

Costello - Dist. 11

## 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

Eric Costello

Candidate for:

Baltimore City Council, 11th District

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Email address

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Present occupation

Baltimore City Council, 11th District

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Employer

Baltimore City

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Party affiliation

Democrat

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

2016: AFL-CIO, IAFF 734, IAFF 964, AFCSME Local 67, ATF-MD & BTU, ILA District Council and Locals 333, 953, 1429 and 2066, FOP 3, LiUNA!, SEIU State Council, Unite Here Local 7.

2020: ILA Local 333 and 953

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

Current position - October 6, 2014 - present

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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?

As Chair of the CC Budget & Appropriations Committee, I have personally led budget negotiations with the Administration the past three years, with the overwhelming majority of those funds negotiated being directed to education and youth services, including a historic agreement in 2017 which increased the City's MOE by \$3M annually. I work very closely with each principal in my district as well as the Promise Heights community schools program to improve outcomes for our kids.

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

Yes, GAO Local 1921

## 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, yes, and yes.

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?

I believe there should be one minimum wage throughout the State. I was supportive of efforts to increase this to \$10.10 and again last year to \$15.

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?

A defined benefit pension plan provides for a specified payout amount in retirement and a defined contribution plan gives the opportunity to employees and employers to contribute toward retirement over the period of employment. I do not have a position on this. I believe it is up to the municipality and the labor unions to negotiate what is most appropriate for the employees.

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?

I don't believe this would require a City Council ordinance. That said, I am not supportive of making this change.

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?

Absolutely, yes.

#### 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?

Attendance, physical environment, and wrap around support services. We have incredible teachers, but it is challenging to effectively teach when kids aren't showing up at school, when HVAC systems don't work, or students are coming to school unprepared to learn due to challenges at home. My work around schools has focused on increased funding to BCPSS, working on ways to increase attendance (i am working on a pilot program re: this for past two months), and increasing capacity of our community school program operators.

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 believe any school board must have educators with at least 3 years of classroom experience, but that can't be the only criteria, otherwise we are doing a disservice to our kids. Potential criteria include: residence in the City, diversity to match that of the City, and formerly or currently with kids attending BCPSS.

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?

I support a hybrid model. I would need to research what other municipalities have done in more depth before taking a position on a specific number of appointed vs. elected officials.

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?

I do not have specific examples but would welcome the opportunity to discuss with AFT / BTU.

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?

None of these closures have occurred in the 11th District. As Chair of the Budget and Appropriations Committee, I have used that position to advocate for additional assignments of funding in fund balance to cover closing out debt service on closed school facilities in order for the City to more efficiently dispose of those properties. Once disposed of, these provide redevelopment and revitalization opportunities for the communities they surround, which should include community amenities, including those focused on education and youth activities. One of my focuses has been attracting grocery stores throughout the City and in food priority areas this would provide great benefit to the surrounding communities.

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?

As a Councilmember, I don't have the power to "direct" Planning to create a comprehensive plan in conjunction with BCPSS. That said, just as I support police redistricting, I certainly support school zone redistricting. Once a plan is completed, it should be implemented / phased in over a period of time (2-3 years) that does not create hardship or uncertainty for families, students, faculty, staff, and the community.



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 employees should be employees of BCPSS, with the exception of charter school board members.

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

I don't believe there is a binary answer here.

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?

The Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) Program provides scholarships for some students who are eligible for the FARM program to attend eligible nonpublic schools. I do not believe government should be subsidizing this.

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?

The City will need to fund an additional \$330 M by FY2031, phased in annually. This is approximately \$266 M in current day dollars. The FY2020 General Fund budget for Baltimore City is approximately \$1.9 B.

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

This would need to be phased in over a ten year period, and it must happen. This will require a combination of a reduction in services, gained efficiencies in services, reorganization of certain agencies, reduced budgets for several agencies, and potentially raising revenues.

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 do not have a position on this. I do not see a correlation between the head of BCPSS's title and the number of charter schools other than that being a coincidence.

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?

One resource which comes to mind that should never be privatized is our conduit system. The City's ownership of the system ensures we will one day be able to bring municipal broadband to all areas of the City and ensure that all residents have equitable and affordable access to the Internet. I can't think of an existing City resource or service which should be solely privatized.

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?

Yes, I have continued to support building affordable housing in Baltimore City, since my first day on the City Council.

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

Yes, please see answers to previous question on this.

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

Yes, but in order to have a PLA that is effective, we must have enough residents prepared and trained to do that work.

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

Yes, I fully support labor peace agreements.

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 voted in support of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, the \$20 M agreement to fund it, and the Neighborhood Impact Investment Fund (NIIF). I will continue to support these and other efforts to expand accessibility to quality and stable housing in Baltimore City.

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. Providing students with better outcomes better prepares them for when they graduate, to hold a family sustaining job, to raise a family, and be productive members of the community.

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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