

# Asaka - District 4



AFTHCMD | BCFPE | BCFPHN | BTU | CUB | GCFT | MCEA | MCFT | MPEC | MSDFSA

## Candidate Information

Name

Anson Asaka

Candidate for:

Baltimore City Council District 4

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Email address

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Present occupation

civil rights attorney

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Employer

NAACP

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Party affiliation

Democrat

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

No. This is my first time running for office.

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

No.

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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?

AFT-Maryland should support me for several reasons. My political platform is in alignment with the AFT-Maryland's mission. I support economic opportunity, high quality public education and healthcare. More specifically, I call for the full implementation of the Kirwan Commission's recommendations, expansion of the Youth Works Program, living wage for all workers, universal and free medical care, and free public college education. For more information, please visit my website, [ansonasaka.com](http://ansonasaka.com). My commitment to such social justice issues is not new. For the past 15 years, I have worked as a civil rights attorney with the NAACP National Office. In addition, as a student at Howard University and political blogger, I have been engaged in the movement for social justice all of my adult life. Aside from being alignment with the mission of AFT-Maryland, I have more qualified than the other candidates. I graduated cum laude with a bachelor of arts in political science. As a lawyer, I have necessary legal skills to draft effective legislation and to excellently negotiate with other law makers and other entities. Finally, my campaign is strong and viable. I have canvassed in every precinct in my district. I have distributed thousands of flyers. I have raised funds for flyers, yard signs, posters, and other important campaign items.

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

No. However, my father was a member of the Teacher's Union. My brother and grandfather were members of the United Auto Workers Union. Unions are in my blood. The union made it possible for my grandfather, a man with limited education, to provide for his wife and five children. The union made it possible for him to pay for his wife's nursing degree. The union made it possible for my brother to pay for his college education. Although I have not been a union member, I fully understand the importance of unions and I fully support unions.

## 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 be granted the right to engage in collective bargaining. Collective bargaining empowers workers to protect the rights of hard working Americans. Through collective bargaining workers are able to negotiate higher wages, better benefits, and better working conditions. If elected, I will do everything in my power to expand collective bargaining rights to municipal employees who currently do not have 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?

I fully support ending the exclusion for tipped workers. Ideally, the minimum wage increase should not be delayed. I do support linking further minimum wage increases to inflation. That will ensure that the minimum wage is linked to the increasing in the cost of living.

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 do not support such a move. As noted on Investopedia, pension plans have less market risk than 401(k) plans. With a pension plan, the plan provider is responsible for investment and longevity risk. Under the pension plan, workers receive a certain amount based on the amount contributed and number of years employed.

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 would pledge to never vote to move retired educators and city employees to Medicare Part D for their prescription benefits. As stated in the Baltimore Sun, switching to Medicare Part D may be more expensive for retirees.

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. I would support a law requiring the various city departments to partner with Maryland Occupational Safety and Health to inspect all city workplace facilities to help identify potential safety hazards. We ensure that all workers are safe.

### 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?

The three biggest problems facing Baltimore City public schools are inadequate and inequitable funding, insufficient wrap around support resources for indigent students, and inadequate teacher wages and administrative support.

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 voters should elect all of the members of the city's school board. However, candidates should be required to have at least 3 years of classroom experience in order to run for office. Elections will ensure that the citizens have the power to directly hold school board members accountable.

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?

Yes. For the previously stated reasons, I would support legislation for transitioning to a fully elected Baltimore City 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?

Yes. The code of conduct should be revised to ensure that schools are safe for students and teachers. Although I understand the need for some restorative practices to address the problem of the school to prison pipeline, students who attack and/or threaten teachers and/or other students should be expelled and put into alternative schools. As reported in a Baltimore Sun article titled Attacks on Baltimore school employees revive discussions about student discipline , "a Baltimore Sun investigation in 2014 found that school employees reported more injuries than those in any city agency except the Police Department." There have been reports and viral videos of students attacking teachers. Too often, those students are allowed to return to school. That is simply unacceptable.

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?

Ultimately, to address the root cause of the problem, we need to implement long term policies to encourage people to stay in and come to Baltimore. My campaign is about creating a cleaner, safer better Baltimore. Meanwhile, if elected, I would support legislation to convert some of the closed schools into community centers. The community centers could be used for recreation programs, arts programs, counseling, mentorship programs, vocational training, and/or adult literacy program.

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?

If elected, I would support school redistricting. Redistricting, if properly planned and implemented, could address the continuing problems of school segregation, achievement gap, and inequitable distribution of 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 be considered employees of the city’s public school board to ensure that teachers do not lose their rights under Baltimore Teachers Union’s collective bargaining agreement.



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

There should be a limit on the number of charter schools. We must ensure that charter schools do not undermine traditional public schools. We must ensure that all public school teachers' rights are protected and that charter schools are held to the same standards and regulations as traditional public schools.

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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. A public funds should not be diverted to private schools. Baltimore public schools are underfunded. According to CEO Sonja Santelises, the Baltimore school system could face a \$60 million budget gap if the schools do not receive additional funding from the state and city. Under such circumstances, no funds should be used to support voucher programs. Those taxes should go to Baltimore public schools.

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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 should commit to gradually increasing funding public schools to least 28 percent. We must invest in our youth. They are our future.

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

I would propose that payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) programs with non-profits such as John Hopkins be renegotiated. Non-profits such as John Hopkins should pay their fair share. As noted by a Baltimore Brew titled Do Baltimore nonprofits pay their "fair share" of city services?, "Hopkins pays no property taxes, but voluntarily contributes \$3.25 million to the city under the 2016 PILOT." the Baltimore Brew article further states that: "Were Hopkins to pay property taxes, some \$59 million would go to the city, Cename estimates. That represents an 18-fold increase in funds from the present arrangement (\$59 million compared to \$3.25 million)." That article further points out how such non-profits are underpaying the city by \$41 million dollars for city services. Furthermore, developers and corporations must paid their fair share as well. In addition, I would advocate for the legalization and taxation of marijuana. A significant percentage of marijuana tax revenue should be allocated to Baltimore public city schools.

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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. Language and titles are a reflection of culture and values. Our schools should not follow a for-profit corporate model. Our schools should follow a public service model. Changing the title to "Superintendent" will reflect a return to the public service model.

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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?

None of the city's resources should be privatized. I do not believe that it is appropriate to privatize public 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. I support the implementation of strong and enforceable community benefits agreements will all developers. Such agreements would promote affordable housing, funding for public schools, prevailing wages, hiring of Baltimore residents, and the implementation of labor peace agreements. My political platform supports affordable housing, funding public schools, and workers rights. Please visit my website, [ansonasaka.com](http://ansonasaka.com), for more information.

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

Yes. I support the implementation of strong and enforceable community benefits agreements will all developers. Such agreements would promote affordable housing, funding for public schools, prevailing wages, hiring of Baltimore residents, and the implementation of labor peace agreements. My political platform supports affordable housing, funding public schools, and workers rights. Please visit my website, [ansonasaka.com](http://ansonasaka.com), for more information.

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 support the implementation of strong and enforceable community benefits agreements will all developers. Such agreements would promote affordable housing, funding for public schools, prevailing wages, hiring of Baltimore residents, and the implementation of labor peace agreements. My political platform supports affordable housing, funding public schools, and workers rights. Please visit my website, [ansonasaka.com](http://ansonasaka.com), for more information.

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

Yes. I support the implementation of strong and enforceable community benefits agreements will all developers. Such agreements would promote affordable housing, funding for public schools, prevailing wages, hiring of Baltimore residents, and the implementation of labor peace agreements. My political platform supports affordable housing, funding public schools, and workers rights. Please visit my website, [ansonasaka.com](http://ansonasaka.com), for more information.

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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 would create tax incentives to encourage developers to create affordable housing in opportunity areas of the city. We need to create and/or expand tax credits programs to make it easier for teachers to purchase homes in Baltimore. In addition, we must address some of the root causes of homelessness such as poverty, unemployment, drug addiction, and mental illness. The city should use eminent domain to seize and renovate vacant, dilapidated buildings. Such building should be used to house the homeless.

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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. When our youth receive a quality education and training, they have far more opportunities to secure stable, viable, reliable legal employment and are less likely to engage in criminal activity. When the youth are poor, unemployed and uneducated, they are more likely to engage in criminal activities in order to survive.

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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