

Ramos - Dist. 14

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.

Email address *



Candidate Information

Name

Odette Ramos

Candidate for:

City Council District 14

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Email address

Present occupation

Executive Director

Employer

Community Development Network of Maryland, Inc.

Party affiliation

Democrat

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

Yes, UFCW - December 2019, SEIU 32BJ, December 2019, Liuna December 2019

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

I am currently serving in my 2nd term as a member of the Baltimore City Democratic State Central Committee representing District 43. First elected in 2014.

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 30 years experience in Baltimore has prepared me for this position. My background is in community development and organizational development. I have worked to improve communities through organizing, advocacy and legislation, most recently leading the Affordable Housing Trust Fund in Baltimore, which now has \$20million a year in new money for affordable housing, and as the Executive Director of the Community Development Network of MD passing legislation to create more tools to address vacant properties and eliminate tax sale. I have also worked to improve the lives of young people across this city. As a mom, I founded several playgroups in our neighborhood, and took courses to understand the young developing brain and how we can help our young children at an early age. I also founded the Village Learning Place, a community run library and learning center in Charles Village that was the old St. Paul Street library. As a consultant I organized with the Algebra Project for the city to create the Peer to Peer Enterprise fund to have money for youth entrepreneurs. I've been the chair of the Baltimore Hispanic Chamber of Commerce when I was a small business owner, and organized the Neighborhood Congress in 1998, and passed important legislation in Annapolis to end Tax sales and to create more tools to address vacant properties.

This is just some of the work I have done in Baltimore. I am committed to putting neighborhoods and people first, and have a track record of getting things done in our communities. We cannot improve educational outcomes without improving the circumstances and neighborhoods by which our young people are living. We have to do both.

I am the best candidate for this position right now. I have knocked on over 16,000 doors already since May of 2019, I work hard, and I have the experience to start on Day One making Baltimore work for everyone.

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, if elected, I will work to expand collective bargaining rights to municipal employees who currently do not have that right. I believe in unions, it has been the unions who fight for increased wages and fair treatment for everyone. Expanding collective bargaining agreements to protect the rights of librarians, employees of the Baltimore Convention Center, and Baltimore City Community College is crucial to maintaining a level playing field for all kinds of workers in Baltimore City.

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 am proud to have been part of the statewide coalition to Fight for \$15, in my role as the co-Chair of Baltimore Women United. Working with the coalition and offering the voice of women who have suffered from unequal pay was important. Unfortunately, most of our tipped workers are women and people of color. We absolutely need to include them in the wage. I will introduce legislation to include them, increase the timeframe by which Baltimore reaches \$15, and tie Baltimore's wage to inflation (which is called indexing). Baltimore already indexes its livable wage and prevailing wage, we can do the same with the minimum wage, and be a leader in this for our state and nation. Increased wages for all workers helps our economy and 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?

No. Public sector jobs, in general, pay less in exchange for guaranteed retirement funds. Switching to a defined contribution plan would make public sector jobs less attractive and cause some of the public sector's high-functioning employees to look for work in the private sector, leading less effective and/or efficient public services. While pensions are a burden to our budget, we must continue to give such to our workers, and come up with creative solutions to make sure that such payments are not taken away in the future.

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 will never vote to move retirees from the prescription drug benefit we give them to Medicare Part D. It's actually critical we take a comprehensive look at our health care system with our state partners to be sure everyone has access to prescription drugs and at prices we can afford. No one should have to make decisions between rent, prescriptions, and regular bills.

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?

Our facilities are aging, and as such, often repairs are delayed because of budget problems. We should be proactive in making sure that such facilities are safe for our workers. More importantly, a partnership with MOSH will help us identify any other workplace hazards. We should do this on a regular basis so that facilities and protocols are updated.

I want them, or the appropriate entity, to also inspect workplace safety, so that we can have workplaces that are free from sexual, racial or other harassment or discrimination. I've heard stories at the doors from women in particular who are city employees who have been harrassed, and yet are afraid to lose their jobs so they don't say anything and continue to work in an unsafe environment. This is not how women should be living, and we must end it, with some proactive steps to ensure that all workers are safe.

I will work on this legislation with the AFT.

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

Inequalities. We have some fabulous schools. We have some terrible schools. Look at a map and we can see where this is happening in our segregated city. This is not a mistake. Chronic underfunding comes in, and these disparities deepen. In order to address this, we must do the following:

Ensure Kirwan funding comes to Baltimore. I will work with our City Delegation in Annapolis this year to ensure that funding comes to us.

Ensure Baltimore meets its funding obligation. Currently the City Council only cuts from the Mayor's budget. There is a charter amendment pending that would drastically change our role and allow Councilmembers to add to the budget and move around. I want to sit on the Budget and Appropriations Committee to move funds from areas where we don't need it, to education. I don't want to raise property taxes at all in our City, I know we can find efficiencies to do this (including the police overtime!).

The formula is such that schools in concentrated poverty areas, and those with students with disabilities (and trauma) will get more funding using a weighted scale. This is important to make sure that the Principals are asking for the right funding, and I want to make the schools' budget processes are open, that community members, teachers, and parents have genuine input in the budget. As a member of the Budget and Appropriations Committee I will have a lot of leverage to ask City Schools to do this.

Make sure we have exceptional, excellent inspirational leaders in our schools. While Kirwan Commission focuses on enhancing teacher's abilities to address the needs of the students in their classrooms, we have to be sure the Principals are also provided with similar training, and are managers who can provide their teachers with the resources they need to help the students. I have knocked on too many teacher's doors who are unsatisfied with the support they get (or don't get) from their Principals because the Principal is concerned about how the school will look. This has to end, as it's not fair for the students or the teachers. I would like to work with BTU and the principals union on how best to do this, which could include enhancing the support for Principals, allow for teacher and parent participation in evaluation of Principals, and more. My role would be to get everyone to the table, and come up with the strategies from there. I will advocate for the funding to make sure we can do this. Our students and teachers deserve it.

Enhance the environment in which our students live. Here's where my community development background comes in. While we have to continue the work of building new schools or rehabbing the schools (REACH Partnership school is the newest school in our district, and City College will be getting significant funding for renovations, while Lake Montebello is next for a new school), we also have to make sure our students, and their families, are living in environments that do not make our students stressed. If they are stressed, the Cortisol in the brain is enhanced, and it blocks learning. Here's what we need to do:

Create a system where if families need to address mental health or substance abuse, they get help right away. We have no system, and Methadone is not for everyone. Social workers in the schools will help, but creating a system that families can access who are in trauma, or who want to kick their substance abuse habit, is really important.

Address vacant properties and blight. If students walk to school next to vacant properties, their stress level increases, but also the perception is that the city does not care about them or their neighborhoods. My plan to address vacant properties is based on my experience and work I have done over many years, and includes creating a land bank to address vacant properties in a more timely and efficient way. I've passed legislation in Annapolis allowing the City to do this, and it has not been implemented yet. We should focus on areas by our schools first.

Continue to hold landlords accountable. While the City Council just passed laws to register and inspect

rental properties so that landlords can get their license and continue to rent, I've witnessed several landlords who are not complying with the law. They are not even registering with the City and continue to have tenants in terrible conditions. Tenants are afraid to take action for fear of losing their housing. My experience as the Board Chair of the Fair Housing Action Center will help tenants advocate for themselves, but most importantly, we'll report the landlord not complying, which triggers a surprise inspection and more action. Children cannot live in conditions where they are unsafe in their own homes.

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?

First we must bring the City Schools back to the jurisdiction of the City. Right now it's a partnership system where the Governor and the Mayor appoint the board members, the State Board of Education begins the selection and vetting process and hands it to the city for the rest. More importantly, because the City Schools are not under our jurisdiction, we cannot make laws that govern the system. So I will work with our Delegation to move City Schools back to our jurisdiction. Then, I'll introduce legislation whereby the appointed school board members have to go through the same process that others go through for boards and commissions, they get nominated by the Mayor and then approved by the City Council. School board members should have some background in education, whether as a teacher, a principal or staff member of the school system or school. I do not mind having business-minded members of the school board either, but most of the members must have some experience. They also must be individuals with upstanding integrity, and are committed to transparency.

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?

While HB558 that was passed in 2016 creates a semi-hybrid board of school commissioners make up, it does not go far enough. The General Assembly needs to make this change, so I will work with our City Delegation in the General Assembly to move toward an 11 member board, with 6 elected, rather than just 2. We also need to make sure it's an odd number of board members to address any tie breaker situation.

Last, we need to bring the Baltimore City Schools under the City completely. School board members are appointed by the Mayor and the Governor, and it's been that way since 1997. (I worked on that legislation while I was working for Delegate Jim Campbell in the General Assembly that year, he was the Chair of the Education Subcommittee). Generally the Governor has not been involved, other than the state board of education begins the process with vetting and interviews. However, with our current Governor, we could be in a situation where he decides to intervene with the appointments.

Having the city schools come completely under the jurisdiction of the City, and having a partially elected school board, are both important for transparency and accountability.

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?

In school systems across the country, Mindfulness is being practiced as an alternative to detention or suspension. Mindfulness and restorative justice practices should be included in the toolbox for the schools to use for addressing student behavior. Restorative justice allows for the student to be in a room, with the resources they need, and the person who was the target of their behavior. That student then has to face what they did, and work with the room full of resources on a plan. Mindfulness allows students to sit, breath, and think about what they want, how they want to behave to get that, and allows for reflection. This is totally new thinking, and yet it's working across the country. Let's think differently about school discipline, because the students doing the worst in this, likely have other issues they are dealing with or are in trauma. They need help. Suspending them, and then not addressing the underlying issues is a problem.

Admittedly, I've heard from teachers on whose door I have knocked that sometimes the students are so disruptive, they cannot teach the others who are not. Allowing for restorative practice and mindfulness may help these students, and so they may need to be removed from the classroom and to get additional help they need and come back in when ready.

Let's think creatively about what we're doing.

Safety is a big deal, and I've heard from students that they can be afraid to go to school. If we have violent offenders then more drastic approaches must take place in addition to those I laid out.

The City Council's role would be to work with the school system to do this. Again, my role on the Budget and Taxation committee will help hold the system accountable, help get funding for them to move in this direction, and encourage such changes.

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?

In the 14th District, the old Venable school in Waverly has sat vacant for years. In this case, there are no recreation centers in the area (the Waverly Y is a great resource, but does charge a membership fee). Residents are asking for a community center in the area to fill lots of needs, including a place for young people, a place for senior to gather, and a place for the community. This could serve Ednor Gardens as well. The City has finally issued an RFP for the building. Right now the proposals include demolition for additional homes, and revitalization for the Midtown Academy. The Residents have been clear they want a community center. I was involved in the creation of the 29th Street Community Center in the old Barclay Rec Center. I know it would take a lot to have a nonprofit take the Venable building, revitalize it for community use. The building is a sick building. It will take a partnership, maybe a developer to do housing on the top, with retail and community space on the bottom. That model would make the math work on this building.

The Monarch school on Kirk and Exeter Hall Ave was also abandoned recently when Monarch was closed. It is currently being used as a Y Head Start, fulfilling a huge need in the community for affordable day care and a place for families to know that their younger children are getting the opportunity to be ready for school.

I bring these up because they are examples of what we're dealing with regarding these older school buildings. Lead, Asbestos and years of decay make these spaces hard to revitalize. But we can do it.

As Councilperson, I would be active in understanding the needs of the community, and seek developers/organization to help make that vision happen.

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?

Yes I believe we need a comprehensive redistricting plan. Howard and Baltimore Counties are also doing this and have taken bold steps.

We've seen, especially in my district, where when a set of parents don't want to send their kids to the zone schools, they make other choices, like charter schools or private schools. (Families in Guilford are zoned for Waverly school. Waverly would not have under enrollment if the families in Guilford sent their kids there.) This is due to the segregation in my district, and also the need to increase the quality of our school. It's also due to racism in our area. However, in Southeast Baltimore, changing the boundaries will help diversify the schools significantly, and parents are already bought in to the public schools. English Language learners (particularly Hispanic) are in two or three schools. Having them spread across the area will help them, and other families, significantly.

In order for a new redistricting plan to work, we have to eliminate movement to out of zone schools. Many parents in my neighborhood send their children to out of zone schools instead of the schools in our area.

We have school choice for a reason, and it has kept families here, and given options to families who would like them. I think it has worked for many families that have a car and can get their children to another school out of zone or a charter school.

These are considerations when we do a redistricting plan.

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 and staff should be considered employees of the city's public school system. I do not believe that charter schools should get more leeway and act as private schools with public funding. The teachers benefit from the work of BTU and would otherwise likely take significant pay cuts and that's not fair. Charters are part of the schools system and all of their teachers and staff should be employees of the system.

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

This goes back to the redistricting question. If we redistrict, we'll have to limit the number of charter schools so that all schools are included in the plan.

I believe all students deserve a high quality education, and we cannot allow for some schools to be different than others. I will continue to fight for the right that all our children get a world class education.

We should prioritize funding for our traditional public 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, The General Assembly must remove such funding for this program. We cannot use public funding for private schools, especially those schools who discriminate.

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 believe that Baltimore City should increase its contribution to BCPSS by 15%, from 14% to 29% of it's annual operating budget, in order to meet Kirwan obligations. We must do this, however, over time, at least 4 years.

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

As I stated earlier, I want to serve on the Budget and Appropriations Committee, and the charter amendment to give the City Council more power over the budget must be passed. Then we will have to power to reallocate funding from the police overtime and other sources to the schools. In the meantime, we will advocate strongly to the Mayor to make this change. But we have to make it over time. The agencies are required to do audits, and yet only one has (Rec and Parks). These audits can tell us where spending can be redirected, if possible.

Also, re-working our procurement process I believe will save the city millions in expensive change orders. Right now the city accepts lowest bid ONLY, making projects possibly being done by unqualified organizations, OR contractors that know they can ask for change orders, unmonitored. That has to end. This is part of our pay to play system. I will introduce legislation to make this change, and will work with the unions, minority contractors and DPW to do this.

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?

Yes, if elected I will be in favor of returning the title of the head of our public school system to “Superintendent”, rather than “CEO”. Despite the subtlety of this issue, we must not underestimate its impact on the functioning of our public school system. Our school system should not take on a corporate-based model.

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?

There are no resources in Baltimore City that should be privatized. Privatization of city-owned resources should be evaluated with the highest scrutiny and be implemented as a last-resort. Privatization of city resources endangers the quality of life of Baltimore City's residents. I do not feel it is ever appropriate to privatize public services or property, unless it is absolutely necessary. Private companies only respond to the needs of their shareholders and are not accountable to the public.

I do, however have two ideas to make significant efficiencies and changes. I believe we need to take our transit system out of the MTA and create a regional transit system with a regional transit authority. This authority is still a public body, with public accountability, and connected to our city government, but has powers that City Council does not have (i.e. floating bonds for maintenance and not relying on ridership for dollars for maintenance). The other is to explore a regional water system so that Baltimore County residents are also paying their fair share of the water maintenance (baltimore county residents use our water but their bills are 1/3 of ours), have correct water bills and have an authority to float bonds for maintenance capital. In both cases we need to be sure all of our jobs are union jobs and that there is significant transparency and public accountability, including elected board members (or hybrid). The DC region can be looked toward for models of each (WMATA and the DC metro, as well as the water sharing with WSSC between Prince George's and Montgomery Counties. We need to think creatively about solutions to our major issues.

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 answer this within my long answer at the bottom of this question)

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

(I answer this within the long answer at the bottom of this question)

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 answer this within the long answer at the bottom of this question)

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

My complete answer for all of the above is here: I opposed the Port Covington TIF and I will oppose others like it, although I favor smaller TIFs to revitalize small neighborhood commercial corridors like Greenmount Avenue in Waverly area.

My equitable development plan stems from my years of work on this issue in Baltimore City and nationwide.

We must revamp the Inclusionary Housing law that Baltimore has. It does not work. I will sponsor legislation to change this law to not allow developers to ask for waivers of the 20% affordable housing requirement. Inclusionary works in other jurisdiction, we can make it work here.

I propose developing a development excise fee to incentivise development in our neighborhoods. Every jurisdiction in Maryland has one but us (even Baltimore County established one last year). These types of fees manage growth in areas and can be applied geographically. So if a developer wants to develop near the waterfront, they would pay an additional excise fee per square foot. If they don't want to pay the tax, they can develop in East or West Baltimore, with several requirements. If they don't want to pay the tax and still build in the waterfront, they have to do 20% inclusionary (and not with vouchers as the Port Covington agreement was...there are no more housing vouchers!). This is an unpopular idea. But again, we have to think creatively about how we manage our development and make sure that all neighborhoods are getting attention. We can steer the revenue from the excise fee to education. We also can do this without complete gentrification in east and west Baltimore by capping property taxes for legacy (senior) residents. We can also require partnership with community development organizations and community benefits agreements to guarantee local hire, investment in local amenities like recreation centers, etc.

I'd like to sit on the Taxation and Finance Committee so that we can review all of our tax credits and incentives, and make sure we're tying prevailing wage, local hiring, living wage, labor peace agreements, and project labor agreements to all developments with any public subsidy or tax break. We have to withhold Baltimore Development Corporation from making these deals without these requirements.

I was one of the leaders in establishing Baltimore's Affordable Housing Trust Fund. We can use these funds to ensure that neighborhoods have mixed income communities with subsidy for projects that meet certain criteria. (however my biggest priority with these funds right now is to make sure that our seniors can age in place without the house falling on them, and also make sure they have an heir - written in their will - who will care for the house. A lot of our vacancy problem has to do with an elder passing, with no one to take care of the property.)

I was a small business owner, and I know we have no infrastructure in our city to enhance our small businesses, connect them with partnerships and financing, and incentivize hiring. We must do this, as we have entrepreneurs and our small businesses do hire and take risks. We must make it easier for our businesses to thrive, while requiring the wages and workplace measures needed for successful workers.

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?

As stated earlier, I lead the Affordable Housing Trust Fund initiative. I'd like to use some of that funding for a local voucher program. The rent is too high in Baltimore for several reasons: areas around universities are high because landlords think mom/dad will pay the rent, and the federal voucher program uses area market rent which includes Baltimore County, so then all landlords are using this standard. The rent is too high!). Since we have a huge waiting list for federal- vouchers 25,000 on the waiting list - creating a local voucher program will help many of these families. Baltimore Housing already created a short term one for those families displaced by the new landlord law, but we need a more permanent solution to this issue. A local voucher program will benefit so many families and reduce homelessness.

We can also use that funding for gap financing to help bring more affordable housing projects, particularly permanent supportive housing, to Baltimore.

We should be pressuring our hospitals to invest in housing. Part of our health concerns, and homelessness, is around housing. Hospitals across the nation are working with partners to invest in housing, which lowers chronic illnesses they see in the emergency room like asthma, health related issues related to homelessness, etc. Hospitals have an incentive to do this under the Affordable Care Act, but we have not engaged them. The community development field is moving in this direction, and the state's Medicaid expansion can be used for housing as a preventive measure. Since our hospitals are tax exempt, this is a great way to give back!

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

Providing the opportunities for young people is a critical element of reduction in crime. Along with my plan to enhance small business to help hire people, we need a year round youth jobs program. In addition, we want to work with the unions to connect young people to the apprenticeships they offer (especially the students at MERVCO who are learning the building trades! There is not a pipeline for these young people). Education as described above is also critical.

If the young people touch the justice system, we need them to be placed in programs that provide them with various opportunities, like the Public Safety Compact did prior to Governor Hogan cutting it. Releasing these young people back into the same environment which put them in that situation to begin with is not helping the young person. Putting them in cages does not help them either. DJS needs to be totally and completely reformed to handle this, and give our young people a fighting chance to survive and thrive.

Substance abuse is related to our public safety issues. If we can't help people get away from their disease of drug addiction, then we will always have the drug trade which leads to violence. In addition, we have lost more people to overdose than to murder. Our city does not have a system for addressing this issue. Sure if someone goes into treatment, then come out, but there is no support for them. Methadone does not work for everyone. We need more treatment options, and supports /counseling for them as well afterward. Talking with residents who have recovered, they specifically had a support system to help them. Many do not, and we need to create it. I will bring everyone working on this issue to the table to develop this system, allocate funding, and make it work. Our city is in trauma and we need a comprehensive response.

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.



This form was created inside of AFT-Maryland.

Google Forms