

Dorsey - District 3

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

Ryan Dorsey

Candidate for:

City Council District 3

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Email address

Present occupation

City Council Member (no other employment)

Employer

Baltimore City

Party affiliation

Democrat

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

Yes. AFL-CIO and affiliates in 2016 general election.

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

Yes. Presently running for a second term.

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?

In 2017 I proposed to AFT, BTU, CUB, and AFSCME leadership, and to Senator Ferguson and Delegate Ali a property tax credit for the City's lowest paid employees. The enabling legislation was introduced at my request, and passed the following year. I introduced the tax credit bill in the City Council in 2019 and held a press conference that I organized with AFT. It is featured presently on the home page of the CUB website. Once passed, this will be a benefit to thousands of union members every single year.

I have been a steady voice pushing back against the lies that are so commonly told about BCPS funding, and all of the accompanying misunderstanding. I have spent hundreds of hours helping to educate people on this matter. I have always supported full funding of adequate education, and was advocating for the \$300M that is owed annually before it was ever a common talking point. Full funding of education is essential to teachers, para-educators, and school staff having not only the salaries and benefits they deserve, but their work environment and conditions being raised to what they should be, including adequate staffing numbers, buildings, supplies, and health and specialized support to meet the challenges that life brings into the classroom.

I have been the leading voice year after year during the City's budget hearings, on staffing City agencies properly, and questioning practices around the hiring of seasonal maintenance workers, filling labor needs without filling union positions. I have helped to uncover the unacceptable rate at which these workers are hired and never converted into full-time, union member positions. This has brought light to the subject and helped to create pressure to improve these practices.

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

No, but I was part of the collective bargaining team of AFSCME 1885 in 2018.

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. All workers should have the right to collective bargaining. I will support any effort to expand and improve that right.

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?

The 2019 bill was a step forward, but is not enough. 2025 is too far away, when \$15 is already not enough now. I have been unequivocal in this matter. I ran for office on a promise to support this, and was perhaps the first person running for any office in Baltimore in 2016 to do so. When people said a City Council candidate or member needs to focus on their district and constituent services, I said yes but also we must think bigger, and ran a campaign based on transformative public policy, with the minimum wage at the center. I have always been clear that it must be indexed to inflation and must include all workers, regardless of age or other factors.

I also believe we should do much more to enforce and protect against wage theft.

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. A defined benefit is something that can be negotiated for and predictable. It is part of the backbone of benefits fought for and won through labor organizing. Retirements must be fully secured during years of work, as essential compensation for years of labor, not left to be determined later. The private sector/stock market cannot be trusted with the livelihoods and welfare of workers while they are working, let alone in retirement. The mere fact that private finance is entirely motivated by and beholden to the interest of short-term dividends for corporate shareholders, which always come at the expense of workers, is entirely at odds with the goal of supporting workers. Labor will always be necessary, and so the public sector that relies on labor should always be who supports the retirement of the workers it has relied upon.

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. It's important that we maintain the ability to leverage the City's tens of thousands of employees and retirees for negotiating prescription drug pricing and to ensure access to the medications people need now or may need in the future. With the federal government being prohibited to negotiate on prescription drug prices, economic constraints of the system lead to severe limitations as to what it covers, and what people ultimately have affordable access to. This is not a circumstance anybody should be in. I will never support it.

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. Providing a safe working environment is a very basic part of the social contract that employers owe to workers. Unsafe conditions at City facilities are an outrage.

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?

I believe equitable funding as outlined by the Kirwan Commission is the first challenge, followed by the condition of our historic school facilities. As a graduate of the Baltimore School for the Arts I understand that a City public school can be truly great. However, we are dealing with massive inequities in funding need and availability across the different City public schools, and so many City school buildings are in nearly-unusable condition.

We must do everything in our power to fix these two problems to give our teachers the support needed to provide a world-class education, and for our students to have a chance to benefit from it.

Third, I think redistricting and transportation needs are important to look at. Many students use MTA transit services to get to class. These services, while good to have, can be very unreliable at times and this can cause students to be very late or miss school entirely. Part of addressing this problem no doubt lies in a redistricting conversation. However, a lot more work should be done to understand students' transportation needs and what can be done to resolve them.

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 legislative branch should, to the extent possible, provide checks and balances against the executive branch. One of the most basic ways in which this can happen is through appointments being made through a nomination and confirmation process. It would make as much sense for this to be the process for appointments to the School Board as it does for the Director of DPW or the Police Commissioner.

I believe school board members should have life experience that is similar and relevant to that of the students, educational and occupational experience similar to teachers, principals, and school staff, and a personal stake in the outcomes, such as is the case with parents and grandparents of school students, and with residents of the communities most highly enrolled in public schools.

I would be perfectly comfortable committing to only support a school board candidate with at least 3 years of classroom experience (as a teacher, or a teacher's aide, for example) working in a public school system. This seems like a description that should be met by, at the very least, one member of the school board.

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?

I am not an expert in this area, but I've read enough to know that opinions vary on the subject. I tend to believe that democracy has the potential to prevail in the people's interest, and think that elected leadership and representation will win the day. As with other things, however, campaigns cost money. There is evidence that in other elected offices that pay very little, the tendency is to attract wealthier candidates. The income level among the households of City Schools students being what it is, and with the school board being a volunteer position at present, it would seem that a board elected under such circumstances might not necessarily be representative of the student body and their communities. It's possible that carving out an opportunity to appoint a certain number of members as a safeguard against this might not be a terrible idea. I would say at the very least that a majority elected board is ideal, but to feel confidently convinced of anything more specific would take greater consideration, which I would certainly give if I were actually presented with any power to bring about any change with respect to this matter.

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'm aware of the BTU's safety committee review, and while I don't consider myself to be an expert on the matter, I generally support the findings of this review. This is clearly an area where our teachers have the expertise. Teacher and student safety, health, and mental health is critically important.

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?

While I don't have one of these schools in my district, I'd be supportive in any way I could of any effort that collaborates extensively with the community to return a school building to active use. I believe that just like with other historic redevelopment projects, the strengths and opportunities with each one of these properties should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, with significant community input. These kinds of projects are the kinds I would like to see supported with public subsidies – provided that agreements are met that bring labor and the community fully to the table and follow all applicable best practices (labor peace, PLA, prevailing wage, local hiring, affordable/inclusionary housing, etc.)

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, and yes.

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?

No, we don't need any further privatization of our public schools, and perhaps we already have too much. Charter school teachers must stay employees of the school system.

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

Charters are presented conceptually as a place for experimentation and the proving of new ideas and approaches to education. If they are proven successful by private operators, and the school affords as equitable an opportunity to students as any other school should, then it should be possible to continue the successes achieved under the private directorship under public directorship. There is, however, a limit to the extent and perhaps even the length of time that the district can serve as a bed of experimentation, and there should be some limit to the number of schools engaging in this.

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?

This is an easy no.

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?

Simply put, we need to increase our funding to the greatest extent possible to maximize the complementary funding the State would make possible. I'm less concerned with how the percentage of our budget compares (though we are the clear outlier at the moment). If we simply commit to adequately funding our share, then the budget question is somewhat secondary, and also works itself out.

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

The City has countless fees and surcharges that were written into law long ago and not indexed for inflation. The City needs to update these to maximize its revenue generation, in a way that should already have been anticipated. The City also engages in highly wasteful practices, spending far more than makes sense on certain aspects of public infrastructure. There is money to be saved through smarter practices (and I don't mean by eliminating anyone's job; rather, it's things like installing highway-grade traffic signal infrastructure on a neighborhood main street).

In addition to all of these, it is clear that the budget of the Baltimore Police Department yields no benefits commensurate to the allocation. We should look here for money to divert to education. We should also look at renegotiating the PILOT with large institutional/non-profit partners, with the Kirwan funding challenge representing a historic opportunity to do that.

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. Correlation might not be the same as causation here, but as the prompt establishes, the change to a CEO has occurred hand-in-glove with greater privatization and corporatization. I support reverting back, if we couple that change with a commitment to world-class, equitable, public education.

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?

The conduit system, parks, streets, schools, policing... None of it should ever be privatized.

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've tackled housing policy through legislation like Baltimore's HOME Act, banning source of income discrimination, and I'll continue to work for fair, affordable, and plentiful housing.

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

Yes. I've also worked where it makes sense to challenge zoning or other laws or regulations that pose barriers to more dense, urban development. In this way, I believe we can grow the tax base while also insisting on inclusion and equity.

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. This is a no brainer. The city can lead first by ensuring that its own projects and projects receiving public funding follow these practices. The city can use its influence with private business to encourage businesses to similarly adopt these best practices.

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?

In 2018 I proposed the low-income City employees tax credit idea to Sen. Ferguson and Del. Ali, and then asked CUB to testify in support. When Delegate Smith ultimately passed the State's enabling legislation in 2019 I introduced the local bill, with unanimous co-sponsorship from the Council.

In 2019 I passed the HOME Act, prohibiting source of income discrimination.

I introduced a law to permit Accessory Dwelling Units and have taken leadership on challenging exclusionary zoning laws, such as the expansion of single-family zone districts that occurred in 2016. I have been the sole elected official in Baltimore voicing need for such legislative action, including others like expanding transit oriented development and eliminating parking minimums that drive up the cost of housing. These things are far more capable of increasing housing opportunity than most of what Baltimore's housing advocacy community might note.

In addition to all of the above, we absolutely must reform our inclusionary housing law, so it is actually effective. And when we do, we must recognize that we have compromised on this matter and deferred to the interest of private profits for far too long, and that we need the strictest and most aggressive requirements for affordable housing inclusion as possible.

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. Because the real way to prevent and reduce crime is through economic and racial justice. That means providing an equitable, world-class education to every student, and not stopping there; all of us must be afforded equitable opportunity in the job market, and through the services provided in our City and neighborhoods.

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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