



AFT-Maryland Candidate Questionnaire – Jon Baron

1. The AFT-Maryland is a federation of numerous employee unions, including Baltimore City teachers and paraprofessional and school-related personnel (BTU); professional state workers (MPEC—Maryland Professional Employees Council), state healthcare professionals (AFT Healthcare-Maryland), state classified employees (MCEA—Maryland Classified Employees Association); as well county (BCFPE and BCFPHN) and city (CUB) employees. Why should we support your campaign?

Improving education will be a top priority in my administration. More than a quarter of Maryland middle schoolers can't read at a basic level, and more than a third can't do basic math. These numbers are no different than they were 20 years ago. Change is urgently needed — and when I'm governor, I'll work closely with labor unions and educators across the state to implement bold solutions in schools that will make a real impact on students' education. I view this as a partnership — one in which we communicate often to ensure that new policies and programs are actually having a positive impact in the classroom. This is critical because, too often, leaders and policymakers roll out new plans without having any idea of how they will impact stakeholders on the ground. Teachers and other school personnel have first-hand knowledge of how policies are being implemented and what potential roadblocks might need to be overcome. They are closer to the students we are serving — and when I'm governor, they will always have a seat at the table as we work together to improve our kids' education.

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

n/a

3. Expanding the right to collective bargaining. Currently, a number of state and public school employees in Maryland have collective bargaining. However, many still do not. For example, state judiciary branch workers; grad students, adjuncts, and full-time faculty in the University of Maryland System; faculty at our state's community colleges; coordinators in community schools; and many county and city librarians; do not have the right to bargain collectively. If elected, will you sponsor and/or support legislation to grant these public employees the right to engage in collective bargaining with their employer?

Collective bargaining is one of the most important tools that employees have to protect their rights in the workplace. I support the expansion of these collective bargaining rights to any sector of state and public school employees that do not already have this right.

4. Raising the minimum wage. Our members see every day the harmful impact of a minimum wage that does not keep up with rising costs of living throughout the region. While Maryland will raise its minimum wage to \$15 per hour in 2025, it still will not be indexed to inflation, and Marylanders working at this compensation level will continue to fall behind. If elected to office, will you author and/or support legislation to tie the minimum wage to the rate of inflation?

I support raising the minimum wage to \$15/hour, per existing law, and would work with the legislature to periodically update the minimum wage to adjust for inflation and other economic conditions.

5. Binding arbitration in contract negotiations.

Maryland recognizes the importance of collective bargaining as a way to assure employees at the state, municipal, and school district level have a fair and democratic voice in the conditions that govern their employment. For many of those employees and their unions, when disagreements arise during negotiations, there is no mechanism by which those disputes can be resolved. In most cases when the parties reach an impasse, management can implement their proposals without the consent of the employees. Because of this, management often realizes there is no

need to bargain in good faith. To fix this flaw, many states and local governments have implemented binding arbitration. When an impasse arises at the bargaining table, management and the union agree to take their case to an objective, third party arbitrator. The arbitrator hears the case, and issues a ruling that both management and the employees must agree to. There is some form of binding arbitration for state employees in Connecticut, Delaware, and Maine, and Baltimore County offers binding arbitration for its municipal employees, for example. Do you support objective, binding arbitration for contract negotiations for school district, city, county, and state employees? As an elected official, would you support strengthening those rights for the public employees that fall under your jurisdiction:?

Binding arbitration is a great tool to resolve labor disputes in a fair and objective manner, and I support its use, when needed, in all public contract negotiations.

6. Public employee compensation. Under the current governor's administration, it is rare for state workers to get the compensation they deserve, even though the state has often had a budget surplus. As a result, too many public agencies have staffing problems, as many employees leave for better compensation in the private sector. What is your plan to assure state, county, and municipal employees (including workers employed at BCCC, the Maryland School for the Deaf, and all public, state-supported higher education institutions throughout the state) that their compensation levels will be financially competitive with the private sector?

Public employees should be compensated fairly for their work across the board. My administration will conduct regular audits to ensure public employees are paid wages that are competitive with their private sector counterparts, and that overall compensation packages are sufficient to attract strong, diverse applicants for government positions. Retention of existing employees is especially important in education, given the shortage of education professionals in Maryland. Fair compensation is one tool to help improve retention levels.

7. Health insurance transparency. Audits and budget analysis show some government healthcare surplus funds are being diverted for use in unrelated areas. In effect, employees are therefore paying much higher than their negotiated healthcare splits for employer self-insured healthcare coverage. What should a public body (the state, the municipality, or the local school system) do with money refunded to employees' health insurance programs? As an elected official, will you sponsor legislation that would force government employers with self-funded insurance programs to be more transparent with actual claim cost, rebates and other refund programs?

Transparency is extremely important in healthcare funding and other areas of government administration. People should know exactly what they are paying for when it comes to healthcare, and the government should be transparent about how healthcare surplus funds are used.

8. Retirement for public employees: defined benefit versus defined contribution. Most Maryland public employees have defined benefit retirement plans like a pension. This allows employees to plan for their retirement because they know exactly how much income they will be receiving. With defined contribution retirement plans like a 401(k), employees contemplating retirement are never quite sure when the right time is to retire because of changes in their plan's investments. Do you support keeping public employee retirement plans as defined benefit/pension plans?

I support keeping these plans as defined benefit pension plans.

9. Prescription drugs for retired state employees. The State of Maryland is currently being sued by a group of retired state employees over the loss of their prescription drug coverage. Their position is the state has backed out of the promised retiree prescription drug benefit. Do you support full health benefits for retirees including prescription drug benefits? Under what circumstances, if any, would you agree to a reduction in benefits for retirees?

Maryland should abide by its commitments to retirees and to all Marylanders in health coverage and other areas. Separately, I believe the state should work diligently to negotiate for lower prescription drug prices for workers on the state health insurance plans. You can read more in the healthcare section of my website (www.jonbaron.com/issues).

10. Appropriate staffing levels. This past fall, numerous news reports confirmed what many state employees have already known: that staffing in a number of state agencies have fallen to levels that the safety of workers and the ability to carry out their duties has been compromised. For example, the Maryland Department of Health has not been able to admit court-ordered patients to state mental health facilities in accordance with the law due to the lack of staff. Likewise, the State Investment Park Commission found that park ranger staffing levels are too low to meet the demand of Maryland Residents wanting to visit our state's parks. The most recent state analysis shows nearly every state agency has at least a 10% vacancy rate, with some of the larger agencies having a vacancy rate over 15%! Would you support efforts to increase recruitment and retention of qualified state, county and city employees? Would you make funding of additional staff a priority?

State agencies should always have the staffing and resources necessary to serve Marylanders. I would support efforts to increase recruitment — and ensuring funding for necessary staff would certainly be a priority for my administration. Part of the answer is equitable compensation for state workers. But beyond that, we need to aggressively recruit a diverse workforce that represents the state's population.

11. General [for candidates running for Governor, Comptroller, or for office in Baltimore City legislative districts only]: What do you think are the three biggest problems facing Baltimore City public schools? If elected, how will you solve these problems?

In Baltimore City, only 22% of high school students are proficient in math, and only 33% are proficient in reading. 1/4 of kids don't graduate from high school. These are urgent challenges — and I've proposed several tested and proven solutions to lift all students and schools in Baltimore and across the state.

First, students need more individualized attention, especially in early grades, to ensure that they don't fall behind. A centerpiece of my campaign is creating a statewide tutoring program for every struggling 1st and 2nd grader. We should also invest in Career Academies, which are small learning communities in high schools that provide hands-on technical and career training, and have been shown to significantly increase long term earnings for graduates. Another promising program is "Learning Accounts" for low-income 10th graders, which would provide students up to \$10,000 in financial aid for college — depositing money into their accounts as they meet key benchmarks in high school, like advancing to the next grade and graduating on time. This program has been shown to increase both high school and college graduation rates by a remarkable 7 percentage points — we should try it in Maryland, initially on a pilot basis, and expand it if successful. Lastly, it's critical to ensure that the Blueprint is implemented in an

evidence-supported manner so that our schools have the resources and programs needed to help our students and teachers succeed.

12. Education funding. The state has enacted the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, an ambitious plan developed by bipartisan education experts and stakeholders. The Blueprint will provide a world-class education our students need. Despite hand-wringing from the current governor, the state has the funding to pay for the Blueprint through Fiscal Year 2026. Beginning in FY 2027, the state will have to make decisions regarding revenues to continue to provide every student in the state the education they need. If elected, how would you propose the state fund the Blueprint? How will you advocate for these necessary revenues?

There is no perfect way to predict the exact financial situation that the state will be in six years from now, so I'm hesitant to offer exact specifics, especially in light of the state's existing budget surplus. Many of the programs that I advocate expanding are revenue neutral or even save the state money (e.g., by reducing the cost of healthcare), while still having strongly positive effects on educational outcomes, wages, and health. Thus, I do not foresee a need for any large expansion of state expenditures or taxes. However, in some cases, increased revenue may be needed — which is one reason why it's so essential to invest in proven-effective education programs, like a statewide tutoring corps, that will deliver results within a few years. By showing voters tangible progress, we'll be able to create the political will for any revenue increases that may be needed at the state or local level. We can also secure additional revenue by addressing tax loopholes and making other common-sense adjustments to the state tax code.

13. Living Wage for Paraprofessionals. One element that was unfortunately unresolved by the Kirwan Commission recommendations was the pay for Paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel (PSRPs). For too many PSRPs throughout the state, their compensation levels are not enough to be considered a living wage. Will PSRP compensation be a high priority for you if you are elected to office? How can the state better show its appreciation to PSRPs working in our state's public schools?

Absolutely — PSRPs are fundamental to our classrooms and should be compensated accordingly. The state's minimum wage increase to \$15/hour by 2025 is a good start, and we should explore other ways to ensure PSRPs receive competitive compensation for their work.

14. Public School Construction and Renovation [for candidates running for Governor, Comptroller, or for office in Baltimore City legislative districts only]. In 2013, the state passed the 21st Century Schools Program, which allowed the Baltimore Public School System and the Maryland Stadium Authority to leverage bonds to renovate roughly 25 public school buildings. While a good start, Baltimore city still has the largest portfolio of aging and obsolete school buildings in the state; therefore, the program needs to be expanded. If elected, what will your administration do to assure more aging school buildings in Baltimore city will be eligible for renovations?

I strongly support Baltimore's 21st Century School Buildings Program, which funded the renovation of 28 schools, and I support continuing and potentially expanding the program to meet this urgent need.

15. Public charter schools and local oversight. There are over 50 public charter schools in the state of Maryland, and the vast majority of them reside in Baltimore city. Private, out-of-state charter school operators have previously wished to weaken the state law overseeing charter schools to make teachers and staff employees of the charter board rather than employees of the

local school district. This would remove all protections that teachers and staff have under their collective bargaining agreements. It would limit oversight of these privately run public charter schools by taking them out from under the purview of the local school boards. It would also give the private operators a “blank check waiver” from any local school board policy. Should charter school teachers and staff be considered employees of the charter school or of the local school board? Should oversight of these schools be weakened?

I don't support the expansion of private charter schools. I do support the expansion of certain public charter school models, such as KIPP, that have been rigorously evaluated and proven to significantly improve student achievement. Teachers in these schools are public employees with commensurate labor protections.

16. School vouchers and the BOOST program. Maryland is a state that diverts public funding to send students to private schools - the BOOST school voucher program. While the program is not codified in law, the governor's budget every year has re-directed millions of dollars of public funds to these private schools, many of which discriminate against students and families who don't adhere to that school's beliefs such as gay marriage. If elected to office, what will be your plan regarding Maryland's BOOST school voucher program? Should the state ever give public dollars to students to attend a private school? Would you support tax breaks to corporations that fund student scholarships for private k-12 schools?

In general, I don't support diverting large amounts of public funding towards private schools, and I strongly believe the state should not send public dollars to institutions that discriminate against students and their families. BOOST is a relatively small program that provides modest funding to low-income families who have particular educational needs, and I support its continuation at current funding levels.

17. School Staffing. In too many of our public schools, administrators are not following the law and are hiring people who are employees of non-profit organizations, some of whom are uncredentialed and untrained. Because they are not direct hires of the school district, they are not covered by the collective bargaining contract, nor are they held to the same accountability standards as certificated employees. If elected, will you work to ensure that school districts follow the law to prevent public schools from hiring employees from nonprofit organizations, circumventing the collective bargaining agreement? Under any circumstances is it acceptable to you for a school to hire an uncredentialed and non-unionized employee to be involved in the education of Maryland students?

In general, it is strongly preferable for people to be employees of the school district rather than an intermediary nonprofit. A centerpiece of my campaign is to expand high-quality, one-on-one tutoring to all struggling first and second graders in our state. Studies show it is extremely effective in moving them up toward grade level early, before their problems become serious in later grades. Some of the most effective one-on-one tutoring programs are delivered by trained, certified teachers. A leading example is Reading Recovery. That said, there is currently a very large teacher shortage in Maryland, and in order to rapidly expand a highly effective early-grades tutoring program, members of the community who are trained and paid a stipend may be needed in lieu of a program entirely staffed with licensed teachers. In any case, it would be important for all to have significant labor protections, including collective bargaining rights.

18. Teacher recruitment and retention. The global pandemic has exacerbated the increasingly challenging problem of teacher retention and recruitment. Far too often, experienced, successful

educators are made to leave our school systems. Newly hired teachers in some alternative teacher education programs stay in the classroom for an average of 3 years. How can the state enact legislation to support the retention of the highest quality educators, and recruit more to their ranks?

Our teacher shortage is severe, and made worse by the difficulty retaining the teachers we do have. The increases in teacher salary provided for in the Blueprint will help significantly, but there are other ways to help improve retention beyond just higher salaries. Examples include high-quality teacher professional development, coaching, and peer-support programs; and use of paraprofessionals as well as tutors from the community to work more closely with struggling students who need individualized attention.

19. Elected versus an appointed school board [for candidates running for Governor, Comptroller, or for office in Baltimore City legislative districts only]. In 2022, the citizens of Baltimore city will finally be allowed to elect 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 favor increased representation for elected school board members. Appointed seats can be a valuable way to ensure a high level of expertise and education experience, but it is important for voters to have a significant degree of influence over public instruction.

20. Standardized testing in the schools. In our state's public school system, instruction time in our classrooms is often pushed aside so that students may prepare for and take a plethora of standardized tests. What is your view on standardized testing in our state's public schools? If elected, what policy positions would you take regarding the number of standardized tests required of our students?

Standardized testing is important for certain purposes — such as determining student proficiency in reading, math, and science at various points in their educational career — but I agree that it is often overused and mis-applied (e.g., to label schools in high-poverty areas as failing).

21. Transportation. When Governor Hogan canceled the Red Line rail project, he replaced it with a revision of the MTA regional bus lines and renamed the system the Baltimore Link. How effective do you believe this new bus plan has been? How can the state improve the transportation needs of its residents?

East-West transit solutions, like the Red Line, are critical for Baltimore residents to get from point A to point B and for the city's economic prosperity. I am glad that there are significant federal resources coming to support this critical infrastructure.

22. Revenues and closing unfair tax loopholes. In order for the state, county, city, and local school system to continue to provide the services to Maryland residents that they deserve, do you believe the state must work to close loopholes in our tax structure? From things like instituting

combined reporting (where out-of-state corporations no longer avoid paying taxes on the revenues they generate in Maryland) or a carried interest tax (where wealthy hedge fund managers pay the same income rate that the rest of Maryland residents pay), would you introduce and/or support legislation that would make our state tax code more fair?

My policy proposals are cost effective, and I am not looking to significantly expand government expenditures beyond current levels. However, if further revenue is needed, the first avenue I'd explore would be to close corporate tax loopholes to make sure that corporations pay their fair share of taxes – e.g., by requiring corporate income reports to include all parent and subsidiary companies. 28 states have already implemented some version of this loophole closure.

23. Privatization, General. As public employees, each of our members works for an entity that is directly accountable to the residents we serve. Far too often, when jurisdictions and school districts choose to contract out or privatize those services, the level of accountability changes with those services. A private company or nonprofit is accountable to its board of directors or shareholders, and not necessarily to the residents that rely on its services. In addition, their employees are seldom unionized. If elected, would you support any plans to privatize and/or farm out work to a private company or nonprofit in our state and local governments or local school systems? If so, why?

In general, I support the concept that full-time education staff should be public employees and oppose privatization efforts.

24. Privatization, specific. On September 2, 2021, the Maryland Department of Health announced the Facilities Master Plan, which includes plans to close Western Maryland Hospital Center in Hagerstown and Deer's Head Hospital in Salisbury within the next 5 years by transferring patients to private facilities. In many cases, these facilities offer the only long-term care options for Maryland residents on dialysis or who are dealing with chronic respiratory problems. If elected, would you support the plan to close these state facilities? Would you support outsourcing state, county or city operations?

Any decisions by the Department of Health should be made in the best interests of patients. We should not close state health facilities if doing so will harm patients or the quality of care they receive.

25. State's mental health and addiction crisis. The need for mental health and addiction services has increased during the pandemic. Mental health beds in the state hospital system are filled with court ordered patients. If elected, would you support increasing private and public resources for treatment to be sure all Maryland residents have access to the care they need?

The state should ensure there are sufficient resources so that Marylanders can receive high-quality, evidence-based mental health and addiction care if they need it.

26. Vaccines and working with unions to return to work. The COVID-19 pandemic has of course been a challenge for the safety of Maryland residents and our members who have been returning to work. While we hope that the worst of the pandemic is behind us, we know from past experiences with mutations of this novel virus, recovery and a return to normalcy may not be linear. Vaccines must be a part of a comprehensive strategy to get past the pandemic, as well as an important tool for fighting public health threats in the future. What role do you believe unions

and management have in constructing a plan to vaccinate their workforce? What in your mind is the way unions and management can work together to make sure represented employees are offered a COVID-19 vaccine?

I have called for vaccine requirements in key sectors, because vaccines are a proven-effective tool for preventing serious COVID illness and death. A condition of working for the state should be vaccination. However, I would work closely with organized labor to ensure that the timelines and rollout of any such requirements are done in sensible ways. Having a highly vaccinated workforce is a workplace safety issue – every employee who chooses not to get vaccinated is a risk to his or her fellow employees and to any Maryland citizens they regularly interact with.