

Edward Leo Cochran Jr., Howard's 2nd county executive, dies at 96

He served on Howard's school board and County Council, and helped found the community college



Former Howard County Executive Edward Leo Cochran Jr., has died. Pictured from left to right, former county executives Ken Ulman, James Robey and Cochran and current County Executive Calvin Ball (Courtesy of Howard County Government)



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[Former Howard County Executive Edward Leo Cochran Jr.](#), a pioneer in scientific research and education, died Sunday evening at Lutheran Village at Miller's Grant, a retirement community in Ellicott City, due to complications of advanced age. He was 96.

Born on March 18, 1929, in Jarrettsville in Harford County, he grew up in Fallston and attended Bel Air High School. Dr. Cochran graduated from what was then Loyola College in 1949 at age 20, then earned a master's degree in chemistry from Duquesne University in 1951. He pursued his Ph.D. at the University of Notre Dame, and while there met his wife of 62 years, Catherine Joan Flanagan, a graduate student at nearby St. Mary's College.

The couple married in 1953, and after briefly living in New Haven, Connecticut, they moved to Holly Hill, a historic 10-acre Clarksville farm, in Howard County in 1956. Mrs. Cochran immersed herself in education and civil rights issues and became an advocate for minority and women's rights. [She died in 2015.](#)

Dr. Cochran's daughter, state Del. M. Courtney Watson, who represents Howard County in the Maryland General Assembly, said her father was always driven and focused on his family and improving the community.

"He served as a role model and an inspiration and instilled in us a sense of responsibility to make the world a better place," she said.

He was a member of Howard County's Board of Education from 1964 to 1968, and served on the Howard County Council from 1971 to 1974, acting as the chair for the first two years.

During his tenure on the school board, he worked to help end segregation in county schools. All of the county's Black schools were closed ahead of schedule and without any major incidents. He believed desegregation was "very important to modernizing the school system," Ms. Watson said.

In 1974, Dr. Cochran, a Democrat, was elected as the second county executive in Howard.

In his first 18 months, he formed the Citizen Services Department, the Office of Human Rights, and the Office of Aging, according to a news release. He also established subsidized housing for seniors, created the Office of Consumer Affairs and implemented program budgeting for fiscal accountability.

During his tenure, he established financial disclosure requirements for elected officials, consumer protection laws, zoning reforms, strict sign regulations and the county's first no-smoking law.

Dr. Cochran was instrumental in taking the county from rural to modern during his tenure as county executive. He established the Department of Citizen Services, emergency management protocols and created a full time Office of Law, Ms. Watson said.

“His greatest legacy in his public life was [that] he laid the cornerstones for Howard County’s government as we know it today,” she said. “He did all of the things that create a well-rounded government.”

Dr. Cochran’s scientific career included pioneering work at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory in Laurel on free-radical chemistry. Projects he worked on would become some of the most frequently cited in APL’s history, according to a county news release.

Dr. Cochran was a “scholar, an educator, a public servant and a committed resident whose work advanced both knowledge and the common good,” according to current Howard County Executive Calvin Ball.

“His years of dedication to science, education, and civic leadership left a lasting imprint on Howard County, Maryland, and beyond,” Ball said in a statement. “His example reminds us that earnest dedication, whether in the laboratory or the George Howard Building, can move a community forward.”

Cochran was also instrumental in the founding of Howard Community College, serving as the first chairman of its board of trustees in 1967.

Watson will always remember the meaning of hard work because of her father, she said.

“He was a loving and caring father who expected a lot out of his children and set the standards very high, but always from a place of deep love,” Watson said.

When he wasn’t working as a scientist or at a council meeting, he’d be working at the family farm.

“[He took] deep satisfaction and peace in creating his environment at home and teaching us how to take care of the environment,” Watson said.

A funeral Mass will be offered at 2 p.m. Friday at the Shrine of St. Anthony, 12290 Folly Quarter Road, in Ellicott City.

He is survived by his brother, Donald, six children, Ms. Watson, [Ted Cochran](#), William Cochran, Mark Cochran, Mary Catherine Cochran and Christopher Cochran; 23 grandchildren; and 13 great-grandchildren.