

# Miller - Mayor

## 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

Mary Miller

Candidate for:

Mayor

Home address

.....

City, ZIP code

.....

Phone

.....

Email address

.....

Present occupation

Senior Fellow (unpaid)

Employer

21st Century Cities Initiative at JHU

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?

As a former union member, longtime Baltimore resident, and a graduate of public schools, I am committed to creating a fair and just community that offers access to opportunity for all residents. I understand the importance of paying for the Kirwan recommendations, and believe that a strong public education system is essential not only to student success, but to the general health, safety, and prosperity of our city. As Mayor, I will prioritize education by: 1) expanding access to high quality early childhood education programs, 2) recruiting and retaining diverse and qualified educators and providing them the support they need to succeed, 3) expanding community schools and wraparound services that support the well-being of children and their families, and 4) ensuring that students are better prepared for 21st-Century work.

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

I was a member of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters Union when I worked at a supermarket in high school in the early 1970s.

## 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

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 think that \$15 should be the minimum standard for a living wage, and Maryland shouldn't wait until 2025. I also support removing the exemptions for tipped workers and indexing for inflation. As Mayor, I will fight for these provisions at the local level while also advocating for these changes at the state level so that Baltimore isn't put at a disadvantage compared to neighboring jurisdictions.

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?

The city's pension funds for civil workers and police and firefighters are both underfunded. We should honor the current commitments we've made. To protect the benefits of future employees and their families, the city should be able to weigh the costs and benefits of moving to a defined contribution plan or hybrid plan.

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 switch to Medicare Part D was handled poorly, with many retirees being notified via letter about their plans changing. I would not support changing benefits for current retirees, but would be open to considering a change for future retirees, if that would be the best and most cost-efficient plan for them. I would solicit input from current and future retirees to inform any future decision.

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 that law.

### 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) Unsafe and underfunded facilities. Research shows that Baltimore City schools are in worse condition than schools in any other part of Maryland, leading to missed instructional hours, student and teacher health concerns, lower teacher retention, absenteeism, and lower student achievement, which have disproportionately affected students of color. As Mayor, I will ensure that Baltimore City schools receive more funding for infrastructure improvements, and will join the Maryland ACLU and Strong Schools Maryland in calling for more state funding.

2) Inadequate support for educators. Both the Kirwan Report and the Blueprint for Success underscored the need for various teacher support and retention initiatives, including mentorship, professional development, and higher teacher diversity. As Mayor, I will push for the recommendations put forth by the Kirwan Commission, as well as those from the Baltimore City Public Schools Black Teacher Recruitment and Retention Working Group to make teacher support, development, and retention a high priority.

3) Lack of access to high quality early childhood education. The path toward closing the opportunity gap in Baltimore requires high investment in quality early learning opportunities. Research shows that ECE benefits children, communities, and the future economy. As Mayor, I will leverage city, state, and federal funding to expand optional preschool enrollment for all Baltimore City students when they're 3 years old.

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?

Although the responsibility to appoint School Board members may ultimately be the Mayor's, the City Council should be involved in identifying good candidates for the Board.

A lack of classroom experience should not disqualify a person from being considered for the Board, as long as they have some experience with the school system, a strong grasp of local education policy priorities, and a demonstrated understanding of the needs of students, educators, counselors, and leadership.

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 support a hybrid model for Baltimore City's School Board. I would like to evaluate how the expansion to 12 members with two elected members impacts the Board to determine if increasing the ratio further would be in the best interest of Baltimore City schools. I will also encourage input from residents, City officials, and school and district leaders to ensure that the ultimate decision is informed by those working most closely with the 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?

I support the BCPS Blueprint for Success' emphasis on more restorative practices in schools, such as healthy communication, relationship building, and an emphasis on the harm that was done versus the rules that were broken. Rather than punishment, I believe the priorities should be whole-child growth, conflict reduction, and elimination of racial disparities in the administration of consequences for violation of school codes.

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 needs of every community in Baltimore are different, so solutions should be community-specific and resident-informed. The City should engage with neighborhoods to assess the need for specific resources or services, and then determine how vacant facilities can help meet that need. Additionally, the City should strategically partner with respected community organizations to provide needed resources and services, such as community health support, youth services, workforce development, transitional housing support, or staging grounds for emergency preparedness.



13. In Baltimore, as across the nation, school zones and neighborhood boundaries have historically served to limit access to high quality public schools. While Baltimore City Public Schools students in middle and high school are assigned to schools through a complicated "school choice" process, students in elementary schools are still largely assigned to schools based on enrollment zones. These zones were created over a generation ago, and in the years since, population shifts (notably large growth southeast Baltimore of the English Language Learner population, which required additional services and support) have resulted in several schools being overcrowded, while others are under-enrolled. Additionally, the school district's Equity Policy requires it to examine its plans and practices to determine and address the ways they exacerbate racial and economic inequity. In order to meet the needs of Baltimore families, and move towards a more just and equitable school system, a comprehensive redistricting plan should be completed, involving the coordination of the Baltimore City Planning Department and Baltimore City Public Schools. However, changing neighborhood boundaries causes significant public backlash. If elected, would you support school redistricting and would you direct the Baltimore City Planning Department to partner with City Schools to create a comprehensive plan?

Yes, I will support redistricting and will direct the BCPD to partner with City Schools to create a comprehensive plan. I support the Comprehensive Educational Facilities Master Plan's goal of maximizing the number of students attending schools that provide a safe and healthy environment conducive to teaching and learning, and the space needed for effective and efficient delivery of instruction and support services.

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 in Baltimore should remain employees of the City's public school board and be afforded the same protections as their peers.

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

Although my priority is supporting and strengthening public schools, there should not be an absolute cap on charter schools, as long as they are routinely held to a high standard and are proven to serve students effectively and equitably. Importantly, charter schools should not be privileged above City schools, and underperforming charter schools should be closed.

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?

Vouchers should not be necessary in a strong public school system. Our first priority must be making public education high quality and the first choice for Baltimore's families. The Mayor does not control the BOOST program of vouchers, which are for children of very low-income families.

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?

Without final word on the funding level formula from the state, it's difficult to forecast a percentage increase.

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

By 2030, when the full \$300 million is required, the City should be in a period of inclusive economic growth with strong tax revenues. Public safety should improve by that point and the City can reduce the BPD budget and devote more money to education.

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?

I am not wedded to any specific title (e.g., CEO, Chancellor, Superintendent). I do not have enough information to evaluate the connection between the title and the move to charters and standardized testing. As Mayor, I would empower district leadership to determine their own structure and relevant titles as needed.

### 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?

Services that are life-critical and/or central to the community’s health and survival should never be privatized. This includes sanitation, emergency services, prisons, and protections for seniors such as Medicare and Social Security. Additionally, there is an important role for the public sector in services that are based in the collective community good, such as education, parks, and transportation. In these instances, along with services that are non-labor intensive or would require substantial investment, public-private partnerships could be explored as a way to leverage the resources and expertise of both sectors while maintaining the focus on people rather than profits.

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?

As Mayor, I would make inclusive growth a front office priority. For the city to truly benefit from inclusive growth we need to make it easier for everyone to live and work in Baltimore. As Mayor, I will provide consistent and higher funding for the Vacants to Value program to increase affordable home ownership in the city, and use the new Affordable Housing Trust Fund to leverage more investment in home ownership. Additionally, we need to do a better job retaining the businesses we have and growing new ones, while avoiding displacement of longtime community residents. Our focus should be on small businesses with real job creation potential - particularly ones that are willing to create opportunities for those that have been left behind. We should encourage and invest in the vibrant startup community in Baltimore, along with new business models like worker-owned co-ops that bolster inclusive growth and access to prosperity.

Reclaiming our neighborhoods means giving small developers and residents the chance to work on renovating vacant houses that will create jobs and income. We should give priority to projects that employ local residents.

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

My plan for inclusive growth will enable the city grow into a stronger tax base, which will go toward paying for increased spending on public 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

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?

See 20a

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. Not every violation of law should be met with a police response. Fighting crime also means fighting poverty and structural racism, and the health, education, and workforce systems have an important role to play in that effort. My official crime and education plans support several measures that are proven to reduce crime in the short and long term, including expanded access to early childhood education and wraparound support for youth and families. Additionally, a move toward restorative practices in schools disrupts the school-to-prison pipeline, as do paid internships and apprenticeships for older youth. I support the Commissioner's plan to increase diversion programs so that low-level drug offenders or people with substance use or mental health needs can get the support and treatment they need, rather than be incarcerated without solving the underlying issue.

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).



This form was created inside of AFT-Maryland.

Google Forms