



AFT-MD Candidate Questionnaire for Baltimore City Races

The AFT-Maryland is a federation on local unions of the AFT within the state, including the Baltimore Teachers Union and the City Union of Baltimore—whose members work for the city—as well as state employee members of the Maryland Professional Employees Council, AFT Healthcare-Maryland, and the Maryland Classified Employee Association. Together, with the Baltimore County Federation of Public Employees, AFT-Maryland has thousands of members who are citizens of Baltimore City, as well as thousands of members who work to make Baltimore City a better place for its citizens and children.

The AFT-Maryland has prepared the following questionnaire for candidates running for office in Baltimore City as a means to familiarize the candidates with issues that our members care about most. It also allows us the chance to see where the candidates stand on these issues.

AFT-Maryland locals participate fully in the endorsement process of the Metropolitan Baltimore AFL-CIO Council; the council will announce its final endorsements sometime in February 2016. However, because we are a large contingency within the Baltimore AFL-CIO, the unions of the AFT-Maryland have a heavy influence on who Labor chooses as its candidates for endorsement.

Please take the time to complete this candidate questionnaire. It may be returned to

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Please return this completed questionnaire no later than February 5th, 2016, at 5pm. If you have any questions, please contact Todd Reynolds, AFT-Maryland Political Coordinator, at 410-764-3030.

2016 Candidate Questionnaire—BALTIMORE CITY RACES
AFT-Maryland

Candidate for **Mayor of Baltimore City**

Candidate's name **Tirell Alexander Maxwell "Mack" Clifton I**

Address [REDACTED]

Phone [REDACTED]

Email [REDACTED]

Occupation **PC Support Technician II** Who is your employer? **Mayor and City Council of Baltimore**

May we make your answers to our questionnaire public? **Yes**

Party affiliation (circle one):

Democrat

Republican

Independent

Other (please specify) _____

Have you received an endorsement from a labor union? If so, which ones? **No**

Have you ever held elected office? When? **No**

General

1. The AFT-Maryland is a federation of numerous employee unions, including Baltimore City teachers and paraprofessional and school-related personnel (BTU); Baltimore City employees (CUB); as well county and state employees; public health professionals; and higher education workers. Why should we support your campaign?

As a member of the City Union of Baltimore for the majority of the past seven years, I have seen and have been made aware of, through my personal experiences and through the relaying of personal experiences by friends, co-workers, and associates, the disparities that exist in city

government, up to and including working conditions that may have exposed employees to cancer-causing agents and substances, disciplinary actions taken against employees that do not follow the agreed-upon protocol, pay that did not adequately cover living expenses, unfair labor practices that have had employees experiencing retaliatory measures from supervisors, employees that have earned post-secondary education degrees that made them eligible for promotion but they were overlooked, decisions made that have led to disastrous circumstances that could have been avoided from the onset, and other situations that warrant looking into that would seriously impede the quality of life not just for local, county, and state employees, but for Baltimore City as a whole. I believe that the AFT-Maryland should support my campaign, because as an underdog, I will fight for fellow underdogs who have the right to be treated with dignity and respect regardless of their financial, familial, or residential status, and do the absolute best that I can to ensure that everyone would receive fair and equitable treatment, comparable wages that are proportional to the ever-rising costs of living, and that their civil rights will be protected at all costs.

2. Have you ever been a member of a union? If yes, please give the union name, local number, and date.

Yes, I have been a member of the City Union of Baltimore for the majority of the past seven years, as I recall; my membership began on or around November 3, 2008.

Worker Rights

3. Should Baltimore City librarians be granted the right to engage in collective bargaining? Should employees of the Baltimore Convention Center? If you are elected to office, will you work to expand collective bargaining rights to public employees who currently do not have that right?

I believe that if engaging in collective bargaining will benefit Baltimore City librarians and the employees of the Baltimore Convention Center, then by all means they should be granted that right. If there is no specific language written while those individuals are employed either as a librarian or as a convention center employee that is in any documentation that they have signed their name to that would prevent them from participating in a collective bargaining agreement process, I would definitely work to expand those bargaining rights to public employees who currently do not enjoy that right, and would work to do so even if there is language that prohibits those activities, as I would consider something of that nature to be a hindrance to their employment as well as an obstacle in their lives as a whole.

4. Many cities nationwide have passed ordinances that raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour. Would you be in favor of Baltimore raising its minimum wage to \$15 per hour? Why or why not?

I would be in favor of an immediate raise of the minimum wage to \$15.00 an hour. My reason for doing so is this:

Since there is a direct correlation between poverty and crime, a minimum wage of \$15.00 an hour would give employees in the city a better chance of survival and would help to keep many people that live at or below the poverty level from becoming homeless and jobless statistics. On average, a person that is working and earning a decent wage is normally not considering committing criminal acts just so that he or she will be able to keep a roof over their families' heads, and causing bodily harm to another person or taking a life. The current minimum wage of \$8.25 an hour is barely enough to live on, whether it is a single person or the head of a household. And considering that the costs of living have steadily increased, the minimum wage is, for many individuals, a source of irritation and despair, which may lead a normally good person to do things that are completely out of character for them.

As mayor of Baltimore City, I would act on the findings in Article 11 of the Labor and Employment Ordinance of the Baltimore City Code, section 1, paragraph 1-2, where in 2007, the Mayor and City Council conducted an investigation and found that: "legislation is necessary in the public interest in order to end these conditions (those conditions being "paid wages, which in relation to the cost of living in the City and the income necessary to sustain minimum standards of decent living conditions, are insufficient to provide adequate maintenance for themselves and their families" and that the "employment of such persons at such wages impairs the health, efficiency, and well-being of the persons so employed and of their families, reduces the purchasing power of such persons, diminishes and depresses business, trade, and industry in the City, threatens the stability and well-being of the City's economic life, fosters and contributes toward slum conditions and housing evils, creates conditions of want and deprivation tending to weaken and undermine family life and breed crime and juvenile delinquency, threatens the health, welfare, and well-being of the people of the City, and injures the City economically) so inimical to the public health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of Baltimore, to establish minimum wage standards for all employees as herein defined at a level consistent with their health, welfare, and general well-being." The understanding that I glean from this Article is that the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore City possessed the legislative means to put a policy in effect eight years ago to address this matter, and since that time, not one individual in the executive branch of City government between December 5, 2007, and the present has attempted to bring relief to the citizens of this City by raising the minimum wage to one that would be consistent with the current costs of living, and they have consistently failed to address this issue, and their inaction, in my opinion, has contributed to the rising rate of crime, homelessness, homeowners losing their homes and approximately twenty-five percent of the vacant properties being owned by the City, as well as a decrease in the quality of service provided by the City to its residents.

5. Retirement for city workers: defined benefit versus defined contribution. The city of Baltimore has been discussing moving from a defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan (401K) for its employees' retirement. Do you support such a plan? Why or why not?

It is my opinion that a defined benefit plan, or pension, would be favored more by employees than a 401(K) plan would, because a pension will afford a retiree the knowledge of knowing what he or she will be receiving on a regular basis after retirement because that amount will

have been predetermined. A 401(K) plan provides less security and is based solely on the amount of funds contributed to the account of the participant. It is not based on the employee's earning history, tenure of service, nor the age of the employee, and based on the total amount that is contributed on the employee's and the employer's part, may not provide sufficient funds for the employee to live off comfortably after retirement from City government service.

The Role of Public Education in Baltimore City

6. What do you think are some of the biggest problems facing Baltimore City public schools today? If elected, how would you help solve these problems?

Based on my experience as a parent, I feel that some of the biggest problems that are facing Baltimore City public schools are (1) a decreased number of certified instructional teachers, (2) outdated curriculum, (3) lack of remediation of the lead content in the drinking water, (4) inadequate heating and cooling systems in several of the city school buildings, (5) security, (6) closing schools regardless of the fact that a large number of school aged children (48,045 of them based on a report by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2014), and (7) disruptive children that make learning difficult for themselves and their fellow students.

As mayor, I would address the outdated curriculum matter by using the funds allocated for textbooks for a more modern way for children to keep their school work, and that would be tablets for children pre-K through grade six, and laptops for children grades 7-12. What these devices would do is allow children to have all of their work in one place as opposed to carrying backpacks with numerous books that could be very heavy for them to carry at times.

I would push for the hiring of more certified instructional teachers and a screening process for them to ensure that they are truly interested in teaching the children and keeping them engaged by making education interesting and upbeat, as well as keeping up with current events.

Lead remediation may involve demolition and reconstruction of schools and removal of the pipes that may be the cause of the problem and testing of the drinking water, or the installation of a filtering system that will remove the majority of the harmful material from the water, contracting a company such as Brita for a project that would be beneficial to the students in those schools that have water coolers as their primary source of drinking water.

As much as I dislike saying this, metal detectors, if installed, may help to reduce the number of weapons brought into schools. Also, reassigning some City police officers to assist with security or placing police cadets on rotating weekly assignments to supplement the efforts of the school police will be a viable option.

I feel that there are too many children in this city that are in need of an education, as well as a school to attend, that any school should be closed. It is my belief that if a school must be closed,

it should be deemed a health and environmental hazard as opposed to simply being a fiscal matter.

Lastly, students that disrupt classes on a regular basis, after they and their parents have been sufficiently advised to modify their behavior and have not made an effort to do so, should be summarily enrolled in a disciplinary quasi-military academy with retired Armed Forces personnel from all five branches as instructors. At least two locations for the academies come to mind; an entire floor of a few middle and high schools, or elementary schools if it becomes necessary, to be dedicated for this venture, or a school building that is scheduled to be closed but does not pose any health or environmental hazards. The academies will be dedicated to the correction of behavior, as well as instruction and preparation for life beyond high school. There may be a team of behavioral health specialists as part of the teaching staff, and counselors that will advise the children regarding their future.

Another option that could be explored would be A-shift and B-shift public school education for school-aged children whose parents have irregular work schedules, or a program that will allow parents that are unable to afford a babysitter or day care to attend school with their children and to assist the teacher with the class as a paid intern or assistant.

7. Community Schools: Beginning in August 2015, Baltimore City will have 51 of its public schools serving as a designated community school. A community school is a public school that partners with some entity (UM-Baltimore or the Baltimore YMCA, just to name a few examples) to provide either after-school academic or social services to both students and members of the community. Would you be in favor of expanding the Community School Strategy in Baltimore by working to make more Baltimore City public schools community schools? If so, why? If not, why not?

I would be in favor of such a program because it would provide additional resources for the City's youth, and would help them to explore options that go beyond life in the City of Baltimore. It would be part of a solution that would keep children engaged and involved in activities that would be beneficial to them, and a way to replace, for lack of a better term, recreation/community centers that have been closed. Additionally, within at least a two-year period, I plan to reopen the centers that have been closed, and include more schools and partners to draw the 48,045 children that are not enrolled in the public school system.

8. Public Charter Schools: There are just over 40 charter schools in the state of Maryland, and the vast majority of them reside in Baltimore City. The large, out-of-state charter operators would like to weaken state law to make teachers and staff employees of the charter board, rather than employees of Baltimore City Public Schools. This would remove all protections that teachers and staff have under the collective bargaining agreement between the teachers union and the school board. This would also limit oversight of these privately run public schools by taking them out from under the purview of BCPS, as well as giving these charters a "blank check waiver" from any local school board policy. Should charter school teachers and staff be considered employees of the charter school or of the local school board? Should oversight of these schools be weakened?

Since charter schools receive public funding, I feel that the teachers should be considered employees of the school board. I see no true benefit in weakening the oversight, unless there can be assurances that the students will receive high quality education and the teachers' rights will be protected. If that was the case, and the oversight was weakened, or that oversight given completely over to the out-of-state charter school operators, and those teachers did become employees of the charter schools, perhaps they could form their own unions. But overall, I opt for the teachers remaining employees of the school board.

9. Charter School funding. There has been a long-running dispute between certain charter school operators and Baltimore Public Schools over appropriate funding. As a feature of being a public charter school in Baltimore, the charters are largely given cash—calculated on a per pupil basis—from the district in lieu of the services that the central administration provides neighborhood schools. Most recently, the system presented a per pupil funding formula that mandated funds intended for students living in poverty or who are English language learners actually receive those funds. Some charter operators have countered with a lawsuit, arguing that those special funds for high-poverty students or ESOL be distributed to every student equally, regardless of need. How do you think BCPS should calculate its charter school per pupil funding model?

Based on a report on the Baltimore City Schools website, for FY 2016, 34 charter schools and 2 contract schools will follow the charter school funding model, which allocates \$9,387 per student (13,724), giving a grand total of \$128,827,188.00. I believe that the Baltimore City Public School System should distribute the funding equally to every student, regardless of need. An unequal distribution of funding may be viewed as an advantage given to those “high poverty” students and English language learners. I feel that the proverbial playing field should be leveled, and that everyone should have an equal opportunity to succeed, whether or not they are impoverished or are learning the English language. I consider that to be equitable and fair.

10. School vouchers: should government give out vouchers (either a tax credit, or even a tax rebate) to parents who want to send their children to a private school? Please explain your answer.

I do not believe that the government should give vouchers to parents that desire to have their child educated in a private school. The only way that I could approve of such a voucher is if these conditions are met: (1) the child attends a school within his or her district that is doing poorly by the Board of Education's standards, (2) the private school is within the same district, and no other public school in the district meets the immediate educational needs of the child, and (3) that the parent demonstrates a financial need. Outside of those factors, a parent that wants their child to attend a private school should be financially able to send their child to that school, and the government should not be made responsible for that.

11. Education funding: This past year, lawmakers in Annapolis severely cut education to Baltimore City schools. Some in Annapolis have argued that the city should be contributing more to public schools, as property values (especially in and around the Inner Harbor area) have rapidly increased. Do you agree with this assessment?

In the City's capital budget of \$898,137,000, \$17 million is earmarked for schools, while the BCPSS adopted a budget for 2016, comprised of the total of the Public School System's revenue

from the General, Special and Enterprise funds, is \$1,339,415,250, which is approximately one-third of the City's operating budget, but not included in the City's operating budget.

I agree with the assessment in relation to the City contributing more to public schools, but not in relation with the increase of property values in and around the Inner Harbor, unless the majority of the revenue generated from the property value increases is directly earmarked for school funding. If those increases in value would comprise at least half of the costs of public education in Baltimore City, then I may see the validity in the argument presented by "some in Annapolis".

12. Some current members of the Baltimore City Council have proposed a city charter amendment that would guarantee 3% of the city's budget for youth programs in the city, like recreation programs, youth mentorship, and afterschool programs. Would you be in favor of such a charter amendment? Why or why not?

If three percent of the City's budget is calculated from the combination of the fiscal operating budget and the fiscal capital budget, which amounts to over three billion dollars, is guaranteed for youth programs, I would be in favor of a charter amendment such as that. If the funds are allocated properly and the spending is not done haphazardly, it would serve to benefit the youth of the City, because services that are vital to their development would be provided. I would require accountability of the spending of \$100 million for those programs, just as I would for any agency in the City, to provide an accurate tally of how much is being spent, and what it is being spent on. The abovementioned programs might not require spending of the entire amount, and the remainder could be reallocated towards the Public Schools operating budget.

13. Due to the limited number of certified nurses in Baltimore City Public Schools, administrators and/or staff are forced to administer medication to students, share nurses between multiple school locations, and utilize part-time nurses. How would you help solve this issue?

From a legal standpoint, I would see no reason for anyone that is not licensed to dispense medication to do so, or feel forced to do so, and be subjected to criminal prosecution. To help solve that issue, it would be necessary to hire at least one additional medical staff person, for example, a certified medicine assistant, for administration of prescription medications. I would not want to subject the City to a possible lawsuit filed by a parent that is made aware that someone in an administrative position or a member of the school staff gave a child prescription medication unless there are specific rules that allow for actions such as those.

14. Currently, all seats on the Baltimore City School Board are appointed. Legislation is introduced almost every year to allow for at least a partially elected school board. Would you be in favor of such legislation?

Yes, I would. I believe that school board members should be chosen by the same democratic process that places our elected officials in office.

15. Violence in the city schools. What do you think is the best strategy to assure that our school buildings are safe and welcoming environments for children, teachers, and other education professionals in Baltimore City?

All persons entering and exiting school buildings will do so at designated exits, with other restricted access doors being monitored by CCTV and police officers, as well as having alarms installed on those doors, which should only be used in emergencies. Implementation of the tablet and laptop program will require that students carry their devices in portable neoprene sleeves and in approved laptop bags, which should lighten their carrying load as well as have fewer places to hide weapons. This may be accomplished by having children evaluated and observed in classroom settings by mental health professionals starting on the first day of school. Teachers would be instructed to submit written reports on the potentially disruptive and violent students and submit them to the principle for review. These evaluations and reports would occur for the first two months of the school year, placed in a disciplinary military style academy, thereby allowing the children that are truly in school to obtain their education to do so without serious problems arising too often, and lessen the possibility of physical altercations between students and teachers.

Vision for Baltimore City

16. The city has begun shutting the water off for accounts that are delinquent by more than \$250. It has started to turn off the water for both individual accounts and business accounts. Do you agree with this plan? Why or why not?

I do not agree with the plan, because some of those delinquent accounts may belong to people who are living on fixed incomes, or are elderly and/or disabled. I would agree to the plan only if the account is consistently being paid late, and the property owner does not offer a reasonable explanation for the delinquent payment.

17. Privatization. Many rumors have been circulating that the city has been looking into privatizing water services. When, if ever, do you feel it is appropriate to privatize public services or to sell off or privatize city-owned resources?

In a nutshell, never. I feel that it would give the service provider carte blanche to charge whatever they feel is profitable to them, which may be a huge disadvantage to many property owners in the City.

18. There are at least two competing strategies to help the city raise funds for recreation centers: one calls on the city to sell off a number of public parking garages downtown; another calls for the Downtown Hilton to be sold. Do you prefer one plan over the other? Or a different plan to raise revenues for more rec centers? Do you think raising more funds for recreation centers should be a priority for city leaders? Why or why not?

I would call for at least two different plans to raise funds for recreation centers. One of those plans to raise funds would call for the distribution of medicinal and legalized recreational

marijuana, which seems to have worked for the state of Colorado. Data released by the state Department of Revenue reveal that tax revenue from retail marijuana sales amounted to \$40.9 million between January 2014 and October 2014, not including revenue from medical marijuana and licenses and fees. It stands to reason that legalization of marijuana would boost revenue exponentially. And the Baltimore City Health Department would be responsible for all distribution. Also, unless the City of Baltimore is already doing what I am about to suggest, opening and maintaining online auction accounts, such as eBay and iOffer, and making City surplus property available to the general public to bid on and purchase, is something that I consider to be a very good idea. I used to work for the Comptroller of Maryland, and they currently maintain an eBay account, which I believe was established in 2007. I consider this a way to increase buying power for citizens as well as an excellent way to generate revenue.

19. The City is entertaining proposals to build a trash incinerator near Curtis Bay, located less than one mile away from Benjamin Franklin High School and Curtis Bay Elementary school. Supporters claim this incinerator will create much-needed jobs for the community. Opponents argue that incinerators pollute even more than coal-burning power plants, and should not be constructed so close to public schools. What is your position on the construction of a trash incinerator in Curtis Bay?

Creating jobs at the expense of the health of the 15,000 Curtis Bay residents is not an equitable tradeoff. I am reminded of my employment at the Patapsco Wastewater Treatment Plant, which is surrounded by other chemical manufacturing and/or distribution plants in the Curtis Bay area. Several of my co-workers (at least five of them) have died from cancer within the past five years, with one of them being in his early fifties. And if burning trash will put mercury and lead in the air, and there is no way for the plant owner to have those harmful elements filtered out before smoke is allowed into the atmosphere, there is no way that I could see myself advocating the building of an incinerator in Curtis Bay.

20. According to some statistics, there are approximately 16,000 vacant buildings and 14,000 vacant lots in Baltimore. Combined they total 30,000 vacant properties within the city limits, and play a large role in contributing to crime and other problems facing the city. More than 75% of all vacant property in Baltimore city is privately owned. How can we fix this problem and make sure land is being used effectively and efficiently in Baltimore?

Regarding the vacant lots, I have tentatively formed a program called Vacants to Veggies, which would be a community garden project primarily in blighted neighborhoods that have limited access to affordable food. Many of the vacant lots may be suitable for community gardens and orchards, in an effort to beautify those neighborhoods as well as provide food for the residents in the immediate areas. It would also be a way to bring residents together for a common goal that would benefit the neighborhood at large, and possibly the City as a whole.

The only way that I can see the City effectively demolishing all of the vacant uninhabited homes is if the City owned all of the vacant uninhabited homes. Many of those vacant buildings may be suitable for rehabilitation, while the rest of them may not. Conditions like trees growing inside these structures, lead content that is not easily removable, and structural integrity may

make the unsuitable buildings candidates for demolition. Detailed inspection crews can be formed to determine which buildings can be rehabilitated, and which buildings may need to be demolished. My plan to clean up the blight, and simultaneously end homelessness for many of the Baltimore residents that are currently on the street involves the following:

- a. Form teams of able-bodied homeless individuals in groups of ten to twenty people that are willing to work and be paid for rehabilitating the homes that are salvageable. These teams will be hired by major real estate developers in Maryland as well as in other states that wish to invest in properties in Baltimore City. Temporary housing can be offered to the workers. Public and private grants can be sought, and donations of building and construction materials as well from major corporations such as Home Depot and Lowes.
- b. I have done research into affordable prefabricated housing that is available both in the United States as well as overseas. One option would be to set up small communities on large vacant properties with 40-foot storage containers that have been converted into houses and to install electricity, HVAC, and plumbing, with the Housing Authority being responsible for these structures. Also, I have found websites that offer prefab houses for sale, that can be erected on vacant properties, and several of the companies that sell them are located in the United States, while others are located overseas in places like China, for example.
- c. Last, but not least, perhaps the program that involved selling houses for a dollar may gain wide approval, with the homebuyers being solely responsible for the costs of rehabilitation of the homes. Becoming a homeowner may inspire one to help rebuild and revitalize the neighborhood in which the building is located.