

# Bullock - Dist. 9

## AFT-Maryland Candidate Questionnaire for Baltimore City Races

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

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

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

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

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

Email address \*



Candidate Information

Name

John Bullock

Candidate for:

City Council, 9th District

Home address

City, ZIP code

Phone

Email address

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Present occupation

Council Member, Professor

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Employer

Baltimore City, Towson University

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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?

AFL CIO: 2016, 2020

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

Baltimore City Council: 2016-present

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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?

I pledge to continue being a voice on the Council that will be sensitive to the rights of workers and partner with labor unions in sponsoring and supporting such legislation. I believe that all workers should receive fair wages and benefits, so our City government must do everything possible to make this a reality.

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

While not a union member, as a state employee in the University System of Maryland, I have benefited from AFSCME's push for collective bargaining and the reinstatement of cost of living adjustments that were cut by the governor. As a public school teacher, my wife was a member of the Baltimore Teachers Union.

## 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 reelected I will work to expand collective bargaining rights to all such employees. These agreements are crucial to maintaining an even playing field and protecting the rights for various types of workers in Baltimore City.

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?

Absolutely. This is about survival and the minimum wage has been way too low for far too long. It is very difficult for workers to support themselves and their families as wages have been stagnant. As a result of such low pay, many full time workers are mired in poverty. This why I have stood with and continue to stand with our unions and progressive groups in the fight for \$15 to close such loopholes affecting tipped workers.

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 employment typically pays less in exchange for guaranteed retirement funds. Changing to a defined contribution plan may cause some employees to work in the private sector instead.

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.

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?

Workplace environments for city employees must be regularly reviewed for safety. I will support legislation to investigate workplace violence incidents, risks, or hazards and provide training and education to affected employees. It is also necessary to meet record keeping requirements and prohibit acts of discrimination or retaliation against employees for reporting such conditions.

#### 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. Poor learning environments.

I will work to secure funding for the maintenance and restoration of our public schools. Repairing crumbling infrastructure, providing reliable heat and air conditioning units, and funding janitorial staff to ensure that our schools are clean and hygienic.

2. Underfunded schools.

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

3. Safety.

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

9. Appointments to the City School Board: Just recently, a law was passed that gave the mayor (but not the city council) more authority in choosing the members of the city's school board. What role do you think the city council should play in this process? What should be the qualities Baltimore should prioritize in choosing a member of the city's school board? Would you commit to only support a candidate for local school board with at least 3 years of classroom experience (as a teacher, or a teacher's aide, for example) working in a public school system?

The City Council should have the authority to confirm or deny the mayor's decisions regarding school board members. We should prioritize school board members with public school teaching backgrounds as well as a commitment to integrity and transparency. It is critical that appointees have years of experience working in public schools so they have a deep understanding of the everyday conditions and challenges.

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?

Absolutely. If reelected, I will support legislation that would transition Baltimore City's School Board to a hybrid structure. A partially elected school board provides greater accountability, local control and transparency. Within this structure, the school board would be more balanced and members would have to answer to Baltimore City residents.

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 mental health based approach to discipline in order to identify and address underlying issues that may make a student act out in school. Suspending students with behavioral problems without addressing the underlying causes of those problems does nothing to help the student, as well as teachers and other pupils who may be put at risk by their actions. Students with repeat behavior issues, rather than being suspended, should be referred to trained mental health professionals.

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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?

In our district, we have already worked with community partners in repurposing buildings to provide critical programming and services. Neighborhood input is also extremely important to determining the future of such assets.

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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. As city planner it is apparent that educational resources should be distributed to meet current demographic needs. Additionally, the recommendations of the Kirwan Commission provide a pathway to more adequate and equitable school funding.

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. Without a limit on the number of charter schools in Baltimore, traditional 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?

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.

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

As a Council Member, I support reappropriating the City budget to have more balanced investment in education, housing, and health. However, the exact percentages for each category must be determined through careful examination and cost benefit analysis. While public safety should not be compromised, we can all be safer by taking a preventative rather than reactionary approach.

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 reelected 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?

No. Government services and public property should not be privatized. This has a negative impact as private entities achieve cost savings by laying off workers and cutting wages and benefits. At such a cost, privatization is not the answer.

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 willing to build low-income/affordable housing projects have access to the necessary resources and 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 incentivizing developers to build community resource centers for students and families in and around Baltimore in order improve public safety in our neighborhoods and foster innovation in our 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?

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.

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 opportunities for affordable housing units across the city. This will include 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 are crucial to reducing crime in Baltimore City. If reelected, a top priority will be to ensure our City schools have the resources and personnel that will allow all students to develop and succeed. We must offer our students a holistic education, providing them with the foundation that will allow them to excel academically, socially, and professionally; this will 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 [treynolds@aftmd.org](mailto:treynolds@aftmd.org).



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