

Porter - Dist. 10

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 *



Candidate Information

Name

Phylcia Porter

Candidate for:

Baltimore City Council, District 10

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Email address

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Present occupation

Fund Representative

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Employer

International Association of Machinists Pension Fund

.....

Party affiliation

Democrat

.....

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

Yes. In 2019, I was endorsed by the Metropolitan Baltimore American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL- CIO) for my candidacy for Baltimore City Council, District 10.

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

Yes. In 2018, I was elected to the Democratic State Central Committee, Baltimore City representing legislative District 40.

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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?

As a proud employee of the International Association of Machinists National Pension Fund, I have experienced firsthand the power of a living wage job for working families, the benefits of comprehensive healthcare, and the dignity of retiring with a good pension for those that dutifully work decades for their employers. For the past 10 years, I have dedicated my life to public service as a community organizer toward making the quality of life for Baltimore City residents better from working wages to pension protection, having access to fresh foods, to equitable transportation. Professionally, I am honored to work with the International Association of Machinists as we fiercely protect pensions of retirement of the hard working Machinists. Organized labor should support my campaign because I have long believed in the purpose of the labor movement to protect the rights of workers, create opportunities for income security and jobs for working people, champion fair wages, expand healthcare, and secure retirement for residents in Baltimore City, Maryland, and a national level. Long before I have asked for Labor support, I have been an advocate for the Fight for 15 state & nationwide campaign. For example, in the previous Maryland General Assembly session, I lobbied with 1199 SEIU to advocate for a comprehensive \$15 state minimum wage. As a City Councilwoman for Baltimore City, I will not only work closely with labor, but will champion issues that improve the lives of working families.

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

No. I have not been a member of a labor union. As an independent entity, the IAM NPF works very closely unions across the United States.

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 elected, I will work to expand collective bargaining rights to municipal employees who currently do not have that right. Professionally, as a part of my current employment, I work with District & local level representatives to engage new industry groups within the Machinists profession. I would transcend this technical expertise to the Baltimore City librarians. As a major educating professional, school librarians are an integral part of school environment and deserve the opportunity to maximally represented by unions. Even local governments can sometimes take advantage of its employees if there are no laws and/or regulations in place to curtail their influence and power. Expanding collective bargaining agreements to protect the rights of librarians, employees of the Baltimore Convention Center, and Baltimore City Community College is crucial to maintaining a level playing field for all kinds of workers in Baltimore City. These rights are imperative for employees to maintain an equitable work environment.

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?

Legislatively closing minimum wage loopholes is extremely important to addressing several of Baltimore City's most pressing issues from public safety to homelessness. Passing legislation that directly improves the quality of life for our tipped & shift workers helps improve the city as a whole, brings in additional tax revenue and, overall, bolsters the Citywide economy. As a former tipped & shift worker for a number of years, I understand the challenges that face shift workers and tipped workers including lack of financial means to pay all bills, over stressed coordination of multiple schedules that detrimentally impact parent-child involvement, and overall health implications as a result of chronic stress. Specific to the 10th District, there are a large portion of under- employed and unemployed individuals that would benefit from this wage increase to support their families on lockstep with the changing rates of inflation. I am in full support of this initiative.

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. Public sector jobs, in general, pay less in exchange for guaranteed retirement funds. Switching to a defined contribution plan would make public sector jobs less attractive and cause some of the public sector's high-functioning employees to look for work in the private sector, leading less effective and/or efficient public services. As a representative of a major multi-employer Pension Fund, I understand the subtle yet drastic nuances of a defined benefit plan and a defined contribution plan, usually through mechanisms such as 401K, 403A, and/ or 403B. Defined pension benefit plans offer a mechanism for participants to retire with employer-based contributions for the service that a worker provides over a set period of time. Defined contributions through public sector jobs, in general, pay less in exchange for guaranteed retirement funds. Switching to a defined contribution plan would place an incredible reliance on unpredictable marketplace economics of the stock market for accumulation and retrieval of retirement funds. This type of heavy reliance on marketplace economics could place workers at an incredible disadvantage such as the economic downturn of the stock market in 2008. A defined benefit through a pension fund would provide the foundation needed for workers to retire with dignity to enjoy the fruits of their labor for their years of service.

6. Retirement benefits for educators and city workers: Over the past few years, retired educators and employees of Baltimore City have had concerns that, just as the state did to its public workers, the city will discontinue the retiree prescription drug benefit and move all retirees to Medicare Part D for prescriptions. If elected to office, do you pledge to never vote to move retired educators and city employees to Medicare Part D for their prescription benefits?

Yes, I will never vote to deny retired educators and city employees the benefits that were promised to them. As a public health practitioner with a regulatory background, I understand the subtle, yet life changing nuances of this commercial shift. If enforced; this change has the potential to have dire consequences for the many educators & city workers that have serve Baltimore City for decades.

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?

I will work on legislation that will investigate workplace violence incidents, risks, or hazards as soon as practicable; provide training and education to employees who may be exposed to workplace violence hazards and risks; meet record keeping requirements; and prohibit acts of discrimination or retaliation against employees for reporting workplace violence incidents, threats, or concerns. As Councilwoman, I will ensure there is periodic review of workplace environments for city employees. Most importantly, as an elected official I would support legislation modeled after the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Services Workers Act (H.R. 1309).

That makes employers:

1. investigate workplace violence incidents, risks, or hazards as soon as practicable;
2. provide training and education to employees who may be exposed to workplace violence hazards and risks;
3. meet record keeping requirements; and
4. prohibit acts of discrimination or retaliation against employees for reporting workplace violence incidents, threats, or concerns.

This is a great example of innovative legislation that will support the workplace violence claims of workers, initiate data-driven systems for cataloguing threats of violence and injuries, and better educate employers about adequate working environments.

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.

a. I will advocate for a mental health based approach to discipline in order to identify and address underlying issues that may make a student that has behavioral issues in school.

b. Advocate to the Baltimore City Delegation in Annapolis to segment a portion of the Kirwan Commission specifically for BCPS support staff, paraprofessionals, and community based organizations to designate funds for conflict mediation techniques and non traditional mental health techniques, such as Project Pneuma.

2. Subpar learning environments, classrooms & school infrastructure.

a. I will work to secure funding for the maintenance and restoration of our public schools.

b. Repairing crumbling infrastructure, providing reliable heat and air conditioning units, and funding janitorial staff to ensure that our schools are clean and hygienic.

3. Underfunded school administration, paraprofessionals, and support staff.

a. I will work with our Annapolis delegation to secure funding for the Kirwan Commission Recommendations and work with other council-members to explore ways for Baltimore to meet its contribution requirement.

b. Increase resource capacity for paraprofessionals & support staff.

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 believe that the City Council should have the power to confirm or deny the Mayor's decisions regarding school board members. Secondly, I completely agree that they should have at least 3 years of experience working in public schools. As Councilwoman, I would work to prioritize school board members with public school teaching backgrounds as a voting representative on the BCPS School Board. As a technical expert in public health, I am fully firm in the position that entities that deal with our youth should have the technical background & professional experience related to education. These individuals would support and provide an advisory role on the School Board with proven evidence-based models for programming, instruction, etc. that are specific to BCPS. Lastly, there should be a mandated voting representative from the parent and youth demographic on the School Board. This provides an opportunity for a specific demographics to be represented on the School Board that would otherwise not be represented.

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?

If elected, I will support legislation that would transition Baltimore City's School Board to a hybrid structure. A hybrid method provides balance and ensures accountability and transparency from elected officials while still maintaining the professional expertise of appointees.

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 will advocate for a holistic mental health based approach to discipline in order to identify and address underlying issues that may make a student misbehave in school. As a former student with behavioral issues, I fully understand that there are other underlying factors that inhibit student's behavior. Suspending students with behavioral problems without addressing the underlying causes of those problems does nothing to help the problem student, as well as teachers and other students who may be put at risk by their actions. Students with repeat behavior issues, rather than being suspended, should be recommended to trained mental health professionals.

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?

There are several opportunities available to utilize these vacant and/or underused community buildings & resources. Such vacant school properties can be revitalized and transformed into rec centers for the public, multi-unit affordable housing complexes, general community resource centers, and senior centers. Along with my colleagues, we would, of course, prioritize community input when deciding what to do with these empty buildings. This would be shaped as an opportunity for engagement & empowerment for communities to use education institutions as an anchor for neighborhood revitalization. As an advocate for community revitalization & stabilization, I would collaborate with neighborhood stakeholders to create & cultivate opportunities that center on the optimal utilization of housing trusts, land trust, and community development corporations in areas with incredible need.

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 believe the Baltimore City Council, in collaboration with the BCPS, should distribute educational resources to meet the holistic needs of students and families. I understand that areas with sufficient school funding might be hostile to redistricting out of the fear that the quality of their neighborhood schools might diminish in resources and capacity, however, quantitatively historically redlined schools are severely underfunded and in need of community engagement and revitalization. In addition, with the additional funding for our schools secured in accordance with the Kirwan Commission’s recommendations we should have enough funding to ensure that all of our schools have equitable funding and capacity resources.

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?

Charter school teachers and staff should be considered employees of the city’s public school board and not the charter school board. The charter schools receive funding diverted from BCPSS funds and therefore, in good faith, should adhere to collective bargaining agreements made between BCPSS and the BTU.

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

Yes, absolutely. Without a limit on the number of charter schools in Baltimore, Baltimore City Public Schools will receive less funding, and the City will see its already underfunded schools lose attendance and lack adequate resources.

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, money that goes towards private school vouchers is money that could be put towards improving the quality of public education. Parents should be able to have the choice to send their children to private schools, but not at the expense of our public school system.

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?

I believe that Baltimore City should increase its contribution to BCPSS by 15%, from 14% to 29% of its annual operating budget, in order to meet Kirwan obligations. While this is not enough to address all of the holistic needs of BCPS, this is a step in the right direction to begin address the decades long underfunding of BCPS.

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

I am in full support of reallocating the City's budget to increase spending on schools. Spending on policing must absolutely come down, but there must be further discussion/investigation into the exact percentage that ought to be cut and shifted. We need our police force to have adequate funding in order to address violent crime and ensure public safety. Yet, investing in public education is just as, if not more, important to prevent crime before it happens. In addition to redirecting police funding towards education, we should do a complete audit of other city agencies (DPW, City Hall, etc.), identify wasteful spending and funnel these funds towards meeting the Kirwan obligations.

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, if elected I will be in favor of returning the title of the head of our public school system to "Superintendent", rather than "CEO". Despite the subtlety of this issue, we must not underestimate its impact on the functioning of our public school system. Our school system should not take on 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?

There are no resources in Baltimore City that should be privatized. Privatization of city resources endangers the quality of life of Baltimore City's residents. I do not feel it is ever appropriate to privatize public services or property.

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, I will ensure that developers build low-income/affordable housing projects have access to the necessary resources and local & state government support. I will also fight to make sure that we distribute affordable housing to areas where it is needed the most while, at the same time, avoiding high concentration of low-income housing projects.

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

Yes, I will support collaborating with developers to build community resource centers for students and families in and around Baltimore in order to improve public safety in our neighborhoods and foster innovation in our schools. Since there is a large portion of developers that utilize public funding, negotiations of secure of TIF monies should be attached to community driven projects in the communities served.

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 will work to ensure that developers in Baltimore follow prevailing wage standards and project-labor agreements in order to create and sustain good, well-paying jobs, for working-class Baltimoreans.

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

Yes, I will ensure businesses follow labor peace agreements and will hold them accountable if they fail to do so. These Labor Peace Agreements in Baltimore City will serve as the protection for all workers to explore their rights to collectively organize for a concerted voice to employer bargaining parties. In collaboration with Union leadership, the Mayoral administration, and the employer, I would introduce a resolution that solidify a clear agreed upon unionizing procedure by all bargaining parties for rights to engage in concerted unionizing activity, thresholds for organizing, and documented enforceable consequences & remedies for violations of the agreed terms by all bargaining parties.

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?

I will work with local developers to explore and help push through affordable housing projects across the city. I will work to make sure such developments are done so that they are best able to address the needs of Baltimore City residents, including heavily subsidized housing for current students and the continuation of property tax credits for low-income city employees.

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

Improved education and expanded city services play crucial roles in my plan to reduce crime in Baltimore City. If elected, one of my top priorities will be to ensure our City schools have the resources and personnel that will allow all students to develop and succeed. I firmly believe we must offer our students a holistic education, providing them with a foundation that will allow them to excel academically, socially, and professionally, and in turn prevent them from engaging in criminal or dangerous activities.

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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