

Hudson - Dist. 7

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 *

friendsforhudson@gmail.com



Candidate Information

Name

Rod Hudson

Candidate for:

Baltimore City Council District 7

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Email address

Present occupation

educator

Employer

Baltimore City Public Schools

Party affiliation

Democrat

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

no

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

no

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?

From July 2008 to the present, I have served as community organizer and an advocate for education reform by addressing critical issues of equity and equality for Sandtown Children with the Baltimore City Board of Education. I protested the signing of the Port Covington Redevelopment and stood with unions and community activist demanding that a delay of the signing of the Port Covington deal until a new mayor and city council was in place. I protested in Annapolis urging Governor Hogan to support the Kirwan Commission's recommendation for improving the State's public schools. I have served as an advocate to eradicate hunger in Baltimore and in particular in the Sandtown Community through the Ames Shalom Community Inc by providing nutritious meals, health fairs, food giveaways, back to school events, and I have worked with Former Commander Melvin Russle by hosting workshops in bridge building between the Baltimore City Police Department and the Sandtown Community.

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

Baltimore City Teachers Union Present; Prince Georges Educators Association 2002-2008

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?

I believe that City Librarians, employees of the Baltimore Convention Center, and municipal employees be granted the right to organize as unions and engage in collective bargaining. It is certainly imperative that any municipal employee who at this time do not have this right be afforded that opportunity. I will work hard on behalf of those whose voices are left out so that all will be treated fairly in terms of equity with salaries, working conditions, benefits, and other aspects of workers' compensation and rights for workers.

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 would be in favor of linking the minimum wage to inflation, and removing the exclusion for tipped workers. I would also be in favor of removing the delay and closing these loopholes in raising the minimum wage.

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 support such a move to defined contribution as defined benefit plans, although seemingly attractive and seemingly more secure, come with some risk to employees. If employees change jobs, they can lose a significant portion of their investments. Furthermore, there have been cases when some employees did not work long enough to receive the full payout consequently receiving far less than anticipated. It should be noted that in the Defined Benefit plan, the investments made on the employees account is managed by the employer, and although the employer guarantees to top off the plan during economic crisis, the public sector has been known to cut the plans and changed them. Moreover, when new administrations are elected, the priorities and promises made by the previous administrations are not always honored. However, in defined contribution plans, the benefits of the plan are managed by the employee, and as such, if the employee leaves the job, he or she still manages their plan without a major interruption or loss. The employer contributes matching funds to the plan thus allowing the employee to have more control over their retirement.

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?

The problem with Medicare Part D Prescriptions is that although you do choose from a large list of approved drug plans, they do not cover as much of all prescription drug plans as the retiree prescription drug benefit plan that city workers currently have today. Medicare Part D program simply is not comprehensive enough and only add to the already high costs of getting the drugs that many of our retired public seniors need for medical reasons. I would commit to not voting to move retired educators and city employees to medicare Part D.

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?

If I am elected to office in Baltimore City, I will 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.

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 that I see facing Baltimore City Public schools are delayed Facility Maintenance repairs and upgrades, the need for increased 21st Century Technology in the classrooms and Curriculum Resources support for every child, and salary increases for every administrator, teacher and support staff member based on a pay scale that recognizes the uniqueness of Urban Education. To solve these problems I would vote to fully fund the Baltimore City Public Schools and introduce bills that would support funding for the above mentioned needs. I would also urge the 100% funding of the Kiran Commission findings for Baltimore City Public Schools.

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?

Because of the uniqueness of Baltimore City Public School, experience in working in public education in Baltimore could be instrumental in untangling the bureaucracy and nepotism that has become all too common. I would support choosing a schoolboard member with at least 3 years of classroom experience to serve on our 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 would support legislation transitioning Baltimore City Schools to a hybrid school board with the majority of seats being elected seats. This hybrid configuration of the School Board may allow communities to have a more prominent voice in the decision making that best represents the needs of the respected communities. The School Board members should ultimately answer to the communities that they represent. Too many of our schools with rich history and roots that run deep into our communities have been ignored. School names that are connected to prominent figures of a particular community have changed without input from the respective community. A Hybrid School Board best serve the needs of Baltimore City Communities.

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 believe that there should be a zero tolerance for violence and bullying while employing restorative justice and engaging in restorative practices to help students succeed. Striking a teacher or Student should result in immediate action as violence in any form should not be part of the school climate or culture. It should be noted that suspensions and expulsions of students could have at its root questions of equity especially after juxtaposing how males and females receive support based on gender and the support services received based on ethnicity in Baltimore City Schools. However, expelling students without first offering them support is equally unhelpful to the students and could send the wrong messages to our communities that have experienced injustices by public agencies throughout Baltimore. Nevertheless, Students who are constantly and consistently disruptive and have zero regard for the student code of conduct might benefit most when administrators and teachers alike offer them the proper support which may include mental health, and counseling before they are returned back into their classrooms. Moreover students who show repeated inappropriate and violent behaviors should be immediately referred for mental and student support services so that they can receive the much needed support. Just returning chronically disruptive and violent students to the classroom without some referral for mental help or support services increase the chances of more violence in our schools and classrooms thereby putting the lives of children and teachers alike at risk. I would support changes in the student code of conduct that would require evaluations for these kinds of students before they are returned to the classroom.

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 vacant school buildings in our communities certainly are testaments to the deep history and service of Baltimore. However, once a building has been decommissioned for service by the BCPS, it could be re-purposed to fit the needs of the community. Some buildings could be deconstructed and the space utilized to provide much needed housing and state of the art recreation centers while other spaces could be deconstructed and used to draw the attention of potential development that may provide jobs for the affected community. Simply letting buildings sit and deteriorate may only serve as an eye sore for the community and may create opportunities for crime.

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?

I am a firm believer that quality education should be available at every school irrespective of the neighborhood and the people who live therein. I would support community buy in and engagement before any plans of changing neighborhood boundaries are undertaken by any agency.

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?

Unlike private school teachers, Public Charter School educators are required to meet the same standards as any public school teacher in Maryland. Moreover, they enjoy the option of being members of the Baltimore Teacher's Union. Given that some Public Charter Schools do not have the resources or financial support that traditional Public schools enjoy, making teachers employees of the public charter school board might put these teachers and staff members at greater risk of being stripped of certain rights and benefits all in the name of cost savings for the public charter school. For this reason, ensuring that these teachers and staff remain employees of their respective school boards is imperative to ensuring that they enjoy collective bargaining privileges and protections that come with being union members. I would oppose any legislation that weaken state law to make the teachers and staff at the public charter schools employees of the charter non-profit board and not the school system.

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

I believe that there should be a cap on the number of Charter Schools as Charter Schools drain resources from non-charter schools that could be utilized for student support. Although I believe that some communities may require out of the box and innovated approaches to education, these innovations can also happen in our Public schools as well.

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?

Because Private schools are held to a different standard than their public school counterparts, educating students at private schools are much lower than educating students at public schools. Private schools are not subject to hiring certified teachers and neither are they required to offer the same standardized tests to their students that public schools are mandated to offer. The issues of equity are herein embedded in this discussion as private schools choose the students that they will educate while public schools educate indiscriminately. Students who may perform well in public schools and cost far less to educate are lured away from public education by the boost/school voucher. For this reason, I do not support Boost/School Vouchers as these vouchers siphon resources from public schools.

17. Education funding: Some in Annapolis have argued that Baltimore City should be contributing more to its public school system than is currently budgeted. The city ranks among the worst in Maryland when it comes to the local contribution to its public school system; while on average a county in Maryland contributes roughly 36% of its annual operating budget to its local school system, in Baltimore, the city contributes only 14% of its budget to its schools. The Kirwan Commission is recommending the city increase its contribution by \$300 million, more than doubling its current contribution.

17(a) How large of an increase, percentage wise, should Baltimore City commit in its budget to funding public schools?

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

I would first seek the public input and host discussions about Kirwan so that we could have buy in from all stakeholders. I would organize a task force to help identify funding through Philanthropy and/or the elimination of duplicated city positions and departments that exist both in Baltimore city government and in the Baltimore City Public Schools. I would petition the governor for additional support in reducing Baltimore's portion of funding 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?

The Term CEO of Schools was first used in Chicago (1995) so that the new leader of the Chicago Public School system could have increased power and employ a more corporate approach to turn that school system around. The title is now employed by PG County Public Schools and Baltimore City Public Schools. The title of CEO has become more synonymous with failing school systems that need turn around rather than failing school systems that have completed the turn around. Although the rationale for using the title CEO is noble, there does not seem to be sufficient data to indicate that the title of CEO vs that of Superintendent of Schools have resulted in improved test scores. If elected, I will be in favor of returning the title of the head of Baltimore City Public School System to “Superintendent.”

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 Privatization of public services and properties should only be an option if it will serve the public good and align with clear goals that have buy in from the affected stakeholders. Those goals could include: Improved risk management, quality improvements, timeliness, Accommodating Fluctuating Peak Demand, Access to Outside Expertise, Innovation, and cost savings. It should be noted that cost savings should not be the only goal considered especially if saving cost will lead to lower quality services. Some of the resources owned by the city that I believe should not be privatize is The Department of Corrections, Fire Department, Department of Human Services, Department of social services, department of public works, department of transportation, Baltimore City Department of Finance. Although these agencies have various sections within the departments, outsourcing some sections within the departments may make the department more effective. However, the entire department should not be outsourced.

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?

Some of the greatest assets in Baltimore communities are the faith community and non-profits that work tirelessly for the empowerment of their neighbors. I believe that grassroots organizations that are already connected to the community and are partnering with one another but do not have the capacity to engage funding for large scale housing developments should be identified, trained, and partnered with like organizations that do have capacity and experience to engage housing. My plan would create a partnership between faith communities, University of Baltimore Faith Initiative for Community Development Course, the city government, foundations, and non-profits to offer wrap around services in conjunction with housing, recreation, employment, and mental health. I believe that these partnerships can make an invaluable impact not only in housing but in character education and with mentoring our youth.

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

Expanding the tax base in Baltimore can be key to improving its financial contribution to the public schools. The more businesses that move into our communities and employ our neighbors, and the more people that move into our communities and become home owners contribute to expanding the city's tax base. Simply put, we must create the incentive that will make Baltimore attractive to manufactures, new residence, and other small business upstarts. Moreover, Baltimore City needs to review its practices and have a complete audit of city government to identify areas of inefficiency and duplication. Once those areas are identified, the savings can be redirected to the city schools.

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

I will support the policies that are already in place and expand them when necessary that mandate that workers who live in and around the Baltimore region be afforded first privileged of employment when construction is happening in our communities. Furthermore, we will ensure that construction companies follow prevailing wage standards and project-labor agreements. We will demand that construction companies that don't agree to these standards will not have priority when bidding on contracts with the city.

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

Peace agreements between unions and Employers can be productive in protecting the employee. My vision for development will include businesses that will be required to follow labor peace agreements.

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?

Some of the greatest assets in Baltimore communities are the faith community and non-profits that work tirelessly for the empowerment of their neighbors. I believe that grassroots organizations that are already connected to the community and are partnering with one another but do not have the capacity to engage funding for large scale housing developments should be identified, trained, and partnered with like organizations that do have capacity and experience to engage housing. My plan would create a partnership between faith communities, University of Baltimore Faith Initiative for Community Development Course, the city government, foundations, and non-profits to offer wrap around services in conjunction with housing, recreation, employment, and mental health. I believe that these partnerships can make an invaluable impact not only in housing but in character education and with mentoring our youth.

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

To reduce crime in Baltimore City, my plan addresses homelessness, conflict resolution, addictions, employment, education, mental health, and youth recreation. Simply putting more police officers to walk the streets will not reduce crime, but we must also address the aforementioned factors that contribute to violence.

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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