

Vaughn - 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.

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Candidate Information

Name

Richard Vaughn

Candidate for:

Baltimore City Mayor

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Email address

Present occupation

Business Owner

Employer

Self-Employed

Party affiliation

Democratic Party

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?

Crime in Baltimore City is one of the most (if not the most talked about) issue when discussing our City. My campaign believes that without addressing education and affordable housing, crime will always be a discomforting reality for Baltimore residents. Our schools need real investment, that shows our communities that we care about our children, our educators, and support staff. Our teachers need real support, resources, and sustainable educational investment to safely and properly educate our children. My administration will pour considerable resources and funding into Baltimore City Public Schools and affiliates, to give our students a safe-haven, a good education, and prepare them for college.

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 citizens deserve the right to pursue happiness in our country. My administration is committed to working with Enoch Pratt leadership to outline the best practice for this institution, as it pertains to collective bargaining. While Baltimore City does contribute to the general funds of the Library, I believe that strengthening the bond between BCPS and EPL will give our Librarians more economic growth. I want to see a Baltimore where all citizens thrive, and collective bargaining is an important tool in achieving this objective.

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?

As a business-owner, I currently hire all employees at \$15 an hour. We should work with our restaurants in the City to provide incentives for increasing wages, and this should be a priority - not a delay. Every state employee is entitled to a Cost of Living Increase each year. If the State mandates a higher wage, then the benefit COLA should be included as well.

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?

If an employee invest in the City, then we should invest in them. I, personally, prefer a combination of both that keeps the employee at the forefront. However, we should never become too far removed from the defined benefit plan. It is the most advantageous for the employee.

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 pledge to never move retired educators and city employees to Medicare Part D for 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?

Absolutely! This is imperative and will be an agenda item within the first 100 days.

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?

Crime, affordable housing and community investment, and leadership. We will strengthen the bond between law enforcement and the community, bring adequate living standards into the City, and hire leaders who are committed to allocating resources in the most effective way that benefits our students and teachers. We also need to strengthen the bond with Annapolis for greater resources and investment from the State.

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?

It should not solely be the authority of the Mayor to select such a definitive role within Baltimore City. Candidate for the Board should be presented to City Council, and City Council should be included in the selection process. This encourages cooperation, transparency, and equity. These are also the same qualities we should be looking for in Board members. People who have served in the education and proven their contribution to the field should be selected to lead our education system. I fear that 3 years of classroom experience is too little to qualify for such a monumental undertaking.

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?

Yes. Public Servants should always be selected, where possible. I support a hybrid structure where a majority is selected from the public.

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?

My administration is committed to working with school leadership, public safety, and parents (and guardians) to evaluate the best code of conduct for our schools. We want inclusivity among all stakeholders, that will define the guidelines and expectations of our students. However, student safety is gravely important to me and my administration will take this very seriously.

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?

Increase wages by bringing businesses back to all of Baltimore. Invest in affordable housing and home ownership programs. Make Baltimore beautiful again and create a welcoming environment in all of our neighborhoods. We need to invest in the community and we will see those communities flourish.

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 - but with input from the community.

14. Public Charter Schools: There are 50 public charter schools in the state of Maryland, the vast majority of which are in Baltimore City. Some charter school operators would like to weaken state law to make the teachers and staff at the charter employees of the charter non-profit board, not the school system. This would remove all protections that the teachers and staff have under the BTU collective bargaining agreement. Should charter school teachers and staff be considered employees of the charter school board or the city's public school board?

BCPS

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

No, we need to give parents and students all opportunities available to seek the best education for themselves.

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?

We should invest in BCPS first and give the parents the opportunity to work with BCPS to create a sustainable and flourishing environment for the student and parent.

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?

In any local government's budget, education is typically the highest expenditure. This should be the case in Baltimore City. 14% is too low. \$300 is too low. We can't complain about an exodus from the City if we aren't truly investing in the resources that entice people to live in the City. Education should be our highest expenditure.

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

Limiting Public Safety budget, auditing all city agencies to identify fraud, waste, and abuse, and working with Annapolis for a greater contribution.

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. Public education needs to be comprehensive across the State as we are all evaluated against the same criteria.

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?

Rather than focusing on what is private and what is public, my administration will seek to collaborate with private industry to ensure all services offered by the City are enhanced in the best way to benefit the citizens of Baltimore.

20. Development: In 2016, the city passed a multi-billion dollar re-development plan, supported by a \$535 million TIF request to develop Port Covington. Opponents worried development projects such as these, funded through public tax revenues, will be used not to the betterment of all in the city, but instead to the betterment of wealthy elites, widening the gap between the haves and have-nots in Baltimore. Do you have a vision for development in Baltimore City that...

20(a) ...assures neighborhoods will contain equitable amounts of low-income and affordable housing?

Yes

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

Yes

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

Yes

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

Yes

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?

We need to re-evaluate the property tax, look at how we are charging and who we are not collecting revenue from. Once this is done, the City needs to invest revenue into creating quality and stable opportunities in the City for our families.

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. You cannot combat crime without addressing education and housing.

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.



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