

Hawkins - Dist. 13

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 treyolds@aftmd.org.

Email address *



Candidate Information

Name

Wesley Hawkins

Candidate for:

District 13 City Council

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Email address

Present occupation

Non Profit founder of The Nolita Project

Employer

The Nolita Project

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've experienced first hand a lot of the issues our union workers face and recognize the importance and value of collective bargaining in the process of facilitating change. As a former educator and program provider with Baltimore City Public schools, correctional officer with State of Maryland and Community liaison for Baltimore Consent Decree, I've been an employee of both city & state agencies and I firmly believe that the rights of our employees in each respective field need better protection. I am the candidate who will represent our employees and residents to produce results.

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

No

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?

All employees deserve the right to participate in collective bargaining. Baltimore City Librarians and Convention Center Employees should be granted the right and if I am elected I will support legislation that expands collective bargaining rights for city/municipal employees that currently are not able to participate.

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?

Functionally, the Raise the Wage Act will help but more needs to be done. The purchasing power of the 2025 \$15 rate is the equivalent of only \$11.93 in 2012. I support Indexing the minimum wage to inflation. It would give employees, including tipped workers and their families the ability to keep up with cost of living and allow for the inflation adjustments. With the current rate so far behind I am fully in favor of linking the minimum wage to inflation. I am in favor of removing the delays and loopholes because the longer employees are forced to wait for fair wage increases, the less our employees are able to provide for their families.

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?

I support the move from the current Defined Benefit Plan to Defined Contribution Plan because it gives employees freedom in their ability to invest and plan their financial future according to their individual goals. Defined Benefit Plans places a limit on the income workers can receive or withdrawal during retirement and takes away the benefit of compound interest and growth associated with invested assets. Although DBP (when properly funded) offer low risk and steady payments, Defined Contribution Plans (such as 401k) have the flexibility to adjust for risk tolerance, time horizon, and liquidity needs. Simply put, I believe moving to a defined contribution plan would be more beneficial and I support the move.

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?

When elected, I pledge to vote against moving 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?

Safe working conditions for city employees is paramount. An inherent risk already exist when our employees work in external environments and a failure to ensure safety protocols are met is unacceptable. When elected, I will support legislation that require various city departments to partner with Maryland Occupational Safety and Health.

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?

In my opinion, The top 3 issues facing Baltimore City Schools are:

- 1.Under funding of resources for Black and brown students
- 2,Under representation of black and brown educators
- 3.Need for more counselors to help students and teachers to deal with Trauma

As a Regional Strategy Team member of the Baltimoreans for Educational Equity Organization for the past 3 years, I have had the opportunity to advocate for students and educators. I fully support the Kirwan commission/ legislation and Id fight to expedite the funding which would help to address the issues raised. I also support the Trauma Bill presented by Zeke Cohen, Ill work to ensure that the oversight committee performs their function appropriately.

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 that City Council should have the ability to approve/vote on members of the school board. School board members should be compassionate, collaborative and required to have experience in education as an educator (exception: youth school board members). I would support a vote to require school board members to have 3 yrs experience.

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?

When elected, I will support a fully elected school board which I believe would provide an optimal structure. It would require each member to be held to the standard with city council, representing the interest of each district having a voice in the decisions.

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 feel more staff, alternative remediation, adequate counseling resources, and less suspensions could resolve many of the reoccurring issues. Sending a student home doesnt fix the underlying issue, getting the student the appropriate resources will make a bigger impact. I believe the Kirwan legislation can truly impact these occurrences.

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?

I will work with elected officials to first engage with the communities (residents, associations, schools etc.) to uncover the resources most in need within each community, then connect with partners to offer the resources, safe spaces and potential programming at these locations.

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?

I would support redistricting and I would also support Baltimore city planning department partnering with city schools. Prior to implementation, I would support an open hall for residents to learn further about the reasoning and how the new districts affect the communities.

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?

I believe the charter school teachers and staff should be considered employees of Baltimore City Schools and their right to remain under the BTU collective bargaining agreement should never be taken away.

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

I think there should be a cap on the number of charter schools, that specific number should be voted on. Instead of expanding the number of charter schools and potential pulling resources and students from the host district, our schools can potential share strategy and information on how to better serve our students.

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?

To subsidize the cost of education at private school locations, I believe the government should give a number of tax rebates.

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?

At least the additional 14%, raising to 28% at least meeting the recommended Kirwan Commission increase because properly educating our students is paramount.

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

Through city budget reallocation and more state/federal funding.

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 would be in support of the change because in shifting the title, it also realigns the role to the more appropriate function and in turn the culture. Education is not a business.

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?

Only when the cost to operate, renovate, or facilitate becomes exorbitant without foreseeable resolution should we consider potentially privatizing any resources.

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 support ensuring development takes into account and reserves a specified amount (to be voted/agreed upon) of spaces, housing etc. and also the utilization of union workers to work on projects.

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

In 2019 I supported and advocated for the Lock Box fund which protects city allocated funds from being substituted with Casino revenue funds and instead receiving both as intended. I will continue the support of educational equity and the financial contributions to city schools through voting to reallocate more city funds to our schools/more contribution from the state.

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 the strengthening and expansion of prevailing wage. The reason boils down to one thing, fair treatment of workers. If the construction project receives tax subsidy or tax increment financing, then they are benefiting from money that workers chipped into. If the project benefits from our taxes, no matter the amount, prevailing wage should be applied. I will support legislation to this end. I also support PLAs, they are a proven way to provide efficiently executed projects that support growth and quality wages for workers

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

I would work with Unions, like the AFT, and fellow council members to create an oversight body, whether MOED or another agency or audit group to ensure labor peace agreements are compliant.

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 plan to work with my fellow council members and mayor to provide better solutions for accessible quality and stable housing for residents.

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, appropriate resources reaching the right people make a huge impact in crime. Improved physical conditions and resources are needed for our residents and I support both Kirwan and the Trauma Bill as they can offer solutions.

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 treynolds@aftmd.org.



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