

Washington - 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.

Email address *

Washington - Mayor



Candidate Information

Name

Mary Washington

Candidate for:

Mayor, Baltimore City

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Phone

Email address

.....

Present occupation

State Senator

.....

Employer

Maryland General Assembly

.....

Party affiliation

Democrat

.....

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

SEIU 1199 and Local 500: 2018

LiUNA: 2010

.....

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

State Senator, 2019-present; State Delegate, 2011-2019

.....

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?

Unions are essential to making sure working families earn a decent living, have the time to care for family members and get access to health insurance and other critical benefits. I strongly support a union for city workers. To my knowledge, I am the only active union member in the Mayoral race, and I know how important unions are in keeping workers protected with benefits. I have worked very closely with the BTU specifically in crafting legislation to bring more money to public education. Unions always have a seat at the table with me.

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

Yes, I am a current member of SEIU Local 500 and have been since 2015 when MICA faculty voted to unionize.

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, as I stated earlier, I support expansion of collective bargaining to city employees. This includes all city employees such as librarians and Convention Center employees.

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?

Yes, I would. As a state legislator, I supported having our Maryland \$15 minimum wage legislation include tipped workers. I was disappointed that the bill we finally passed failed to include them fully. I certainly support including tipped workers in city living wage legislation, removing the delay and closing loopholes in raising the minimum wage.

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, I would not support moving from a defined benefit to a defined contribution plan. Such a move limits employees' abilities to have an assured payout amount upon retirement, particularly in times of economic downturn. With a defined benefit plan, retirees can be guaranteed stability of a specified benefit amount.

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?

No, I would not vote for that.

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?

Yes, safety and health of our city workers shouldn't come as an afterthought. I will fully support working with the Maryland Department of Occupational Safety and Health. It's unacceptable that the management of these agencies have not prioritized the safety of its workers.

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?

First, our schools have been underfunded for years which has led to inadequate staffing, deferred maintenance, and teacher turnover. Secondly, chronic absenteeism is a major concern leading to poor academic performance. Getting students to school is the primary driver to success. Schools in low-income neighborhoods that have improved attendance have also improved test scores. We have to help students get to school. Lastly, too many 5-year-olds are entering kindergarten not ready to learn. We have to expand Pre-k across the board. These are my commitments to education:

--We will strongly support the Kirwan Commission's reforms that promise more adequate state funding for our schools. If fully funded, those reforms will improve teacher pay, provide universal pre-K education, and boost funding for schools in need in Baltimore.

--The city itself also needs to do more for our schools. For decades, the city's contribution to our schools has also been too small – much lower than the funding most other jurisdictions provide their own schools. We will boost city funding for our schools by at least \$20 million to serve our students more effectively right away.

--Our schools can work for our whole community. We will work to make schools into community schools where families can get access to critical social services and adults can get literacy training or ESL classes and build other skills.

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 support moving to a hybrid school board that includes elected members and appointed members. Adding some elected members would bring more accountability to the board and give the public greater impact on the composition of the board. Having some appointed members ensures that the school board will have representation of critical skills such as budgeting or school administration. The City Council can make recommendations to the Mayor regarding appointed board members. I could not solely support candidates with classroom experience because there are other skills needed to run our school district, such as legal representation regarding the district's requirement to comply with ADA, special education, etc., budgeting expertise, and social sciences providing big picture perspective in terms of what external factors are having an impact on education. We can only be assured of having a balance of these skills through the appointment process.

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?

As I stated above, I support moving to a hybrid school board that includes elected members and appointed members. Adding some elected members would bring more accountability to the board and give the public greater impact on the composition of the board. Having some appointed members ensures that the school board will have representation of critical skills such as budgeting or school administration. There are other skills needed to run our school district, such as legal representation regarding the district's requirement to comply with ADA, special education, etc., budgeting expertise, and social sciences providing big picture perspective in terms of what external factors are having an impact on education. We can only be assured of having a balance of these skills through the hybrid model.

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?

The safety of school teachers and staff is of paramount importance. In addition, any revision to the code of conduct has to be considered in the context of disrupting the school to prison pipeline. Our schools do not exist in a vacuum. If our communities become safer, our schools will be safer too. Currently the school district is phasing in a restorative justice model in our schools. Studies have shown that implementing this kind of model has improved overall climate in schools including the feeling of safety the school communities have. I support this model because it not only works to keep students in schools which is the only place they can learn, but it teaches students how to resolve conflicts like adults and prepares them for life after graduation. We have to find ways to further support and expand this model so teachers and administrators have enough resources to make it work.

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?

It is critical that as schools close, the buildings should not become vacant eyesores. The need to close schools should not lead to simply disinvestment in those neighborhoods. One of my priorities is to turn our schools into dynamic centers for our communities – good schools for our kids, of course, but also places that serve as important resources for the whole community by enabling families to get access to public assistance and other supports and adults to take literacy, ESL or adult education classes that help them build critical skills. If we need to close some schools, we may be able to keep some of the buildings functioning as community centers.

The current process for closing schools requires BCPSS to surplus the building to the City, giving the City control of what would happen to the property. We should make it easier for communities to utilize this surplus property. A good example of this re-use is in Park Heights where Langston Hughes Elementary school was closed and is currently functioning as a community resource center.

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 would. Redistricting is a complicated but necessary process to ensure that our resources are being used in a thoughtful, balanced way. It is also a means to ensure that every student has access to good schools. Recently, Baltimore and Howard Counties have grappled with this process and it’s demonstrated that communities are still holding on to long held racially biased beliefs. But it’s our responsibility to ensure equity. When paired with greater investment in our schools, redistricting will become a great opportunity to implement long lasting positive change. Currently, a large portion of the student population are attending schools that are not in their zone which indicates that the current zoning isn’t working as designed. All students deserve access to quality education and redistricting is a process that ensures all neighborhoods are treated equally. The ability to access schools out of zone creates an imbalance in the resources individual schools can access. It also creates a hidden process to access more resourced schools. A regular process of reviewing these zones and redistricting would reduce the disparities.

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 strongly support teachers and staff of charter schools as city employees with the full benefit of union membership. This is one of the ways Maryland’s charter school program is different and better than others across the nation.

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

State law does not allow for local districts to impose a cap on the number of charter schools, but I do not support an expansion of our current number of charter schools in the City. With the current charter schools we have, there should be a consistent and transparent method of holding them accountable for academic achievement. This should mirror the standards placed on traditional 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?

I do not support using public funds to support private schools. Private schools are not accountable to any public entity and tax-payer dollars should not be used without a means of accountability and transparency.

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 must increase its local contribution to schools. Our budget is a list of priorities and values we share as a community. We must balance our commitment to public safety with our commitment to good schools. I support an increase to at least 20% with a goal of reaching even higher. I have committed to spending at least \$20 million more than the city now allocates on schools.

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

My administration will transform the way the city spends its money. We will trim the police budget to make it appropriate for a city of our size and audit police overtime. We will make developers and absentee property owners pay their fair share. There are better ways to spend the money we already have at our disposal, so that is where I will start. I also believe the city needs to negotiate new agreements that substantially increase the amount our prosperous nonprofits contribute to the city. The roughly \$6 million per year they contribute under the current agreement is not proportionate to the size of the resources they control.

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 would support returning the title of the head of our public school system to “Superintendent.” I do not support the approach to our system as being 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?

I strongly believe that public services should not be bid out to the lowest bidder. Public services should be owned and managed by the public to whom they are accountable. This includes water, which I was a leader in pushing for water affordability. It also includes public services such as transportation and policing.

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, changing the way the City supports development is one of the core tenets of my campaign. We must support affordable housing, both rental and homeownership in areas of opportunity.

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

Yes. We need to renegotiate PILOTs as a start. Developers wanting to do business in our city will have to pay their fair share.

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, absolutely.

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?

During my time in Annapolis, I have worked to provide greater opportunity for affordable housing for homeless youth. We need to use tax incentives and public resources in ways that revitalize troubled neighborhoods, encourage new investment in communities devastated by decades of disinvestment. This will increase the number of decent affordable housing units.

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, my proposal to reduce crime is holistic and includes healing communities that have been devastated by crime and trauma. Specifically, I will redirect resources to expand community schools: The budget of our police department continues to grow while our schools struggle to keep their students warm in the winter. We will cut wasteful spending across the city to better invest in our schools and fully fund the Kirwan Commission's education reforms that will help provide every student the specific resources they need to stay in school and be successful after graduation. We will also grow the number of community schools in our city, so each community can have important wrap-around, trauma-informed services right in their neighborhood school. Additionally, we will perform an annual public health census: We know gun violence and addiction are critical public health issues, but there are obviously more factors that negatively impact our communities. Working with the Health Department, we will publish an annual review of key public health indicators that strongly impact our city and fully utilize our city's world-class public health resources to deploy evidence-based solutions carefully tailored to meet the needs of our communities.

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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