



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

Todd Reynolds, Political Coordinator
AFT-Maryland, AFL-CIO
5800 Metro Drive, Suite 100
Baltimore, MD 21215
Fax: 410-764-3008
Email: treynolds@aftmd.org

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

Candidate's name Elizabeth Embry

Address [REDACTED]

Phone [REDACTED]

—

Email [REDACTED]

—

Occupation Chief of the Criminal Division Who is your employer? Maryland Attorney General

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? 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?

Workers are the backbone of Baltimore. I will be announcing my detailed economy and jobs blueprint shortly, and how we help workers will be a critical component of that plan. My commitment is reflected in a lifetime of dedication to workers and their concerns in a number of different roles. For example, I am a Board member of the Public Justice Center, an organization that advocates for workforce justice on behalf of low-income people across Maryland, and in recent years has prioritized litigation to protect workers against wage theft and independent contractor misclassification. The Public Justice Center is a member of Maryland's Working Matters coalition. As Chief of the Criminal Division in the Office of the Attorney General, I organized a Task Force for crimes against vulnerable population that included wage theft as one of its principal areas of focus. I served as Special Assistant to the Secretary for the Maryland Department of Licensing, Labor and Regulation, where we pursued a wide range of initiatives on behalf of Maryland's workers. I understand and have deep appreciation for the work of Baltimore public school teachers and administrators. My sister who teaches elementary special education is a member of the Baltimore Teachers Union and I, like my father and siblings, am a proud product of the Baltimore City public school system. My mother founded Arts Education in Maryland Schools (AEMS), a non-profit dedicated to ensuring that public schools across the State have high-quality arts education by working with teachers, local systems, and MSDE. I understand the challenges that your members are facing in today's political environment and AFT-Maryland deserves a seat at the table when we are deciding how to address these challenges.

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

No, I have not.

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?

Yes, I believe they should have the right to engage in collective bargaining. I strongly support the right of workers, including public employees, in their efforts to bargain collectively for increased benefits and improved working conditions, a commitment that will also be highlighted in my economy and jobs blueprint. I pledge to support unions' goals in public speeches and events.

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?

An equitable minimum wage is essential to widespread economic prosperity for City residents. Studies show that raising the minimum wage is good for both workers and businesses. I support raising the State minimum wage to \$15 per hour. I do have concerns that a unilateral move to raise the minimum wage in Baltimore City, without any action by surrounding counties, could harm the City's ability to compete with surrounding jurisdictions. A strong statewide living wage will be a central component of my economy and jobs blueprint, and I will make that one of my leading priorities every day as Mayor. If we cannot increase the minimum wage at the state level, I support increasing the minimum wage in Baltimore City above the statewide \$10.10 level and the City should lead the way by increasing the minimum wage for City workers to \$15 per hour.

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?

City workers deserve a secure retirement, and maintaining the defined benefit plan (i.e. pensions) is the best way to ensure they receive it. People enter public service knowing that relatively low salaries are balanced by reliable benefits and the knowledge that they will be taken care of later in life. Pension funds have to be responsibly managed so they are fiscally secure. Defined contribution plans shift the long-term financial risk from City government to individual workers, and they introduce unnecessary volatility into workers' retirement planning. Instead, the City should maintain pensions – and ensure that the Employees' Retirement System is sufficiently funded – so that workers have the retirement security that they earned.

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?

The problems facing Baltimore City schools are systemic and profound: budget cuts that harm teachers and students – with deficits that are projected to grow, instability caused by high levels of principal and teacher turnover, wavering public support here and in Annapolis, and concentrated poverty which multiplies our children's needs, while leaving parents, teachers and communities without the resources to address those needs. I will be rolling out my platform shortly, but broadly speaking, I believe that there are a number of interwoven threads we will need to guarantee to support our teachers and guarantee a quality education to every student in the city: (1) leadership, accountability and funding; (2) attracting, developing and retaining high quality principals and teachers, (3) community

schools, (4) expansion of early childhood education, (5) enhanced out of school time opportunities, and (6) college and career readiness.

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?

Absolutely. Community schools are important for a number of reasons, but for now I'll lay out two. First, they symbolize the recognition that "non-school factors" – things like health, physical and emotional well-being, and hope – are hugely important to a child's academic success. A child who is hungry cannot focus in school. A child who is depressed and disconnected might not even show up at school. Community schools are places rich in opportunities for better health, greater security, and greater opportunity. Second, community schools are an efficient – and thus cost-effective – way of braiding together resources and services. Community schools can be a place not only where children learn, but where parents get a GED or complete a workforce development program; where children can participate in an afterschool program that provides supper and parents can work knowing their kids are safe and having fun. They allow schools to more effectively partner with outside entities that can supplement classroom learning.

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?

I believe that charter schools are a part of the equation in Baltimore. But, they are not panaceas. Some perform better than public schools, some perform worse. And so I believe it is important that we create a framework of policies that strikes the appropriate balance and sets the right incentives for success: we need innovation with accountability. And although we should always be examining our laws to see if there are opportunities for improvement or refinement in how they impact our schools, we need to be careful about the changes.

I have not seen any convincing evidence that the collective bargaining agreement is impeding the operation of charters in the state. And in point of fact, Maryland's charters have avoided the problems of fraud and mismanagement that we have seen in states such

as Louisiana and Minnesota. What is more, there is plenty of evidence that charter schools are able to find the flexibility within the existing collective bargaining agreement to innovate in their approach to education. And finally, and most importantly, my understanding from talking to teachers and from public reports is that the vast majority of public school and charter teachers in Baltimore are against a move to exempt charter teachers from the collective bargaining agreement.

Against that background, I believe the answer is obvious: charter teachers and staff should not be exempted from the agreement. That is not to say that we cannot improve the conditions for innovation in Baltimore City schools, including charter schools. Charter operators complain about a poor relationship with City officials in working through potential issues. What I would like to see is a world where all of the stakeholders sit down together and roll up their sleeves to find opportunities for innovation, autonomy and flexibility.

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?

The reality is that for the charter school system to work, there needs to be equitable funding for both public and charter schools. But, the way in which one arrives at an equitable funding formula is complicated by a range of factors – and is more complicated than the current two percent rule allows. A disabled student who requires placement in a private facility can cost nearly 20 times the average cost for a student in a traditional school. It would not be fair if only traditional schools but not charters saw their funding reduced to cover those costs. And so we must have a formula that acknowledges these complications. And if that is inconsistent with state law, then I would push to obtain a smarter state law. But I also think we need City leadership that heads off these destructive battles, and that requires proactive discussions, negotiation and transparency.

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.

No. School vouchers would divert money from our public schools in an already challenging environment, often do not lead to quality options, and all too often leave students with disabilities behind. They are not the answer to Baltimore's schools.

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?

I believe this view of those in Annapolis is an abdication of State responsibility to Baltimore, which is in fact a constitutional obligation. Indeed, one of the core problems with the state-city relationship – as we have seen play out in the least several weeks – is a deeply flawed State school funding formula that places far too great an emphasis on property values without taking into account actual tax revenue. As Mayor, I would fight for more State funding, and a smarter State funding scheme that does not place Baltimore and its schools at an arbitrary and unfair disadvantage. My plan is also to increase city funding for programs that support children both inside and outside of school. But that is not an excuse for the State to back off from its obligations.

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?

I agree wholeheartedly with the goals that underlie the push for this amendment. It is very true that one of the fundamental problems with our City is that – unlike some of our peer cities – we have not invested heavily in opportunities for our youth, the future of Baltimore. As I expressed in my first campaign blueprint, which I released earlier this year, one part of that investment needs to be a commitment to after-school and summer opportunities for children and youth. We need to provide the young people of Baltimore with more opportunities to grow and thrive, to pursue their talents and passions. We also need to invest in the community based organizations that lead so much of this vital work.

However, I do not believe that the amendment is the appropriate mechanism. It would mandate an arbitrary carve out of three percent from the budget. My view is this sort of carve out, in a challenging budget environment, is too blunt a tool, and could crowd out other priorities, including funding for schools and teachers. Ironically, it also runs the risk of imposing a ceiling on funding for youth programs. This sort of approach runs contrary to the careful model of budget allocation that I would bring to the position of Mayor.

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?

Those are unacceptable solutions. There are a number of potential student health issues – ranging from diabetes to sudden cardiac arrests – that do not accommodate a part time or swing schedule. And most administrators are not medically trained, and simply not in a position to respond adequately to many of these situations. Our kids' lives are on the line. Room must be made in the budget to adequately staff nurses in our schools. Additionally, inadequate health care hurts student learning, and so underfunding of nursing staff is counterproductive to all of the efforts to positively impact outcomes.

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?

This is a challenging issue. On the one hand, more community involvement in the operation of schools through a democratic process is a positive for the City. On the other, the experience of other cities suggests that it may not lead to improved outcomes in schools, and could distract from some of the problems at hand. Of course, every City is different, and we need to explore every option for improving the fate of our own schools. Therefore, I would support a move to a partially elected board. This strikes me a sensible approach, one that ensures we are not engaging in convulsive disruptions of our current approach to governance, while examining whether this new model is a net positive for our City.

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?

We need to do a better job of addressing violence in school – for the sake of student and teacher safety , and to end the school-in-prison pipeline. Evidence shows that mass suspension of students is counterproductive, harms their educational development, and pushes them into the criminal justice program. Although police officers have an important role to play in defusing situations, and can help teachers to defuse situations, it is a limited role and we should not be outsourcing discipline to police. We need smart and collaborative solutions to school safety, that includes a greater reliance on restorative justice programs – we have one of the best in the country in Community Conferencing – and robust training programs and other proactive models of reducing violence. It is also important that the school environment physically reflect how much we care about the health and safety of our students and teachers. A school building both inside and out should be clean, healthy and welcoming to students, teachers and the community -- from mental health services to constructing spaces that support collaborative learning and student creativity.

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 believe that this step is needed in cases where consumers are truly delinquent. Delinquent accounts place a burden on hard-working Baltimoreans who do pay their bills. And the enforcement efforts have led to millions of dollars in overdue payments that can support important municipal priorities. But we must do everything possible to avoid this step, particularly for hard-working Baltimoreans. Therefore, in my administration, there would be three critical prerequisites. First is that the enforcement must be fair and equitable. A plan that enforces it against families but not companies, or some neighborhoods but not others, is worse than no plan at all. Second is that the City needs to do a much better job of outreach to consumers before turning off their service. Every last option should be deployed before cutting a home off from water. This means that the City also needs to do a better job

of connecting consumers to financial assistance programs and water payment plans, and needs to ensure that the family is aware of the possibility of shut-off and all of the options at its disposal. Third is that to be fair the plan must include a program to protect access to water for those who are renting their homes if landlords fail to pay.

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?

First, the evidence shows that the privatization of these services – often to non-union operators – leads to a monopoly that eliminates competition and leads to poorer service. Second, the attempt to privatize is usually a pretext for removing union labor, reducing pay, and slashing benefits, a result that is punishing to the middle class. All too often, privatization is counterproductive and harmful to hardworking Baltimoreans. As a result, it is not a part of my plan for the future of 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?

Fundamentally, I will want to study each of the options more closely with my advisors before I reach a conclusion. I hope there is a hearing soon on these proposals, which should yield additional information about the economics of the proposed deals, and their impact on workers at these businesses and their families. In general, in evaluating any City asset, I would want to ascertain whether its capacity as a revenue source is being optimized.

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?

I am deeply concerned about the risk of pollutants from the plant to children and other members of the surrounding community. These concerns have been deepened by the inability of the incinerator developer to obtain the needed offsets. The Curtis Bay area already suffers from one of the highest levels of toxic emissions not only in the state, but in the nation. My view is that Baltimore should aspire to a clean jobs platform, one that could provide far more and better jobs than an incinerator. And yet this incinerator could walk us back from those efforts, especially if reports are accurate that it would require a minimum amount of waste.

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?

This problem is at the heart of the future of our City: Studies show that, on average, as soon as a house becomes vacant, violent crime rises by an average of 15 percent within 250 feet of the property. The cost of providing police and fire services to a block is greater than \$1,400 annually for each vacant house. This is a complicated problem, and I will be rolling out a detailed housing strategy later in this campaign. My approach will be to employ new and existing underutilized programs to focus on an extensive rehabilitation of Baltimore's vacant houses that is guided by community involvement, utilizing a sustainable block by block approach that will provide hope and stability to disheartened and dilapidated neighborhoods around the City and jobs to those who need them.