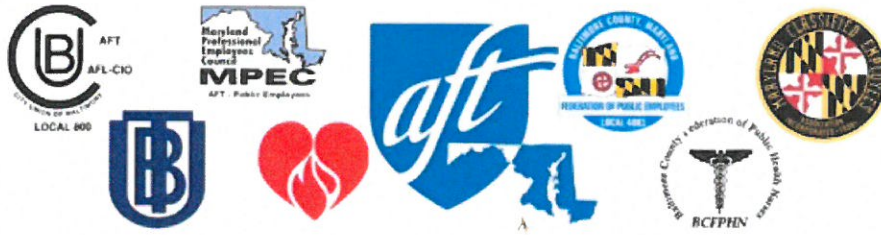


# Rushern Baker



## AFT-Maryland Candidate Questionnaire for Baltimore City Races

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, and the Maryland Classified Employees Association. Together, with the Baltimore County Federation of Public Employees, AFT-Maryland has thousands of members who work to make the region and the state a better place for its residents and children.

The AFT-Maryland has prepared the following questionnaire for candidates running to represent us in Annapolis 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 in early 2018. 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. It may be returned to

Todd Reynolds, Political Coordinator  
AFT-Maryland, AFL-CIO  
5800 Metro Drive, Suite 100  
Baltimore, MD 21215

Fax: 410-764-3008  
Email: [treynolds@aftmd.org](mailto:treynolds@aftmd.org)

Please return this completed questionnaire no later than January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018. If you have any questions, please contact Todd Reynolds, AFT-Maryland Political Coordinator, at 410-764-3030.

2018 Candidate Questionnaire—Representation in Annapolis  
AFT-Maryland

**Candidate for Governor, State of Maryland**

Candidate's name **Rushern L. Baker, III**

Address

Occupation **County Executive** Who is your employer? **Prince George's County**

May we make your answers to our questionnaire public? **yes**

Party affiliation (circle one):

Democrat        Republican    Independent    Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Have you received an endorsement from a labor union? If so, which ones?

Yes, to date I have been endorsed by **Maryland State Council of Machinists & Teamsters Local 730**

Have you ever held elected office? **Yes. Maryland State Delegate, 1995 to 2002. Prince George's County Executive, 2010 to present.**

**General**

1. The AFT-Maryland is a federation of numerous employee unions, including Baltimore City teachers and paraprofessional and school-related personnel (BTU); professional state workers (MPEC—Maryland Professional Employees Council), state healthcare professionals (AFT Healthcare-Maryland), state classified employees (MCEA—Maryland Classified Employees Association); as well county and city employees. Why should we support your campaign?

The single most important reason I am running for Governor is to channel the power of the office into improved living and working conditions and quality of life for ALL Marylanders. The core

message of my campaign aligns with the mission of all labor unions which is to advance the interests of members with respect to wages, benefits and working conditions for the common good of ALL workers and, ultimately, the larger society around us. I believe that our State works best when people have a good education in order to get jobs, when those jobs provide family - supporting wages, and when those jobs can be performed under conditions that allow workers and the organizations for which they work to thrive. This I believe is why labor unions were founded, and it is what I want to ensure for all Marylanders when I am Governor.

2. Have you ever been a member of a union? If yes, please give the union name, local number, and dates active.

Yes, when I worked for the District of Columbia Housing Authority, I became the proud holder of a union card with **American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 2725.**

### **Worker Rights**

3. Expanding the right to collective bargaining. Right now, even though a number of state employees and public school employees in Maryland have collective bargaining, many still do not. For example, state workers in the judiciary branch; higher education workers like grad students, adjuncts, and tenure-track faculty in the University of Maryland System; and teachers and staff at the Maryland School for the Deaf and at the SEED School; all do not currently enjoy the right to bargain collectively. If elected, will you sponsor legislation to grant these public employees the right to engage in collective bargaining with their employer?

Yes, I would sponsor legislation to provide collective bargaining rights to workers in the judiciary, higher education workers, and teachers and staff at the Maryland School for the Deaf and Seed School. I was proud to be an original co-sponsor of legislation in 1999 that gave more than 40,000 workers the right to collectively bargain and was disappointed that the rights of many workers fell victim to the legislative process.

4. The Fight for \$15. Many municipalities in Maryland and across the country have introduced ordinances that would raise the minimum wage in that jurisdiction to \$15 per hour. Yet legislation was introduced in Annapolis last year to block local counties and the city from raising the minimum wage above the state level. Should the state bar municipalities from raising their own minimum wage? If so, would you sponsor legislation to raise the state minimum wage to \$15 per hour, indexed to inflation?

Yes, I would absolutely sponsor legislation to raise the state minimum wage to \$15 per hour, indexed to inflation. While I believe that the optimal venue for increases to the minimum wage is at the State and federal levels, in 2013 I signed local legislation in Prince George's County phasing in an increase to the minimum wage to \$11.50 . I do not believe State legislation should bar municipalities from raising their own minimum wage as we have seen that action at the local level has been successful in spurring legislative action at the State level.

#### **State service/public employee issues and rights**

5. Interest binding arbitration. In 2010 Baltimore County Citizens overwhelmingly agreed that it is important to keep government employees focused on their jobs and not in labor contract disputes (especially Public Safety Employees), so they voted to pass a referendum question supporting interest binding arbitration for all County Employees. Baltimore County employees subsequently won the right to have interest binding arbitration to settle disputes or impasses in contract negotiations but those rights were unnecessarily limited through legislation to wages. According to this process, when during the negotiations process, labor or management declare an impasse and cannot agree to certain provisions of the contract, a neutral, 3<sup>rd</sup> party professional arbitrator will be called into resolve the dispute. Both the union and management agree that the decision of this arbitrator is binding and final.

Do you support interest binding arbitration for contract negotiations for city, county, state, and federal employees? As an elected official, would you support strengthening those rights for the public employees that fall under your jurisdiction?

Although I know binding interest arbitration can present challenges for management, particularly governments managing taxpayer dollars, I believe that it is ultimately the fairest way to resolve disputes between labor and management. Early in my tenure as County Executive, the County lost an arbitration with sworn personnel which presented enormous budgetary challenges for my new government but through prudent management and tough but fair choices, we were able to overcome these challenges to the point where Prince George's County is in the strongest fiscal condition it has ever been in.

6. Health Insurance Transparency. Disputes have arisen around employer's self-insured employee healthcare programs. Audits and budget analysis appear to suggest some governments are running for-profit healthcare programs and healthcare surplus funds are being diverted for use in unrelated areas. This clearly suggests that employees are therefore paying much higher than their negotiated healthcare splits for employer self-insured healthcare coverage.

As an elected official, will you sponsor legislation that would force government employers with self-funded insurance programs to be more transparent with actual claim cost, rebates and other refund programs?

Yes, I would be willing to sponsor legislation that would force government employers with self-funded insurance programs to be more transparent with actual claim cost, rebates and other refund programs. As elected officials our most sacred responsibility is to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being used in the most effective and efficient way possible so I would champion measures that would provide that accountability.

7. Retirement for state workers: defined benefit versus defined contribution. Last session, legislation was introduced that would move state employees retirement from a defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan (401K). Do you support such a plan? Why or why not?

I oppose legislation that would move state employees retirement from defined benefit plans to defined contribution plans. While I believe that strong defined contributions are an important additional option to provide for employees, defined contribution plans were the lynchpin to the establishment of a strong middle class in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and I believe elected officials should protect defined benefit pension plans at all costs.

8. Appropriate staffing levels. This past fall, numerous news reports confirmed what many state employees have already known: that staffing levels in a number of state agencies have fallen to levels such that both the safety of the individual workers and the ability of these workers to carry out their duties has been compromised. Recent examples of nurses being assaulted at numerous state hospitals (<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/investigations/bs-md-spring-grove-assaults-20171003-story.html>), or of reports from the Department of Legislative Services to the state's Spending Affordability Committee (<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/politics/bs-md-state-understaffed-report-20171116-story.html>) speak to this. What more can the state do to assure that Maryland agencies and facilities are appropriately staffed?

I believe that we can never pander politically to misinformed opinions about the size of government to jeopardize the services government is entrusted to provide for our citizens. As Governor, I will build on our award winning Prince George's County stat program to employ data and technology to ensure that we right-size State government and that workers do not unnecessarily and inappropriately lose their jobs.

#### **Public Education**

9. General: What do you think are some of the biggest problems facing public education—both in Baltimore City and in the rest of the state—today? If elected, how would you help solve these problems?

In addition to inadequate funding, I believe that the biggest problems facing education today include the failure to prioritize and properly support early childhood education and properly preparing our students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. As Governor, education will be the first priority in the budgets I submit to the legislature, with resources prioritized to support the overwhelming research that shows that early education is key to longterm success. Funding also needs to be prioritized to: 1) support community schools in an effort to ensure that there is better coordination between schools and other government agencies in supporting categories of students who face challenges that require greater than average

amount of educational resources ; 2) expand early college preparation and career training opportunities for students; 3) encouraging programming that attracts more students back to the public school system.

10. Community Schools: Baltimore City now has 51 of its public schools serving as designated community schools. A community school is a public school that partners with some entity (UM-Baltimore or the Baltimore YMCA, just to name a few examples) to provide either after-school academic or social services to both students and members of the community. How can state government work to expand the community school strategy in Baltimore and the rest of Maryland?

I strongly believe that the long-overdue community school concept should be a key priority in education funding policy at both the State and local levels going forward. I have been proud to have promoted and funded the concept in Prince George's County Public Schools over the last several years. Greater coordination between government and school services creates cost efficiencies in both the short and long term, but also can have immediate benefits to students, families and ultimately the whole community at large as we are seeing in Prince George's County.

11. Public charter schools and local oversight. There are just over 40 public charter schools in the state of Maryland, and the vast majority of them reside in Baltimore City. The large, out-of-state charter operators would like to weaken state law to make teachers and staff employees of the charter board, rather than employees of Baltimore City Public Schools. This would remove all protections that teachers and staff have under the collective bargaining agreement between the teachers union and the school board. This would also limit oversight of these privately run public schools by taking them out from under the purview of BCPS, as well as giving these charters a "blank check waiver" from any local school board policy. Should charter school teachers and staff be considered employees of the charter school or of the local school board? Should oversight of these schools be weakened?

I believe that public charter schools can and should be used as a tool to restore public faith in public education but I do NOT support exempting charter school teachers being exempted from collective bargaining agreements.

I believe that charter schools are a part of the equation in Baltimore. But, they are not panaceas. Some perform better than public schools, some perform worse. And so I believe it is important that we create a framework of policies that strikes the appropriate balance and sets the right incentives for success: we need innovation with accountability. And although we should always be examining our laws to see if there are opportunities for improvement or refinement in how they impact our schools, we need to be careful about the changes.

I have not seen any convincing evidence that the collective bargaining agreement is impeding the operation of charters in the state. And in point of fact, Maryland's charters have avoided the problems of fraud and mismanagement that we have seen in states such as Louisiana and Minnesota. What is more, there is plenty of evidence that charter schools are able to find the flexibility within the existing collective bargaining agreement to innovate in their approach to education. And finally, and most importantly, my understanding from talking to teachers and from public reports is that the vast majority of public school and charter teachers in Baltimore are against a move to exempt charter teachers from the collective bargaining agreement.

Against that background, I believe the answer is obvious: charter teachers and staff should not be exempted from the agreement. That is not to say that we cannot improve the conditions for innovation in Baltimore City schools, including charter schools. What I would like to see is a world where all of the stakeholders sit down together and roll up their sleeves to find opportunities for innovation, autonomy and flexibility.

12. Charter School funding. There has been a long-running dispute between certain charter school operators and Baltimore Public Schools over appropriate funding. As a feature of being a public charter school in Baltimore, the charters are largely given cash—calculated on a per-pupil basis—from the district, in lieu of the services that the central administration provides neighborhood schools. Most recently, the system presented a per pupil funding formula that mandated funds intended for students living in poverty or who are English language learners actually receive those funds. Some charter operators have countered with a lawsuit, arguing that those special funds for high-poverty students or ESOL be distributed to every student equally, regardless of need. How do you think BCPS should calculate its charter school per pupil funding model?

The reality is that for the charter school system to work, there needs to be equitable funding for both public and charter schools. But, the way in which one arrives at an equitable funding formula is complicated by a range of factors – and is more complicated than the current two percent rule allows. A disabled student who requires placement in a private facility can cost nearly 20 times the average cost for a student in a traditional school. It would not be fair if only traditional schools but not charters saw their funding reduced to cover those costs. And so we must have a formula that acknowledges these complications.

13. School vouchers. Should government give out vouchers (either a tax credit, or even a tax rebate) to parents who want to send their children to a private school? Please explain your answer.



I do not support school vouchers in any way, shape or form. Maryland has a responsibility to provide a free and appropriate public education to every child in Maryland. The unmet needs in the public education system are far too great to divert funding from the State's constitutional mandate.

14. Education Funding, state contribution. The state is currently studying revisions to the formula that determines the amount of aid given to a local school system from Annapolis. Over the past few decades, the number of Maryland public school students living in poverty has more than doubled, going from 22% in 1990 to 45% statewide today. In Baltimore City alone, well over 90% of our public school students live in poverty. What can the state—and the funding formula—do in order to be sure these students living in poverty get the best education we can give them? If the answer is more funding for public schools, from where is that money to come?

Maryland needs to regain its place as a leader in providing public education. In order to do that, it is mandatory that we not only prioritize funding for education but that we make smarter choices around service delivery and educational programming. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the community schools concept that we have employed in Prince George's County through our Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative. This concept creates efficiencies in the delivery of educational and social services and allows needs to be responded to in a more immediate manner, ultimately increasing a child's ability to learn and thrive in school. Programming also needs to be tailored to ensure that students achieve a desired skill level in order to get a diploma but we also need to place more emphasis on equipping students with the tools they need to lead sustainable, productive lives after graduation as well, whether by going to college or choosing alternative career paths.

15. Education funding, local contribution. For the past three years in a row, the Baltimore City Public Schools System had dealt with a reduction in state aid to its schools. Some in Annapolis have argued that the city should be contributing more to public schools, as property values (especially in and around the Inner Harbor area) have rapidly increased. Do you agree with this assessment?

I believe this view of those in Annapolis is an abdication of State responsibility to Baltimore, which is in fact a constitutional obligation. Indeed, one of the core problems with the state-city relationship is a deeply flawed State school funding formula that places far too great an emphasis on property values without taking into account actual tax revenue. As Governor I would advance a smarter State funding scheme that does not place Baltimore and its schools at an arbitrary and unfair disadvantage.

16. School Staffing. Due to a lack of funding, a number of specialized services our students need are being staffed by employees who are not trained properly to administer those services. For example, Due to the limited number of certified nurses in Baltimore City Public Schools,

administrators and/or staff are forced to administer medication to students, share nurses between multiple school locations, and utilize part-time nurses. And in other cases, students who have experienced extremely traumatic events do not have access to social workers trained to help them through these times. How would you help solve this staffing crisis?

Those are unacceptable solutions. There are a number of potential student health issues – ranging from diabetes to sudden cardiac arrests – that do not accommodate a part time or swing schedule. And most administrators are not medically trained, and simply not in a position to respond adequately to many of these situations. Our kids' lives are on the line. Room must be made in the budget to adequately staff nurses in our schools. Additionally, inadequate health care hurts student learning, and so underfunding of nursing staff is counterproductive to all of the efforts to positively impact outcomes.

17. Violence and trauma in the city schools. Far too often, children in the Baltimore City public school system witness very traumatizing events, and indeed may also be victims to those events—either in the classrooms or outside the walls of the schools after the dismissal bell has rung. What do you think is the best strategy to assure that our school buildings are safe and welcoming environments for children, teachers, and other education professionals in Baltimore City? How can we work to minimize the impact of traumatizing events on our school children?

We need to do a better job of addressing violence in school – for the sake of student and teacher safety – and to end the school-to-prison pipeline. Evidence shows that mass suspension of students is counterproductive, harms their educational development, and pushes them into the criminal justice program. Although police officers have an important role to play in defusing situations, and can help teachers to defuse situations, it is a limited role and we should not be outsourcing discipline to police. We need smart and collaborative solutions to school safety, that includes a greater reliance on restorative justice programs and robust training programs and other proactive models of reducing violence. It is also important that the school environment physically reflect how much we care about the health and safety of our students and teachers. A school building both inside and out should be clean, healthy and welcoming to students, teachers and the community -- from mental health services to constructing spaces that support collaborative learning and student creativity.

#### **Vision for Baltimore Metropolitan Area and Maryland in General**

18. Transportation. When Governor Hogan cancelled the Red Line rail project, he replaced it with a revision of the MTA regional bus lines and renamed the system the Baltimore Link. How effective do you believe this new bus plan has been? How can the state improve the transportation needs of Baltimore's citizens?

Whether intentionally disdainful or inadvertently misguided, Governor Hogan's actions around transit in Baltimore City show how out of touch he is with the problems Baltimore faces and the solutions and priorities it will take to solve them.

The underpinning of many of the city's public safety and educational problems can be traced to the chronic lack of access to jobs for many city residents. Time and again, the city receives failing grades for its public transit access, including a recent grade of "F" in jobs-to-transit access from the Central Maryland Transportation Alliance. So against that backdrop of lack of access to jobs and high unemployment rates for city residents, Governor Hogan stunningly decides to divert resources from transit to highway expansion by canceling the multi billion dollars Red Line project and replacing it with an anemic plan to minimally increase bus service that falls woefully short of the magnitude of the need. To then make matters worse, he further constricts transit access by neglecting the city subway system and allowing it to fall into dangerous disrepair

As Governor, in collaboration with city leadership and transit officials, in addition to further beefing up bus service, I would propose an east-west rail link at a scale that is commensurate with the need. I would also propose meaningful improvements to the subway system and would seek at every turn to connect city residents with jobs in all areas of the City.

19. Privatization. Many rumors have been circulating that the city has been looking into privatizing water services. This comes at a time when the Maryland has been quietly attempting to privatize a number of state services—like closing many state hospitals or turning them over to private companies. When, if ever, do you feel it is appropriate to privatize public services or to sell off or privatize city-owned resources?

While I do believe that businesses have a significant role to play in making our communities better, I do not believe privatizing state services is ever appropriate. First, the evidence shows that the privatization of these services – often to non-union operators – leads to a monopoly that eliminates competition and leads to poorer service. Second, the attempt to privatize is usually a pretext for removing union labor, reducing pay, and slashing benefits, a result that is punishing to the middle class. All too often, privatization is counterproductive and harmful to hardworking Baltimoreans and Marylanders. As a result, it is not something I would support.

20. State's opioid crisis. This summer, Governor Hogan declared a state of emergency in Maryland in response to the opioid crisis, calling it a "rapidly escalating" threat. Yet, even as opioid overdoses and death rates continue to climb, the state is actively de-funding, privatizing, or, as in the case of several Maryland health departments actively shutting down numerous institutions designed to treat this crisis. What can you do as a legislator to assure Maryland gives its citizens safe and affordable access to addition resources?

In a time of public emergency, the public relies on elected officials to respond swiftly and appropriately to stem the crisis. As such, when there is an emergency that demands the commitment of additional resources, the State budget should reflect an investment that is commensurate with the magnitude of the crisis. As a State, we need to act more urgently to provide sufficient treatment services to our jails and treatment facilities where many of those affected by the crisis actually end up. We need to have a

strong and visible public education program to alert people to the dangers of opioids and give advice on how to avoid becoming addicted in the first place and lastly we need to make sure public safety has the tools they need to respond appropriately from a law enforcement standpoint.

21. Earned Sick Leave. In the 2017 session, the state legislature passed a bill greatly expanding the requirement that employers provide earned sick leave to their employees, but Governor Hogan vetoed this bill. Do you support the legislative effort to override the governor's veto on paid sick leave?

Absolutely. As a caregiver myself, I strongly believe that no parent or caregiver should be put in the position of providing needed care to a child or loved one or risk losing their job. The General Assembly legislation provides reasonable protections to employers while also giving employees the opportunity to earn the time they might need to devote to their families.