

Sneed, CP

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

Shannon Sneed

Candidate for:

Baltimore City Council President

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Email address

Present occupation

Councilwoman

Employer

City of Baltimore

Party affiliation

Democrat

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

Yes.

Baltimore/DC Laborers, 2016 & 2020
Plumbers & Steamfitters Local 486, Jan. 2020
ATU Local 1300, 2020
UFCW Local 27, 2020
UNITE HERE Local 7, 2020
Painters' District Council 51, 2020
SEIU Local 1199, 2016
SEIU Maryland State Council, 2016
SEIU 32BJ, 2016
CHOICE Building Trades Council, 2016
AFSCME District 3, 2016

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

Yes. Baltimore City Council, District 13 (2017 - present).

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 been standing alongside Baltimore's working families since I've been in office. My track record on labor and working family issues speaks for itself. Below are some of my accomplishments while representing the working families of my district that I am most proud of:

1. Fought for \$15/hour minimum wage in Baltimore City and was glad to see the State Legislature override the Governor's veto in making it \$15/hour for everyone in Maryland.

2. Entered a resolution supporting worker's rights to organize and urged the Supreme Court to do the right thing by working families in the Janus case.

3. Introduced the "John Hopkins Registered Nurses Unionization Efforts" resolution that encouraged Hopkins to adopt a policy of neutrality and non-interference and allow Hopkins nurses to unionize if they determined if it was best for them. I also spoke at their NNU rally and wrote letters supporting their permit applications.

4. Supported increasing wages for the workers at BWI and the Port of Baltimore.

5. Was the lead sponsor on the Displaced Service Workers Protection Act which protects workers for up to 90 days when their contract is not renewed by a Baltimore City hotel, university, or other facility. It also prohibits retaliation against workers who seek help from the Wage Commission, and gives teeth to the Wage Commission in ensuring they are looking out for the interests of Baltimore's workers.

6. Expanded the Community Relations Commission's ability to investigate discrimination in the workplace from a minimum of 15 workers at a site to one.

7. Sent a letter to Whitting-Turner on behalf of the Laborers criticizing their attempting to eliminate their Community Benefits Agreement.

8. Sent a letter to BGE about their contracting practices with nonunion companies.

9. Standing with workers on the picket lines and at rallies as a public facing show of support for their fight for better working conditions.

Now that I am running for City Council President, I want to earn AFT's support because I want to ensure that organized labor always has a seat at the table in the decisions that are made by City Hall.

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

No.

Questions on Worker Rights

3. Collective bargaining for city employees: Should Baltimore City librarians and those who work for the Enoch Pratt Public Library System be granted the right to engage in collective bargaining? Should employees of the Baltimore Convention Center be granted the right to collective bargaining? If you are elected to office, will you work to expand collective bargaining rights to municipal employees who currently do not have that right?

Yes. If they are those or any workers decide that it is in their best interests to bargain collectively, I would support them.

In December of 2018, I introduced the Johns Hopkins Registered Nurses Unionization Efforts resolution, which supported the rights for Hopkins Nurses to organize and bargain collectively without interference.

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 support both linking minimum wage to inflation and closing those loopholes.

However, as for the loopholes, I want to ensure that any legislation protects the tipped workers who are lucky enough to work at a place where they can sustain their family's needs with tips. For them, any new legislation involving tipped workers could give them cause for worry and I do not want to see their lives disrupted.

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. While I am concerned about the possibility that elected officials will raid pensions to pay for other projects, many workers have taken public sector jobs for less pay than what they could get in the private sector, in exchange for the retirement security that a pension provides.

We should strengthen our laws to protect those pensions from being used for anything other than retirement, while at the same time working to ensure these future pension obligations are met while balancing the budget needs of the City.

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 do not see any instance in the foreseeable where I would support discontinuing the retiree prescription drug benefit program.

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. As chair of the labor committee, my office is in the process of scheduling hearings on the death of the worker referenced above. I welcome this and other ideas to ensure worker safety and to prevent future worker casualties while on the job.

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?

1) Safety. For better or for worse, the image of Baltimore City as a whole is that our city is unsafe. Many teachers and parents are becoming more and more scared of the public schools. Like our general crime problem, if people do not feel safe, we can not fix the true underlying issues with our city and schools (lack of funding for infrastructure, shrinking population and tax base, lack of resources and opportunities for our citizens and children).

Some of these issues need to be dealt with at the federal level, particularly comprehensive gun legislation, but other issues are dealt with here at the local level, such as increasing resources for counseling and other wrap-around services that get at the root cause of the problem of any behavioral problems that may lead to unsafe conditions in the schools.

2) Funding. The Kirwan Commission was created for a reason. If you talk to any student or educator you hear stories of a lack of programs, broken water fountains, teachers without supplies, and broken HVAC systems. That is a direct result of a disinvestment in our schools and I believe that our crime epidemic is a direct result of a generation of students being denied the funding they deserve. Funding our schools at Kirwan's recommendations will be starting point in that righting those wrongs.

3) Barriers to employment opportunities. At its core, our school's primary function is to prepare Baltimore students to become productive members of their respective communities. Ensuring that they are able to obtain the necessary skills and experiences to allow them to build a resume and ultimately a career is a key concern of mine, as I see too many young people struggling to get a job opportunity, or lacking the skills to get that first job.

First, I want to expand the youth works program so that if a young person wants a job, they can get a job. That is an immediate solution for young people to gain valuable work experience.

Next, similar to the School Safety Taskforce, I would like to facilitate regularly scheduled meetings consisting of business leaders from a variety of sectors, educators, students, leaders in city government, and school administrators to figure out how to overcome these barriers over the long-term. They then would present their findings during public school board meetings so the community can understand what challenges we need to overcome, and to ultimately tout the successes they achieve.

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?

Of course, I would prefer board members who have hands-on experience in the classroom.

However, I want to make sure that candidate also understands budgeting, the latest research or be willing to accept new data on public education, and is truly in the job to do what's right for Baltimore's public-school students. Any appointment must involve a rigorous vetting of the individuals who have expressed interest in serving on the board. City Council should be a part of that vetting and interview 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?

Baltimore's School Board should be fully elected, and I would like to see them represent individual districts vs. at-large elections to ensure all parts of the city have a voice and understanding of the issues and needs of our neighborhood schools.

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?

I am deferring to the recommendations that the School Safety Task Force put out in 2018, which convened voices from the school district, City Hall, and the community to provide a comprehensive list of revisions to the code of conduct. Students and staff should feel safe throughout the school day, allowing them to focus on teaching and learning.

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?

I would like to convene members of the local community to ask what they want to do with these resources. Far too often our members of our communities do not feel that they have been asked what is best for them. I want to hear their ideas.

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 know it would be difficult and we should listen to the resident's concerns, as many parents buy expensive properties based on where their children would go to school. However, we should have our districts meet the needs of the current population and not of the past.

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?

Charters receive funding from the public and thus their employees should be under the public-school board.

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

Yes. I am absolutely sympathetic to parents who want to send their child to a school other than their assigned neighborhood one, but charters ultimately take resources away from our existing schools. We need to be increasing funding to our schools, not taking resources away from them.

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?

While I received a quality private school education as a child, I am uneasy with public funds going to private schools. Many private schools provide scholarship opportunities for parents who have decided that private schooling is best for their child, but can not afford tuition. Public funds should be used for public schools.

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?

We should ultimately be meeting the Kirwan recommendations. But starting out by at least committing 30% of our annual budget to our schools is a starting point.

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

In order to meet our Kirwan obligations Baltimore City will have to look at how we raise and spend our money.

It is not in the City's best interest to raise certain taxes like our already high property tax rate. Our income tax is already at the highest amount allowed by state law. Two revenue raisers would be allowing the City to have a share of the gambling revenue that will come from sports betting. Another is allowing for the City to implement a tax on liquor and on legalized marijuana. Any cuts to agencies would curtail service delivery. The City must take stock of our use of tax credits. We must also seriously consider shifting how we pay for solid waste pick up and disposal from our property taxes to a pay-as-you-throw utility. Paying for Kirwin will require hard choices, however we need to make smart decisions not just the easy ones.

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.

Words and perception matter, and in the two largest minority student populations in the state, we should treat our schools no different than any other district in the state. We need to kill any perception that students of color are different than students of European decent. That starts at the top.

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?

Baltimore City should not be in the business of privatizing our assets. The only time I would even consider privatization would be to prevent a catastrophic or situation that the City was facing. I would only then consider it after there were robust hearings and conversations had occurred with all key stakeholders, experts, including the workers of the asset or resource.

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. There are a variety of different ways that the City supports development throughout the City. The City must strengthen it's affordable housing laws to mandate that development that receives City aid to proceed must incorporate an affordable housing into their development.

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

Yes. If we could continue to find funding for police officer overtime, we can find funding to increase our share of funding for our public schools.

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. I am currently working on legislation modeled after the District of Columbia which puts into the city code a definition of when how PLAs when will be implemented when taxpayer dollars are involved in the project.

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?

One of the main reasons that we do not have more affordable housing being built is that we have not had the political will do so. When the Council passed the source of income discrimination prohibition, I was proud to stand for a clean bill. In that process I was able to have conversations with advocates about affordable housing. As Council President I will continue working with them to develop strong affordable housing legislation.

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. While we have to stop the bleeding in our streets in the short term to make our families, businesses, and tourists feel safe, ultimately education is the key to solving the root cause of our crime. Having expanded city services, particularly for wrap-around services, can allow police to keep peace on the streets, and individuals can get the real resources they need to deal with their problems, not more policing.

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.



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