

# Henry - Comptroller

## AFT-Maryland Candidate Questionnaire for Baltimore City Races

The AFT-Maryland is a federation of local unions of the AFT within the state, including the Baltimore Teachers Union and the City Union of Baltimore—whose members work for the city—as well as state employee members of the Maryland Professional Employees Council, AFT Healthcare—Maryland, the Maryland Classified Employees Association, and Maryland School for the Deaf. Together, with the Baltimore County Federation of Public Employees and the Baltimore County Federation of Public Health Nurses, AFT-Maryland has thousands of members who are citizens of the city of Baltimore, as well as thousands of members who work to make Baltimore a better place for its residents.

The AFT-Maryland has prepared the following questionnaire for candidates running for office in Baltimore City as a means to familiarize the candidates with issues that our members care about most. It also allows us the chance to see where the candidates stand on these issues.

AFT-Maryland locals participate fully in the endorsement process of the Metropolitan Baltimore AFL-CIO Council; the council will announce its final endorsements sometime in Late February 2020. However, because we are a large contingency within the Baltimore AFL-CIO, the unions of the AFT-Maryland have a heavy influence on who Labor chooses as its candidates for endorsement.

Please take the time to complete this candidate questionnaire by no later than January 17th, 2020, at 5:00 p.m.

If you have any questions, please contact Todd Reynolds, AFT-Maryland Political Coordinator, at 410-764-3030 or [treynolds@aftmd.org](mailto:treynolds@aftmd.org).

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Candidate Information

Name

Bill Henry

Candidate for:

Baltimore City Comptroller

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Email address

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Present occupation

Baltimore City Council, 4th District

Employer

Baltimore City

Party affiliation

Democrat

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

Yes. In 2016 I was endorsed by Unite Here Local 7. In 2011 I was endorsed by the AFL-CIO.

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

Yes, I'm in my third term as a Baltimore City Councilmember, first elected in 2007.

### 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?

It's my view that labor stands for mutual assistance, equality, and democracy and individual rights, not just in the political sphere, but in the private sector as well. I share these values and have exemplified them by voting for pro-worker legislation throughout my tenure on the City Council, including: the \$15 Minimum Wage, Displaced Service Workers Protection, and Living Wages Contracts. I also sponsored and fought for a local hire bill in 2010 and 2011 which would have required developers to sign union-based community partnership agreements with the City for projects financed or funded by or through the City. If I'm elected Baltimore City Comptroller, I'll be a true partner of labor, opening up new possibilities to advance pro-worker policies in Baltimore. The Comptroller's role on the Board of Estimates provides an exceptional opportunity to influence major city contracts to get better results for workers, an opportunity that has been missed for decades. The Comptroller's oversight of the Department of Audits provides the ability to direct auditing resources into analysis of current incentive programs, contracting practices, and other policies with major implications for workers.

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. We should be expanding collective bargaining rights in Baltimore City and Maryland, and that should include library system employees, employees of the Convention Center, and all municipal employees. Growing union membership is a great way to restore a more fair economy, and as our economy continues to change, that necessarily means opening up collective bargaining rights to underrepresented industries, as well as considering new approaches like sectoral bargaining.

4. Minimum wage: In the 2019 Legislative session, the state passed a minimum wage law that excluded tipped workers and did not link the minimum wage to inflation. In addition, the state's minimum wage won't reach \$15 per hour until 2025. Would you be in favor of Baltimore City linking the minimum wage to inflation, and removing the exclusion for tipped workers? Would you be in favor of removing the delay and closing these loopholes in raising the minimum wage?

Yes. \$15 does not even truly meet the threshold for a living wage needed by today's workers in Maryland, and it will be even less sufficient in 2025. Our recent successes are very encouraging, but we should be continuing the fight for living wages. In Baltimore City, and relevant to the Comptroller's office which has oversight of much of city procurement and contracts, we need to be taking a fresh look at the City's existing living wage and prevailing wage laws, with an eye towards raising those wages.

5. Retirement for city workers - Defined Benefit versus Defined Contribution: The City of Baltimore has in the past discussed moving from a defined benefit to a defined contribution plan (401k) for its employees' retirement. Do you support such a move? Why or why not?

I don't support such a move. We should continue to provide a defined benefit because it allows workers to plan for their retirement with the greatest measure of certainty as to what their pension payment will be.

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 don't support balancing the budget on the backs of workers, especially where healthcare is concerned. I wouldn't vote for this.

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?

It's impossible to have a fair economy without safe workplaces. I'd direct the Department of Audits to prioritize a comprehensive review of workplace safety policies and practices in my first year as Baltimore City Comptroller. I will support any law that puts our workers first and eradicates the hazards too many people face in their day to day lives.

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?

Our city public schools continue to provide so many students with a first class education, but due to historic underfunding of operations and facilities there is so much work to be done.

I see three major fundamental challenges:

First, funding. It's well known that the existing Maryland funding formula underfunds Baltimore City Public Schools by at least \$290 million per year, while the Kirwan Commission initially found that Baltimore City schools need approximately \$358 million more in funding to move towards education equity for our students. This funding for curriculum, operations, activities, and more makes a massive difference in the health, mental health, and well-being of students as well as educational outcomes.

Second, facilities and capital expenses. The 21st Century Schools construction program and the Built to Learn act both cover needed new construction projects, but Baltimore City's schools – the oldest in the state – have an approximately \$3 billion state of good repair backlog. This means our children are trying to do the impossible – learning adequately in facilities that are too hot in the summer, too cold in the winter, and lack adequate safe running water and basics. We can't have educational equity until we modernize these facilities.

Finally, I think there's a lot of work to do in supporting our teachers through better working environments, pay, and benefits. As many have pointed out, public education is adapting from what was originally a model that served the industrial revolution. Our concept of the role of the teacher has not yet reached the 21st century. Teachers today should be afforded greater autonomy, and significant investments should be made in the professional and intellectual development of teachers throughout their careers. In Baltimore City, we also must consider the significant health, safety, and mental health challenges faced by our teachers and students alike. Greater measures must be taken to protect teacher and student safety including code of conduct revisions as well as investments in mental health counseling.

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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?

The City Council has an executive appointments committee. It has hearing times that are televised and open to the public. The City Council can vet a potential member of the school board much more thoroughly and publicly than a Mayor can. Allowing the Mayor sole power over choosing and appointing members to the school board is a reflection of the strong mayor system - which has proven time and time again to not serve the interests of working people.

Baltimore City should prioritize candidates with teaching experience, - and I would absolutely commit to only support candidates with at least 3 years of classroom experiences. In addition, we need members with different perspectives - for example, not just academics who study English Language learners, but those who were one or taught ELL students. The best school board would have members that share the same lived experiences as the students in the system they are serving.

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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?

In places where school boards have always been elected, the rationale was that school districts had the ability to directly tax the citizens to pay for the cost of the school system. It's an accountability measure, addressing the boards' ability to raise revenue and appropriate it. Here in Maryland, the local subdivisions and the State raise the revenue, and then they provide it to the school boards, who "only" have to figure out how to spend it properly. The model we used to have in Baltimore was one where the Mayor was expected to nominate exceptionally skilled and qualified citizens to serve on the school board and the City Council was expected to publicly vet them and provide the direct connection between the school system and the communities in which our schools are located and the families which our schools serve. We gave up that model in the implementation of the City-State Partnership in the late 90's and it would be hard for me to say that things have gotten better since then. Maybe the accountability of election for two members will create a school board that is more responsive to the needs of our communities, but it seems to be that we should also consider trying to restore a model that used to work and see if it still does. If letting the City Council vet school board members no longer creates the appropriate level of connection and accountability, then I would be happy to back an even more democratic composition for our school board.

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 support the amendments recommended by the BTU safety committee to the school code of conduct. My view is that teacher and student safety, health, and mental health are top priorities. Teaching in Baltimore City Public Schools can be particularly challenging due to the deep race and economic disparities found throughout our City and the health impacts of those disparities. We need an "all of the above" approach, including revising an outdated code of conduct and other procedures.

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?

The Comptroller oversees the Department of Real Estate which is one of the three major city agencies that works with City real estate. I've already pledged to develop a comprehensive real estate plan that promotes fair development, reduces blight and vacancy, and grows the economy. Our school buildings represent major capital assets that should be redeveloped into community anchors that provide services and opportunities needed by the community. These could range from housing, to space for small business incubation, to community or rec centers, retail space, office space, healthcare services, and grocery stores. The community should be consulted to put together a plan for each building and City government should bring stakeholders to the table.

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. While redistricting can be contentious, as we've seen in Howard and Montgomery County recently, it must be taken on regularly to ensure equity. If we are a City and school district committed to equity, this is what we must do.

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?

Absolutely not. The Maryland model has so far worked as well as it has mostly because it is strongly rooted in the public school system. This type of weakening is clearly a precursor to an attempt to move towards greater privatization, which I oppose.

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

A progressive and democratic school board should be in a position to closely monitor the amount, quantity, and pedagogy of charter schools. I don't think it's for me to say as an elected official what we can and can't allow- but we should leave it up to the school board to determine how we best serve public schools while also allowing innovation to grow.

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?

No. This is easy. No vouchers for private education.

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 City must find a way – through a combination of diverting revenue from priorities that aren't producing adequate results, eliminating waste, and potentially raising new revenue – to provide more local funding for education. I view this as less strictly a question of what percentage of our budget should be provided (since budgets and needs vary across municipalities) but, rather, where there is a credible study recommending a certain spending level, are we meeting that obligation?

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

As referenced above, we should not take off the table the idea of cutting from priorities that aren't producing results. The clear first place to look is the Baltimore Police Department, with the understanding that cuts to the police budget must be done in a holistic and careful way that allows for continued implementation of the consent decree. Eliminating police overtime, however, is a great place to start.

The city could also negotiate larger voluntary payments from our major institutions as a way to provide more revenue, as well as consider a package of small increases to existing taxes and fees, or new consumption taxes like a sugary drinks tax.

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?

If a simple change in title is enough to ensure rolling back the privatization and corporatization of the public school systems in Baltimore City and Prince George's County, then I'm all for it.

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?

We've seen other municipalities try to privatize everything from trash collection to policing - with disastrous effects. Currently, there is a charter amendment to ban the privatization of our city's conduit system. While large corporations would love to own our system, ownership over this system gives up leverage in negotiations with BGE and Comcast, it provides stable jobs, and it allows us to manage the quality of our services.

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. As a member of the Council's housing committee I've worked on legislation around affordable housing and inclusionary housing. We've got a long way to go to a real, comprehensive strategy for affordable, inclusionary, and equitable housing, however, as Comptroller, I will direct the Department of Real Estate to take a leading role in developing such a strategy.

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

Yes. We must balance legal or policy requirements with the need to encourage redevelopment and grow our tax base. As a former community development professional, I know how to walk this line.

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

Absolutely. I support local hiring and minority or women-owned business requirements to the fullest extent allowed by law, and would advocate to expand prevailing wage requirements as well as requiring project-labor agreements for major projects.

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

Again, yes. The use of labor peace agreements should be broadly required, and city government can facilitate building support for this in the business community.

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?

In my platform for the Comptroller's office, entitled "More than Change," I propose to direct the Department of Real Estate to take a leading role in developing a comprehensive real estate policy for the City. Right now, pieces of this overall strategy exist in BDC, Housing, DHCD.

A big part of the reason for doing this is because we need a comprehensive strategy to ensure fair, affordable housing. A big key to providing quality, stable housing is leveraging areas where market demand is high to create broad benefits for all City residents, as well as properly allocating City subsidies and resources to projects that expand the supply of affordable housing. A comprehensive strategy, with requirements for affordability at different levels of area median income creates the predictability for both communities and businesses that puts us in the best position to get the most benefit for the public.

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

Most of the things we can do to prevent crime must take place years prior to the actual crime itself, starting with education, including universal pre-kindergarten. In general, I've been raising the issue of how critical Baltimore City services that affect the health and welfare of our citizens – such as education, parks and recreation, or environmental services like trash and water – have been cut or remained stagnant while our budget for police has increased (see my Sun Op-Ed, "Police Are Not Enough," first published on May 11, 2009).

My vision for crime reduction includes ramping up community-based violence interruption and pre-trial release strategies and reforming our police department as quickly as possible. But most of the work that must be done is in creating a healthy city, where economic growth is inclusive, and where we have world-class, equitable services. This is what must be done to truly reduce crime.

Thank You!

Thank you for taking the time to complete this candidate questionnaire. If you have any questions, please contact Todd Reynolds, AFT-Maryland Political Coordinator, at (410) 764-3030, or [treynolds@aftmd.org](mailto:treynolds@aftmd.org).



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