

Swinton - Mayor

## 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

Dante Swinton

Candidate for:

Mayor of Baltimore

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Email address

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Present occupation

Environmental Justice Researcher & Organizer

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Employer

Energy Justice Network

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Party affiliation

Democratic

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

Not yet!

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

Not yet!

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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?

I have the most-progressive, labor-oriented, and intersectional platform of any candidate in the race. So many people are subscribing to the idea that the person with the most money or close to it will win, but it doesn't have to be that way. If we want a revolution in Baltimore, where we lift up communities struggling most instead of denigrating them, I'm your candidate.

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

I have not been a member.

## 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?

Absolutely! I will work every day I can to make sure these workers, as well as those in the zero waste economy I want to establish, have the right to collective bargaining.

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 do not believe in the exclusion of tipped workers in a living wage law. I actually propose \$18 by January 2025, starting with \$14.50 in January 2022. From there, it would be tied to inflation. I make the argument, especially with tipped workers, that we shouldn't have to provide double subsidies so they can make ends meet: once with tipping, and then a second time with a government assistance program. In fact, according to a Berkeley study, 52% of American workers use at least one government assistance program to make ends meet. Something is wrong with this picture!

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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 defined-benefit plans! A shift to defined-contribution plans would make the city sound more like a private entity, which it isn't. Workers who have spent their careers with the city deserve a specific benefit at retirement. Among other things, it's key that the city does not investment in awful industries with those funds, such as trash incineration.

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 pledge never to vote to move retired voters to Medicare Part D!

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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! We should make sure that all of our workers are serving the city in safe conditions. A family shouldn't have to lose a loved one because of a failure to check critical walkways. I also would make sure our waste management workers, for example, have the proper protective equipment during collection or storage.

#### 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?

Funding is a critical piece. Currently, we spend about twice as much on policing as we do education, and that has to be changed. So, as part of my \$230 million reallocation of funds out of BPD's budget, I will allocate \$75 million to BCPS.

\$25 million - School resources

\$15 million - New teacher hires

\$15 million - Increased teacher pay

\$10 million - Mental health counselors and programming

\$5 million - Comprehensive sex-ed and contraception programming

An additional \$8 million will come from other sources in the budget to provide a fund for individual teacher supplies. This does not include capital funding, which we also must increase so our children don't have to go home early due to heat or cold.

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

I am the only candidate to propose moving the BCPS board to a public election, where board members would serve three years on staggered terms, elected in the year before a city election. This will allow residents to decide who has the right experience and vision to lead BCPS.

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?

See above! :-)

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?

It's evident we don't have enough counseling for our students, which is why I want to allocate \$10 million to boost current numbers. We have to understand the level of trauma our students have faced in the short lives, and support them in as many ways as possible.

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?

My plan to tackle this issue has multiple components. First, I want to invest \$72 million - part of my Poverty Erasure and Community Enhancement (PEACE) Zones policy - into repairing vacant homes in Black Butterfly communities. These homes will be for folks in two brackets - \$14-32K and \$33-57K. Each year, 1200 homes will be repaired across the city. These homes, now owned by the local construction companies that repaired them, will be set on a path to be owned by tenants over 5-10 years, with collaborations with nonprofits to prep for homeownership. My plan also includes \$18 million invested in small business grants, and \$9 million in community-owned grocery stores. I will work to garner matches to these public investments, and property values will increase for future investments. The full plan can be seen at [dcs4bmore.org/peace-zones](https://dcs4bmore.org/peace-zones)

I also want to work with Annapolis to install a 2% nonresident income tax, ultimately reaching 4%. There are so many Marylanders that come into Baltimore to work, utilizing our resources, but refuse to live here. So, I believe they should pitch in on the restoration. Moving back into the city will not only increase the number of homes occupied, expanding the tax base, but also will shorten commutes, minimizing vehicle pollution.

Revitalizing these communities will allow us to restore schools, lower student-to-teacher ratios, and minimize travel times to acquire an education.



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?

It's worth any potential backlash. Our school system must be just and equitable across the board, and I wholeheartedly support the development of a plan. We have to deal with the fact that our city remains a Class 5 segregated city, and that resources are concentrated in certain areas. This is why my plans to lift up communities that have been left behind - and not gentrifying them - will play a key role in the equity within our education system.

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?

They should be part of the city's public school board.

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

Yes! I do not like charter schools utilizing public money that could have been utilized in our public schools. They are not the perfect solution to our education issues, and I want to make sure my administration's policies affirm that.

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?

NOPE. Nope. Still nope.

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?

As mentioned before, I want our education budget to be larger than BPD's. Ultimately, BPD's budget will shrink to no more than \$200 million, which will free up an additional \$100 million to be allocated to BCPS and additional programs to boost our city's strength. This fiscal year's budget is \$530 million, which is ridiculous, and does nothing to eliminate the root causes of crime. But funding our education system aggressively unquestionably plays a role in eliminating those root causes.

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

Boosting the city's population through aforementioned policies, in addition to raising revenue from the sell of valuable recyclables and remanufactured products, and reallocating funding from unnecessary line items, we'll be able to fund Kirwan fully.

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, I'm game for the title change, and to push back against any obsessions with standardized testing.

### 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?

I don't feel it's appropriate to privatize public services. I am open to selling publicly-owned properties so long as the businesses adhere to hiring locally, paying a living wage, agree to collective bargaining, and do not add to existing pollution impacts in the city. For example, my Firesale for Transit (FisT) policy is designed to sell off city properties to contribute to the restoration of the Red Line project. Additional funding would come through a double-barreled bond.

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?

Yep! I've mentioned it throughout! [dcs4bmore.org/peace-zones](https://dcs4bmore.org/peace-zones)

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

Indeed, I have discussed this too!

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

All businesses and housing projects that come about under my administration will have to hire locally.

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

Yep!

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?

Boosting the \$20 million in affordable housing by \$72 million through my PEACE Zones policy, revamping 1200 vacants annually.

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

Yep! Removing poverty and desperation to make ends meet is how you eliminate crime - NOT policing. You can see my vision for this at [dcs4bmore.org/peace-zones](https://dcs4bmore.org/peace-zones), and a greater level of discussion in my WYPR interview: <https://www.wypr.org/post/dante-swinton-democratic-candidate-baltimore-mayor>

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](mailto:treynolds@aftmd.org).



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