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Dr. Edward L. Cochran, Jr.



The Howard Community College Board of Trustees, President Daria J. Willis, and the entire campus community mourn the death of Edward L. Cochran, Jr., a co-founder of the college, visionary public servant, and pioneering scientist who devoted nearly seven decades to building Howard County's educational and civic institutions.

He died on November 16, 2025 at the age of 96.

Cochran's extraordinary relationship with HCC spanned its entire history—from conception to maturity. He was appointed to the Howard County Board of Education in 1964, a period when that body also functioned as the founding Board of Trustees for the yet-to-be-built community college. During those formative years, Cochran helped shepherd the institution from vision to reality. Nearly two decades later, he returned to guide the college through another era of growth, serving on the Board of Trustees from 1985 to 1991.

“Dr. Cochran was present at Howard Community College’s creation and remained among its most steadfast champions throughout his remarkable life,” said Willis. “He understood that education was the cornerstone of an equitable, thriving community. His moral courage in advancing school integration, his leadership during the college’s founding, and his lifetime dedication to expanding educational access have shaped the lives of countless Howard County students across three generations.”

Born on March 18, 1929, in Jarrettsville, Harford County, Cochran demonstrated early the combination of intellectual rigor and public spirit that would define his life. He graduated from Loyola University Maryland in 1949 at age 20, followed by a Master of Science in chemistry from Duquesne University in 1951. After completing his Ph.D. in chemistry at the University of Notre Dame in 1952, where he met his wife, Catherine Joan Flanagan, Cochran was recruited to the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory in 1958.

He distinguished himself as a research chemist, contributing to groundbreaking work in free-radical chemistry using electron spin resonance spectroscopy. His research team published more than 30 scientific papers that became among the most frequently cited works in APL's history, advancing the field of physical chemistry and earning recognition that extended well into the 21st century.

Yet it was in the arena of public service where Cochran left his most enduring mark on Howard County. Appointed to the Board of Education in 1964, he worked with local civil rights leaders to immediately integrate the public schools, providing the decisive vote in 1965 to close all segregated schools in Howard County—a decision of moral conviction and political courage that fundamentally transformed the county’s commitment to equality and justice.

He was elected to the Howard County Council in 1968 and reelected in 1970, serving as Council Chair from 1971 to 1972. In 1974, he was elected as Howard County's second County Executive, serving until 1978.

As County Executive, he introduced landmark legislation establishing the Office of Human Rights and wide-ranging anti-discrimination law. This comprehensive ordinance placed Howard County at the forefront of civil rights protection in Maryland.

His commitment to thoughtful, ethical governance continued throughout his life. After his term as County Executive, he returned to APL in 1979 as Director of External Relations. He served on the Criminal Justice Information Advisory Board from 1977 to 1980, the Task Force on Growth and Development for Howard County in 1988, and the Howard County Charter Review Commission in 2012.

Cochran's contributions were recognized with the Human Rights Award from the Howard County Human Rights Commission in 2009 and the James Clark Jr. Medal from Howard Community College in 2010, honoring his instrumental role in the college's founding and continued development. [Cochran and his family were legacy builders through philanthropic support of the college](#), championing student scholarship access and expansion of resources for teaching and learning.

Cochran is survived by his brother Donald; his six children: Edward L. Cochran III (Andrea), William Cochran (Teresa), Mark Cochran (Deirdre), Mary Catherine Cochran, Maryland Delegate and former HCC Trustee Courtney Watson (Richard), and Christopher Cochran (Laura); as well as 23 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

Funeral Mass: Friday, November 21, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. Shrine of St. Anthony 12290 Folly Quarter Road Ellicott City, MD 21042

Celebration of Life: Saturday, November 22, 2025, Merriweather LakeHouse Hotel 10209 Wincopin Circle Columbia, Maryland 12:00–1:00 p.m. | Reception 1:00–2:00 p.m. | Remarks & Remembrances

Memorial contributions in Cochran's honor may be made to Meals on Wheels of Central Maryland, the [Howard Community College Educational Foundation](#), or Free Bikes 4 Kidz Maryland.

We celebrate an extraordinary life of integrity, vision, and unwavering dedication to our college, our state, and our nation.

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