

Sparaco

~~D. J. Carril~~ Pkz

## AFT-Maryland Candidate Questionnaire for Baltimore City Races

The AFT-Maryland is a federation of 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, the Maryland Classified Employees Association, and Maryland School for the Deaf. Together, with the Baltimore County Federation of Public Employees and the Baltimore County Federation of Public Health Nurses, AFT-Maryland has thousands of members who are citizens of the city of Baltimore, as well as thousands of members who work to make Baltimore a better place for its residents.

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 Late February 2020. 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 by no later than January 17th, 2020, at 5:00 p.m.

If you have any questions, please contact Todd Reynolds, AFT-Maryland Political Coordinator, at 410-764-3030 or [treynolds@aftmd.org](mailto:treynolds@aftmd.org).

Email address \*



Candidate Information

Name

Dan Sparaco

Candidate for:

City Council President

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Email address

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Present occupation

Attorney

Employer

Miles & Stockbridge

Party affiliation

Democrat

Have you ever been endorsed by a labor union? If so, which one(s) and when?

No.

Have you ever held elected office? If so, when?

No.

Candidate Questionnaire

Please note the AFT-Maryland plans to make these questionnaires public. Only candidates agreeing to this provision are eligible to be invited to any future AFT-Maryland Candidate forum for the 2020 Election.

General Questions

1. The AFT-Maryland is a federation of numerous public employee unions, including Baltimore city educators (Baltimore Teachers Union, or BTU, Local 340) and municipal employees (City Union of Baltimore, or CUB, Local 800). Why should we support your campaign?

I am the only candidate in this race with a plan to bring transformative change to City Hall. It won't matter who gets elected if the system stays the same. I am an attorney who is no stranger to City Hall, and no stranger to the challenges our city faces today. Twenty years ago, while Baltimore was implementing "zero tolerance" policing, I was fighting against it as a legal intern at a civil rights group in New York. I eventually became a Legal Aid lawyer, and defended hundreds of low-income families from eviction. Ten years ago, I joined City Hall as a lawyer, and later became Assistant Deputy Mayor for Operations under Stephanie Rawlings-Blake. That's when I learned just how broken City Hall was -- and still is four years later. The next mayor has an immense task -- fighting crime, supporting our schools, and addressing systemic inequality in our city. The next Council President has to rebuild city hall so this work can actually get done. Contracting, hiring, service delivery, and the policy process on the City Council -- all of this must be different, and better, if we are going to turn our city around. The Council President is perfectly positioned to lead that fight, because it requires structural reform, which is why my plan calls for.

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

Yes, I was a member of the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys in New York, UAW Local 2325.

Questions on Worker Rights

3. Collective bargaining for city employees: Should Baltimore City librarians and those who work for the Enoch Pratt Public Library System be granted the right to engage in collective bargaining? Should employees of the Baltimore Convention Center be granted the right to collective bargaining? If you are elected to office, will you work to expand collective bargaining rights to municipal employees who currently do not have that right?

Yes to all three.

4. Minimum wage: In the 2019 Legislative session, the state passed a minimum wage law that excluded tipped workers and did not link the minimum wage to inflation. In addition, the state's minimum wage won't reach \$15 per hour until 2025. Would you be in favor of Baltimore City linking the minimum wage to inflation, and removing the exclusion for tipped workers? Would you be in favor of removing the delay and closing these loopholes in raising the minimum wage?

Yes.

5. Retirement for city workers - Defined Benefit versus Defined Contribution: The City of Baltimore has in the past discussed moving from a defined benefit to a defined contribution plan (401k) for its employees' retirement. Do you support such a move? Why or why not?

Absolutely not. A 401k is a poor substitute for a pension, leaving workers to fend for themselves and to the fluctuations of the market.

6. Retirement benefits for educators and city workers: Over the past few years, retired educators and employees of Baltimore City have had concerns that, just as the state did to its public workers, the city will discontinue the retiree prescription drug benefit and move all retirees to Medicare Part D for prescriptions. If elected to office, do you pledge to never vote to move retired educators and city employees to Medicare Part D for their prescription benefits?

Yes, I pledge to never vote to move retired educators and city employees to Medicare Part D for their prescription benefits.

7. Safe working conditions for city employees: This past year, a number of city employees have been severely injured—and in at least one case, killed—on the job. Whether it be Transportation Safety Officers merely directing traffic, DPW workers inspecting our water reclamation systems, or Department of Transportation officers needing to repair damaged roads—all employees deserve the right to work in safe conditions. Far too often, city workers feel the leadership of various city departments are either unaware of or completely ignore workplace safety protocols. If you are elected to office in Baltimore City, will you support a law requiring the various city departments to partner with Maryland Occupational Safety and Health to do a no-cost, wall-to-wall inspection of all city workplace facilities to help identify potential employee safety hazards?

Yes.

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Public Education in Baltimore City

8. General: What do you think are the three biggest problems facing Baltimore City public schools? If elected, how will you solve these problems?

First, funding, because our schools simply do not have the resources needed to properly educate our children. I will establish a two-year commission on the City Council to convene a broad group of stakeholders to analyze every dollar spend by city government, in particular, on children, to determine how we will meet our obligations under Kirwan, and specifically, re-allocated some of the \$550 million spent on police to our schools.

Second, governance, because since the 1997 agreement with the state that completely removed city schools from the purview of City Hall, the school system has not had any elected official who is directly accountable for its performance. We need to restore accountability in a way that strengthens the school system while protecting schools leadership from the political winds. In my view, that means, in the long term, restoring mayoral accountability. I realize this hard to imagine today because City Hall is performing so poorly, but urban districts need strong leadership, and clear accountability. Not only does the school system and city government have duplicative bureaucracy (that nether perform particularly well when considering human resource, finance, or other administrative functions), the current set-up means resources are not aligned. City schools has a capital program to build new schools, and city government has an entirely separate capital program to build entirely separate recreation centers. One set of expensive infrastructure will support children until 3 p.m. on school days, and another set of expensive infrastructure will support them after 3 p.m. This set-up makes achieving true community schools – open early and late, accessible to children and parents, acting as resource hubs for our neighborhoods and recreation opportunities for our kids – almost impossible except on an ad hoc, piecemeal basis.

Third, is poverty. We need leadership that is going to make racial and regional inequality -- and the political forces and decisions that made this a reality – an issue. Our student outcomes are too often determined by forces our schools cannot easily counteract. There's no one solution to this problem. In the short term, it means righting the ship in City Hall and restoring faith in it's ability to govern the city. But in the medium and long term, it means taking the fight for Baltimore's future to the region and the state on funding a partnerships. Our kids get blamed for circumstances simply not of their own making, and they pay the price for decisions adults made decades ago.

9. Appointments to the City School Board: Just recently, a law was passed that gave the mayor (but not the city council) more authority in choosing the members of the city's school board. What role do you think the city council should play in this process? What should be the qualities Baltimore should prioritize in choosing a member of the city's school board? Would you commit to only support a candidate for local school board with at least 3 years of classroom experience (as a teacher, or a teacher's aide, for example) working in a public school system?

I am glad to commit to supporting candidates for local school board with at least 3 years of classroom experience. The role the Council can play is by hosting a public vetting process, convening those interested in this important job, and in those who might be appointed to it. Currently, these appointments seem like an afterthought, made with little in the way of public process.



10. Baltimore City School Board: In 2022, Baltimore City will finally be allowed to vote two additional members to the school board. Baltimore City is currently the only jurisdiction in the state whose entire School Board of Commissioners is appointed. In 2022 the board will expand from 10 to 12 seats, with the two additional seats being elected rather than appointed. Of the 23 other Maryland County School Boards, 19 are fully elected, and four are an appointed/elected hybrid, with only Wicomico County having more appointed than elected positions. If elected, would you support legislation transitioning Baltimore City to a fully elected or hybrid board with the majority of seats being elected? What is the optimal structure for Baltimore City's School Board and why?

Whether board members should be elected or appointed is a question embedded in the larger question of governance of our schools in general.

I think it is very difficult to make analogies to how other Maryland jurisdictions choose their school boards, because no jurisdiction has our unique set of challenges -- created by racist housing, transit and education policy over many decades. Wealthy and/or homogeneous and/or rural systems might be effectively managed by elected boards but that says little to me about whether an elected board can work in our city.

If the goal is to improve Board oversight of the system and assure relevant expertise, I question whether elections will do that. I've committed to supporting people with classroom experience above, but candidate qualifications often have little bearing on election outcomes in our city (like many other places). As an attorney, I don't support electing judges because I think democracy requires judges be good at judging, not winning elections.

If the goal is to increase public involvement and input, I think there are many other ways to achieve that goal. I have also seen how, in other jurisdictions, incumbent board members acquire all the power of other political incumbents, which can lead to a new flavor of concerns about transparency, accountability, and entrenched power. There are many areas where public input and transparency could be increased within the school system; it does not seem to me that electing board members is the best or only way to do that, and I think there is a real risk of worse outcomes.

Ultimately the desire for an elected school board comes from the desire for greater accountability. As I mentioned above, the 1997 changes removed that kind of accountability because currently no elected official has any over the school system. The long term answer is a deep analysis of the right way to structure governance of the school system. The clearest form of accountability in urban jurisdictions is mayoral -- because voters can remove the most powerful person if their schools don't perform. I am open to other ideas on this, but overall I believe the issue is bigger than whether not board members are elected.

11. Student and staff safety: A number of recent, high-profile incidents of violence in our schools have drawn attention to questions of student discipline. Additionally, in surveys to families about reservations on enrolling their children in a BCPSS school, student safety is cited as their #1 concern. Generally, employees of the school system have questioned the current code of conduct as ineffective, whereby students are suspended from school only to return when the suspension is over with the same underlying issues. Are there any revisions to the code of conduct for student behavior that you feel should be considered?

As I understand it, the urgent issue here is the consequence of reduced suspensions and other out-of-school consequences for bad behavior. I believe that many of the problems in our criminal justice system have seeped into our school system, with similar consequences, and I believe that we need a restorative justice model to solve student conduct problems. The best research in the criminal justice context shows that the system itself is criminogenic. For example, minor probation violations lead to lengthy prison terms, disrupting lives and families with greater long-term collateral consequences for the offender, leading to re-offense. The answer isn't no consequences for wrongful behavior, however. Studies consistently show that, to be effective, sanctions must be swift and certain -- but they do not need to be severe. In the probation context, for example, there's no difference between a day in jail and a month -- both restore compliance provided the system provides clear sanction for reasons the offender understands are legitimate. The way we discipline our children in schools cannot make the same mistakes our society makes in the criminal justice context, with the choice between extreme consequences that foster more rule-breaking down the line, and no consequences at all. Students with behavior challenges need to face swift, certain and clear consequences that restore community norms while not permanently disrupting their lives (as long-term suspension does, ultimately leading to non-graduation etc.). This could be handled on site at schools, with restorative justice practices implemented, but not without sufficient resources.

12. Baltimore's population loss has contributed to enrollment declines in City Schools. Lower enrollment has also been caused by under-investment fueled by systemic racism that's lowered the quality of City Schools' programming. As part of the 21st Century Schools initiative, Baltimore was required to close a number of schools in order to qualify for renovation funds. School closures have also been triggered by low achievement, as part of the district's portfolio approach to schools. These policies have resulted in a disproportionate number of vacant schools in black neighborhoods that are already under-resourced. If elected, what is your plan to utilize these potential community resources?

Decommissioned schools revert back to city government control, which I dealt with as Assistant Deputy Mayor with oversight of the city's Department of General Services. These buildings pose real challenges because of their age, and in many cases building a brand new structure would be less expensive than attempting to renovate the existing, decommissioned one. But these empty husks are also an awful sign of decline for a neighborhood and something must be done. In most cases the infrastructure challenges could be overcome if main challenge -- programming funds for after school programs, adult education, athletics and recreation, etc. -- could be overcome. Ultimately that's the real issue. What I would like to see most of all is community health and rehabilitation centers. The many classrooms in an old school building lend themselves to one-on-one and group therapy, and for all the talk of "trauma" there's not enough community based resources to assist people directly with the trauma of growing up in the kind of neighborhoods that likely have an abandoned school building. I would also like to see our juvenile justice system move towards much shorter term, community based confinement options, only when absolutely necessary and not in a traditional prison context, to assist true rehabilitation for young people with their entire lives ahead of them.

13. In Baltimore, as across the nation, school zones and neighborhood boundaries have historically served to limit access to high quality public schools. While Baltimore City Public Schools students in middle and high school are assigned to schools through a complicated “school choice” process, students in elementary schools are still largely assigned to schools based on enrollment zones. These zones were created over a generation ago, and in the years since, population shifts (notably large growth southeast Baltimore of the English Language Learner population, which required additional services and support) have resulted in several schools being overcrowded, while others are under-enrolled. Additionally, the school district’s Equity Policy requires it to examine its plans and practices to determine and address the ways they exacerbate racial and economic inequity. In order to meet the needs of Baltimore families, and move towards a more just and equitable school system, a comprehensive redistricting plan should be completed, involving the coordination of the Baltimore City Planning Department and Baltimore City Public Schools. However, changing neighborhood boundaries causes significant public backlash. If elected, would you support school redistricting and would you direct the Baltimore City Planning Department to partner with City Schools to create a comprehensive plan?

This is a great question. It is urgent that redistricting be undertaken, and with the onset of Kirwan obligations, it is urgent that resources be aligned and hard choices be made if they have to. I absolutely agree that comprehensive planning is needed, and I would champion it as Council President.

Here again, the question of governance is paramount. I was in the mayor’s office when the 21st Century schools plan was first rolled out. In conjunction with that was supposed to be a grand Planning Department-led effort to align city investments (in road, rec centers, programming) with these new schools. But that effort stalled for lack of coordination, and because the splintered authority lack of political will meant city government and its resources were not (at least at the time) a meaningful participant in new school construction decisions. We have so many bureaucracies operating in silos. Finding Kirwan funding will require that no longer be the case.

14. Public Charter Schools: There are 50 public charter schools in the state of Maryland, the vast majority of which are in Baltimore City. Some charter school operators would like to weaken state law to make the teachers and staff at the charter employees of the charter non-profit board, not the school system. This would remove all protections that the teachers and staff have under the BTU collective bargaining agreement. Should charter school teachers and staff be considered employees of the charter school board or the city’s public school board?

Charter school teachers should be considered employees of the city’s school board. We should not go down the path of privatization.

15. Should there be a cap on the number of charter schools in Baltimore City? Why or why not?

Caps are quantitative, not qualitative, and I generally don't like them as a policy tool, particularly for something as complex as educating kids. But I strongly think the year-in, year-out churn of opening and closing charters is not productive. The system should be focused on building sustainably successful schools for the long term, and should have a strategy regarding the number and kind of charters within the system. I would prefer these be designed to offer meaningfully different options on the menu available our students, perhaps creating innovations that can be translated back into the rest of the school system. I do not think charters should be a substitute for solving the management and other bureaucratic problems present in some traditional schools.

16. BOOST/School Vouchers: Should government give vouchers (either as a tax credit or even a tax rebate) to parents who want to send their children to a private school?

No.

17. Education funding: Some in Annapolis have argued that Baltimore City should be contributing more to its public school system than is currently budgeted. The city ranks among the worst in Maryland when it comes to the local contribution to its public school system; while on average a county in Maryland contributes roughly 36% of its annual operating budget to its local school system, in Baltimore, the city contributes only 14% of its budget to its schools. The Kirwan Commission is recommending the city increase its contribution by \$300 million, more than doubling its current contribution.

17(a) How large of an increase, percentage wise, should Baltimore City commit in its budget to funding public schools?

I am not certain that percent of total budget is the right way to frame this question. Quite frankly, Baltimore City government has more obligations and responsibilities than the vast majority of Maryland counties – roads and snow removal, to name two – and has unique expenses accrued as a result of decades of disinvestment and regional isolation. These are no excuse for mismanagement or failures of leadership, but simply put, we have challenges that others don't, created by forces not exclusively under our control, and these have a pricetag.

Our kids bear the brunt of these challenges – regional economic and racial isolation – and it is critical to keep in mind that the expenditures city government makes to maintain the city our children live in outside of school impact their ability to perform in school during the school day. It would be a significant mistake to think that gleaming new schools with all the resources they need can succeed if they are surrounded by failing infrastructure, inadequate housing, decrepit parks, high crime, trash, and a flagging business sector. Our kids need good schools, but they need a functioning city government just like the rest of us.

We need to agree on the number needed to educate our kids, get everything we can from the state, and then find the way to make up the difference.

17(b) In order to meet Kirwan obligations, how would you propose raising that additional \$300 million?

The Kirwan Commission was a multi-year effort to analyze school funding in Maryland, facilitated in no small part by the Maryland General Assembly. Baltimore City needs a similar effort, carried out over the next two years, to analyze all of its spending and determine how we as a city will meet our obligations under Kirwan.

That's the only way to answer your question – with a serious process led by serious people interested bringing people together to answer hard questions. As Council President, that will be right in my wheelhouse, and I intend to create a Commission charged with demanding that hard choices be made. In particular, we need to slowly move a large part of the \$550 million spent on police into our school system.

18. In every school district in Maryland the head of the school system is the Superintendent of public schools. However, in the two majority minority school systems—Baltimore City and Prince George’s County—the head of the school system is instead titled the CEO of public schools. This title change, while subtle, has been significant: since the switch to a more corporate-based model with this title change, these two districts have seen a substantial portion of their schools become charters, and an overall explosion in the amount of standardized testing has followed. If elected to office, will you be in favor of returning the title of the head of our public school system to “Superintendent” so as to be identical with other school districts in Maryland? Why or why not?

I agree that "CEO" connotes a corporate, quasi-privatized model. But I have heard from women I respect that they consider it a demotion of the current CEO to rename the role "superintendent." I would prefer to use "superintendent," but rather than get bogged down in a fight over titles, we should focus on the crux of your question -- privatization, testing, and the idea that running a school is like making widgets. That Maryland's two majority-minority districts use "CEO" is part of a branding effort to get tough on Black students perceived to be low-performing, to run these systems "like a business." Schools are not a business, and their value cannot be measured on profit and loss statement.

### Vision for Baltimore City

19. Privatization: Recently, CUB and AFT-Maryland worked with the City Council and Food and Water Watch to pass a city charter amendment that would prohibit our water from ever being privatized. Are there other resources that are owned by the city that you believe should never be privatized? When, if ever, do you feel it is appropriate to privatize public services or property?

It is never appropriate to privatize public services or public infrastructure (particular city-owned land and buildings excepted). When the City Council voted to protect the water system from privatization, I testified before them on the importance of protecting the city's little known "conduit system" as well. (This is a network of underground pipes for electrical and other infrastructure).

20. Development: In 2016, the city passed a multi-billion dollar re-development plan, supported by a \$535 million TIF request to develop Port Covington. Opponents worried development projects such as these, funded through public tax revenues, will be used not to the betterment of all in the city, but instead to the betterment of wealthy elites, widening the gap between the haves and have-nots in Baltimore. Do you have a vision for development in Baltimore City that...

20(a) ...assures neighborhoods will contain equitable amounts of low-income and affordable housing?

I would have opposed the Port Covington TIF in its current form because it allows the developers to build affordable housing off-site. We need mixed income neighborhoods and development, and our tax policy has to incentivize that, not reward lip service.

20(b) ...will help the city improve its financial contribution to its public school system?

I think we need to review every TIF awarded by the city to make sure we are receiving the benefits called for in these agreements. I also think we should almost never award such benefits in the future. I say almost -- there will be examples where they make sense. But we should carefully consider whether the city can make direct infrastructure investments to make a development happen in lieu of a TIF. As we know, these have put school funding in a perilous condition because we are foregoing tax revenue even as the value of the built real estate is part of the schools funding calculation. As an alternative -- though likely a too-complicated alternative -- developers could be required to hold the city harmless in future school funding calculations.

20(c) ...will be completed by workers who live in and around the Baltimore region, and follow prevailing wage standards and project-labor agreements?

I support prevailing wage standards. I am concerned over the response to representatives of minority labor and contractor groups to the recent legislation concerning project labor agreements. There appears to be a disconnect between the city's construction workforce and organized labor on this issue, and grave concern that local workers will lose out in favor of non-city, unionized workers. It pains me to see this conflict because I am pro-union, but until I understand this issue -- as it relates specifically to Baltimore City's construction trades workforce -- I can't yet take a stance on PLAs.



20(d) ...will contain businesses that must follow labor peace agreements?

Yes.

21. Affordable housing: Recently, CUB worked with legislators in Annapolis to pass legislation that would allow the city to grant low-income city employees a property tax credit on their homes. Affordable housing is a priority for city educators as well, as there are more homeless students in Baltimore city than there are total students in some county districts. What is your plan to increase accessibility to quality, stable housing in Baltimore city?

I will advocate for new, aggressive leadership at Baltimore Housing and at HABC. I will also push for a fundamental reassessment of our development apparatus, starting with the Baltimore Development Corporation.

The city's Affordable Housing Trust Fund shows what happens when leadership is not urgently pursuing affordable housing. Even though money exists, not a single unit of affordable housing has been built. Current leadership at the city will host meetings forever and never spent a nickel.

We need to allow fast-track approvals of development proposals that have a substantial affordable component, and create zoning exemptions for high-density mix-income housing to incentivize investment.

22. Crime: Do improved education and expanded city services play significant roles in your plan to reduce crime in Baltimore city? If so, how?

Yes. I believe in rehabilitation, and that the great majority of offenders can be diverted away from violent crime if given alternatives. In general people are not stupid, and they are not evil monsters; rather, they are making bad choices within very difficult situations. I am a proponent of a Focused Deterrence approach that uses a combination of carrots and sticks, and direct, consistent outreach, to at-risk offenders in these situations. But that strategy needs a robust set of services to which to refer individuals we want to avoid wrongdoing. Drug treatment and CBT therapy; workforce development; GED and adult education. These are all essential components to reducing criminal behavior in the long term.

Thank You!

Thank you for taking the time to complete this candidate questionnaire. If you have any questions, please contact Todd Reynolds, AFT-Maryland Political Coordinator, at (410) 764-3030, or [treyolds@aftmd.org](mailto:treyolds@aftmd.org).



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