

Piterson - 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 treynolds@aftmd.org.

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Candidate Information

Name

Akil Patterson

Candidate for:

13th District City Councilman

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Email address

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Present occupation

Consultant

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Employer

Community Advocacy Consultants

.....

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

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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?

My campaign should be supported, as I have always been an avid supporter of unions. If elected I would make sure to work closely, with unions in the city to ensure collective bargaining, safe work environments, and beneficial retirement programs.

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?

Yes, any group of employees who seek the right to collectively bargain should be granted so. If elected I will meet with groups that seek to expand their collectively bargaining rights to get their input prior to drafting and presenting legislation to the council.

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?

Minimum wage should be a living wage, this should include tipped workers and grow along with inflation. Current legislation creates a delay in the increase of minimum wage , If elected I would be in favor of removing this delay and closing the loopholes.

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 employee having the ability to choose their retirement benefits. Employees, who have worked for the city longer may have an affinity for the defined benefit system. At the same time newer employees may find more value in the 401K system. By giving them the ability to choose, you put the choice in the hands of the employee, where it rightfully should be.

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?

If elected I pledge to fight on behalf of city employees to ensure that prescription benefits are taken from the current system and moved to Medicare Plan D.

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?

A safe work environment is necessary. However, in our current system does not provide that for all city employees. If elected, I will work to ensure to fight for no cost inspections for all city work environments.

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?

The biggest issues in Baltimore City Schools are: Underfunding, Mistreatment of Teachers, and Lack of Community Based Resources. If elected, I will work to pass legislation that will divest funding from the Baltimore City Police. This funding will supplement the benefits of Kirwan to properly fund schools. After funding is available, I would work with the school system to make better incentives to not only retain qualified teachers, but attract more to the city. Lastly, with funding received programming can be created in schools to build stronger community bonds, that have been shown to have long lasting effects.

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 the city council should have a more active role in the selection of members of the City School Board. This can be in the form of the Council being able to veto selections made by the Mayor. While looking at members, involvement in not only in the school system, but the community as well should be looked at as the School and community are an extension of one another. I would commit to supporting candidates with 3 years of classroom 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?

If elected, I would support legislation that would either create a hybrid board or would allow for a completely elected board. The reason for this is so the community can play a bigger role in the movement of the school system, rather than those with resources and connections.

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?

Student and Staff Safety is an important aspect of the school system. As mentioned the current code of conduct will allow students to return with the underlying issues of the suspension not examined. A revision I would make to the code of conduct would allow for connections to be made with services in the city that can look at underlying issues. Example , if the action is caused by food instability in the home we would with area food banks to assist with this issue. Another example would be if the action is related to some kind of abuse, we would connect the family with the proper agencies to address this.

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?

If elected, I would utilize potential community based resources to attract teachers to low achieving schools in black neighborhoods. This would assist in not only achievement of the school, but assist in the culture of the neighborhood itself, that carries over into the school.

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?

If elected, I would support the redistricting of school zones through a partnership between BCPSS and the Baltimore City Planning Department. This would allow for the equitable distribution of resources based on the demographic in the area.

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 would push for teachers and staff of Charter Schools to be employees of the city's public school system. By doing this they would be able to work with the BTU and actively take collective bargaining action.

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

There should a cap on the number of Charter Schools in the city. The reason for this is that not to disrupt the total enrollment in the public school system. An over-saturation of charter schools can cause this issue.

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?

This should be done on a case by case basis.

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?

Baltimore City should commit to the state average of 36% of the annual budget to the school system.

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

As mentioned earlier additional funds can be obtained by divesting from the Baltimore City Police Department and investing into education. More funds can be raised through partnerships with major corporations within city limits.

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?

If elected I am in favor of returning the title to Superintendent. The reason for this is public education is not a corporation and should not be treated as such, it is a collective effort of the community and the city to educate the youth of the city.

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?

Public Services and Public Property should remain public and not 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?

Part of my economic development plan is to plan for an equitable amount affordable and low income housing throughout the city, so is not clustered together in small pockets of the city.

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

By properly appropriated taxes and developing community partnerships we would be able to better fund education efforts.

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

A major part of my plan is to develop legislation that would require contract hires be 51% residents of the city. This would create numerous work opportunities for residents.

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

In my previous mentioned legislation it would require contractors have a record of following peace labor agreements in order to obtain city contracts. Those found to have broken agreement will be placed on a 2 to 5 year wait list based on the level of the violation.

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?

Part of my plan is to reach out to organizations in the city to assist in the development of affordable housing. This is done through the establishment of community based partnerships, that look to restore abandoned housing and subsidize available housing to make it affordable.

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, they play a major in the reduction of crime. By improving education through the divestment of police funding, this gives schools more opportunities for more qualified teacher, but better programming as well. This increase in programming allows for more involved youth and communities, which has been shown to lower crime rates. Along with this the expansion of city services will give opportunities, to those who previously would've turned to illicit methods.

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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