profiling and discriminatory policing. To ensure that victims of addiction and trafficking get the help they need, we would expand pre-arrest diversion programs like LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion), as well as pretrial initiatives such as the District Court Reentry Project, which gives low-level offenders the opportunity to pursue apprenticeships, skills training, and vocational careers as a condition of probation. We would also institute internal guardrails like requiring a supervisor’s approval before prosecuting offenses like drug possession.

**12) How will your office help reduce gun violence? (150)**

We must keep guns out of criminals’ hands and hold perpetrators accountable when gun violence occurs. Untested prosecutors are currently assigned to firearms cases to gain experience on the flawed view that gun possession is a victimless crime, not a precursor to violence. We will establish a specialized unit of seasoned prosecutors who work with police and federal agencies to pursue gun traffickers and build better cases for trial based upon solid evidence, not stop-and-frisk policing. More firearms cases should go to federal court where repeat offenders face stiffer and more certain penalties. We will also reorganize the office so prosecutors are, by district, dedicated to certain categories of gun crimes, from robberies and carjackings to shootings and killings. Finally, through skills training, job opportunities, and focused deterrence, we will invest in returning citizens at greatest risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of gun violence themselves.

**13) How would you address racial inequities in the criminal justice system?\* (150)**

The first step is to recognize that racial inequities undermine and infect every stage of the justice system, for victims and the accused. Prosecutors have the power and responsibility to ameliorate these longstanding failures. But it is hard to fix what you cannot measure. So, we will track and regularly publish race-based data for arrest and clearance rates, detention and diversion decisions, and plea bargains and trials. We will also conduct implicit bias training for police agencies and our own staff; ensure diversity in hiring and retention; expand alternatives to incarceration, diversion, and restorative justice programs; undo wrongful convictions; and develop guidelines to ensure that the race of neither the defendant nor the victim improperly affects our judgments. Finally, we will mitigate the collateral consequences of contact with the judicial system by, for example, ending cash bail and facilitating the automatic expungement of arrests that are eligible under Maryland law.

**14) How would you use your role to bring down violent crime in Baltimore? How is this different from what's already happening and what's been tried before? Why will your idea be successful?\* (150)**

Since 2015, Baltimore has averaged 333 murders every year—that’s over 2,400 people killed in total. In 2011, while I spearheaded the Major Investigations Unit, we had fewer than 200 homicides. We were making progress, and we can do it again.

This requires immediately mending fences with the police department, the U.S. Attorney’s Office, and the Governor, and I am the best candidate to do this. We also need fresh approaches. We will start by focusing on unsolved crimes that bear the markings of repeat offenders, like daytime homicides involving high-caliber weapons, headshots, and 10+ casings at the crime scene. In addition, we will relentlessly prosecute those gangs that disproportionately drive violence, using wiretaps, Maryland’s gang law, and federal RICO statutes. And we will use lower-level offenses, like burglaries, to build prosecutions of violent repeat offenders who have done far worse.

**15) Resignations have left prosecutors with crushing caseloads. What would you do to stabilize the office, retain staff and attract talent?\* (150)**

We need a leader who can bring back seasoned prosecutors and bring in fresh talent, drawing from neighboring counties, local law firms, and the Justice Department. To improve culture, we will reorganize the office, assigning prosecutors to districts, creating citywide specialty units, and having dedicated juvenile justice prosecutors. This will not be easy, but it is not without precedent.

After Robert Morgenthau lost a bid for governor, he was elected Manhattan District Attorney. He forged what many consider the greatest prosecutor’s office in American history. He recruited trial lawyers and top law students, warning them of long hours at meager salaries. But he pledged they would learn more and do more good in New York City than anywhere else. Here’s the truth: New York isn’t Gotham anymore—Baltimore is. We should use the city’s heartbreak as a lighting rod to attract true public servants and rebuild the office Baltimore needs.

**16) What can the state’s attorney do to overcome the reluctance of many witnesses in Baltimore to cooperate with police and prosecutors and testify in court?\* (147)**

Prosecutors must help rebuild the trust that has been broken between police and community. To further this goal, we will adopt a community prosecution model—similar to community policing—where individual prosecutors are assigned to specific neighborhoods, so citizens get to know the prosecutors who are responsible for cases in their communities. Second, we will teach prosecutors that keeping victims and witnesses safe, engaged, and informed is one of their most important responsibilities. When witnesses cooperate, we will honor the risks they take by zealously pursuing justice in those cases, by not carelessly dropping cases, and by not giving them away in improvident plea deals designed to artificially boost conviction numbers. Finally, the community must see that when cops become robbers, whether by overtime fraud or by taking a person’s life, that corruption is investigated and prosecuted as seriously as any other crime by any other criminal.

**17) Describe your position on the proposed legalization of recreational marijuana? If state voters approve it, what are the legal issues that need to be addressed to maintain public safety?\* (150)**

Legalization raises issues of equity and safety but is long overdue. Currently there is a regulated market for medical marijuana whose profits are funneled to affluent investors—and there is a chaotic gray market that has sown confusion among police, contributed to rising overdose deaths (because of marijuana laced with fentanyl), and deprived Baltimore of hundreds of millions in tax revenue.

Massive economic opportunities from this industry should benefit communities that suffered the most when marijuana was illegal. Prosecutors and police must also answer questions like whether the suspected presence of marijuana, which remains illegal under federal law, could constitute probable cause or be the basis of a search warrant; whether an overarching federal prosecution is appropriate when dealers sell cocaine, heroin, and marijuana; and whether emerging cryptocurrencies or more cash transactions create public risks if federally-insured banks decline financial transactions linked to an industry that still violates federal law.

**18) How will your office hold the police accountable?\* (150)**

We will conduct thorough, transparent, and impartial investigations of alleged misconduct and all use-of-force cases, while deferring to the Maryland Attorney General’s new investigative prerogatives. In cases of great public interest, we will permit embedded reporters and invite outside agencies to review any decision not to bring criminal charges. But police accountability cannot start only when the cameras are rolling after a tragedy strikes. To proactively deter and root out corruption, we will prosecute gateway offenses like overtime fraud and will partner with internal affairs detectives to conduct integrity stings to identify officers tampering with evidence, stealing from citizens, and committing perjury. Prosecutors also review body-camera footage; if they observe misconduct or errors that do not necessarily rise to the level of criminal charges, they will still be expected to report this to the police department and the consent decree monitor, inviting them to take administrative, remedial, and disciplinary steps.