

Rainbow - 43A - House

AFT-Maryland Candidate Questionnaire for the 2022 Election

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, as well as state employee members of the Maryland Professional Employees Council, AFT Healthcare-Maryland, and the Maryland Classified Employees Association. Together, with the Baltimore County Federation of Public Employees, and Baltimore County Federation of Public Health Nurses, AFT-Maryland has thousands of members who work to make the state a better place for its residents.

The AFT-Maryland has prepared the following questionnaire for candidates running to represent us in Annapolis 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 Maryland and DC AFL-CIO State Federation; the state federation will announce its final endorsements in early 2022. However, because we are a large contingency within the Maryland 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 7th, 2022, 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.



Candidate Information

Please note the AFT-Maryland plans to make these questionnaires public. However, personal information will be redacted.

Employer

PwC

Party affiliation

Democrat

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

No, first run for office.

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

General Questions

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?

I am a son of Baltimore, raised by a single mother with a father in prison. Few expected me to succeed. Yet, I rose to become the first person in my family to graduate from college and after, I became a Baltimore City public school teacher. I have what it takes to be your champion and fight for change. I fought to become the first person in my family to graduate from college, fought to teach students in classrooms that were either un-airconditioned and too hot or under-heated and too cold, and fought to make healthcare more affordable for all.

I have the tenacity to garner the resources to get our kids the jobs of the future, fund small business grants and finish rebuilding our schools. As a black gay man from a low income background, a triple minority, I have lived on the margins and the intersections.

I have the tenacity to fight against interlocking systems of oppression as I understand that racial, educational, economic, transit, climate and health care justice are all inextricably linked.

Furthermore, we need a champion to hold the state government accountable. We need more transit options. Buses should run on time. State payments should be made on time. Our state should be more retirement friendly, with lower taxes for seniors. We need additional, common-sense police reforms, including removing police from schools and local control of the BPD.

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

I am so proud to seek the AFT MD's endorsement as a former member! I was a member of the Baltimore Teachers Union, Local 340, AFT, from August 2011 to June 2014. My experience as a teacher / union member informs who I am and everything I do, including my run for office. I am running because we need MORE people of our experience making public policy. That is why I originally left the classroom, to influence change on a larger scale. As a state delegate who has served as a Baltimore City Public Schools teacher, I will leverage my lived experience to fight to fund the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and ensure we equip communities, educators and students for success.

Questions on Worker Rights

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?

Thankfully, SB 746's veto was overrode during the December 2021 special session and now many community college employees have collective bargaining rights. SB 9 will now also become law and union members will be able to more effectively bargain with the state's University System.

As a delegate, I would sponsor and support to grant collective bargaining to all public sector employees.

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?

Already, \$15 will be too little, too late by 1/1/2025 due to the enormous inflation we've experienced since 2020. I support a policy in line with the District of Columbia and several other states where the minimum wage is indexed for minimum annual increases.

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?

I would wholeheartedly support binding arbitration to compel the end of contract negotiations. This will push the government to negotiate in good faith, and serve as an insurance policy against hostile actors, like the Hogan administration. As a former teacher and BTU, I definitely support strengthening rights for public sector workers. Policies that benefit public workers ultimately help the local economy.

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?

Pay equity is essential. I support annual compensation norming and market rate adjustment. Annually, employee profiles (education, years of experience, role) should be compared with the private sector; and market rate adjustments disbursed where needed.

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?

Ideally, the surplus should be used to fund health plan premium holidays or deposited into HSA accounts. However, transparency is critical. I would sponsor legislation to that end.

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?

A pension is much more preferable than the 401(k) I now have as an employee of a private corporation. Public sector employees sacrifice so much and pay their dues, they should know what they'll be paid in retirement. I support maintaining them on 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?

Gov. O'Malley ushered in the switch in 2011, defaulting prescription benefits to the Medicare plan. I believe those who retired before 2011 should be grandfathered into the previous benefit plan.

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?

Long term, we should invest in upskilling our residents for these positions through specialized high school programs and community colleges. Maryland is the wealthiest state in the union per capita. We can support those who may need a certificate or associate's degree for economic mobility. With a stable job as facility attendant or park ranger, people would be better able to provide for their family. Short term, we most certainly should invest in a public advertising campaign to create awareness of these roles and the benefits of state employment.

Public Education in Baltimore City

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?

I'd like to break this question into two parts. First, there are the major challenges associated with COVID (1) and secondly there are the major structural challenges (2). Ironically, COVID has exposed and worsened the major structural challenges.

COVID: The writing was on the wall, yet, now we are being forced to innovate in real time and respond to remote learning, virtual instruction, staffing shortages, lack of devices and lack of high speed internet access. The memorandum of understanding between the BTU and school board must be enforced. Clearly, it is not being implemented at every school with rigor. Systemically, we must close the digital divide. Every child needs an at home laptop and at home high speed internet. We shouldn't open schools for in person learning without giving students and staff multiple KN95 masks, installing HEPA filters, and having daily cleaning. Let alone, the increased burden on teachers who are now reconfiguring lesson plans while contact tracing; the shortage of substitutes and paraprofessionals leading to more work for teachers and others; the shortage of food service employees and bus drivers, leading to a dismal experience for students. Schools need partners in Annapolis to hold the state government account and push for the best solutions.

Structural: Public education in Maryland is like a tale of two states: the haves and the have nots. I experienced this personally, attending both Baltimore City and County schools in the 90s and 2000s; and later as a BCPSS teacher at the Academy for College and Career Exploration from 2011 to 2014. We all know the systemic divides along class, race, geographical boundary. However, the divide is so stark (in schools just miles apart), in a state that ranked number one in public education for years, that it hurts. The Blueprint will help resolve the structural issues. Yet, as we saw last year, the AIB couldn't even hold a proper first meeting because funds hadn't started flowing. It is going to take vigilance and diligence to create the specific rules and formulas to achieve the Blueprint's goals. In Annapolis, I commit to being such a watchdog and advocate. Additionally, I support universal, full day pre-k. If this cannot be won at the federal level, we must implement it at the state level. This will dramatically reduce poverty. As a head-start alumnus, I know personally the importance of high-quality early childhood education.

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?

This is not a matter of scarcity but a matter of choice. Just as we've spent billions of dollars on building stadiums and roads, issuing bonds if needed, we CAN and will spend money on a better investment: our children. I will fight for our future. I support an increased progressive state income tax and wealth tax

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?

This raises a larger issue. We must reimagine the teaching profession. Unfortunately, some see paras as a job with limited advancement opportunities and low wage growth. I support and will work with legislators to create career pathways for Paraprofessionals to become teachers and administrators. This starts with increasing PSRP pay to attract more to the profession.

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?

As an educator, I viewed my job as not just to teach content but to shape and mold engaged citizens. Not only did I lead my students to excellent results, but I was proud to organize the community and lead my school to Annapolis to fight for improved facilities and basic necessities. Heat in the winter. Working faucets and soap. Twenty-first-century school buildings. Our collective efforts led to the passage of the 21st-century schools' plan. Right here, in the 43rd district, Walter P. Carter - my alma mater, Waverly, Northwood, Leith Walk, Govans, and more have been transformed due to our collective efforts.

Baltimore City just spent millions on helicopters, cars and cup-holders for the police. Surely, we can afford renovations. It is not a matter of funding, but of political CHOICE. As a delegate who taught in the oldest (and then non-renovated) school building (Robert Poole - AACE), I will always fight for education.

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?

Some of my friends have worked for charter schools in California, Colorado, DC, Georgia, New York and Louisiana. I've seen them be chewed up and spit out working without the protections I enjoyed as a BTU member. Charter oversight in Maryland should remain the same, with staff employed by the local school board.

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?

Many private schools have large endowments. I'd vote against BOOST and no to tax breaks.

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?

We have unions and a credentials system for a reason. Educators are not childcare providers, they are licensed professionals. Only in exceptional cases, such as staff resigning in December, should an uncredentialed person be considered and they should attain provisional certification before interaction with children.

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?

Teaching ability isn't about having a degree from Harvard or Yale, but about committing oneself to continuous improvement and professional development, learning, reflecting and adjusting. The days of staying in one position for 20-30 years are over for most. We MUST rethink the teacher career pathway. Instead of one subject certification, such as secondary science, we should encourage and make it easier to attain multiple certifications; and view careers as rotational. As mentioned earlier, we should look to creating a career pathway from paraprofessional to teacher to administrator. Virtual and remote are here to stay. The Frederick County Virtual Flex Program <https://education.fcps.org/flex/> offers a model of what could become more common. As a state, we need to try such innovations and replicate what works.

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?

We must end the paternalistic, Jim Crow era structure of the School Board and have a fully elected (nonpartisan) school board (plus an appointed student voting member) who are compensated for their services.

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?

In many ways, as a 6th grade science and social studies teacher, I was "lucky" that I did not teach a tested subject (MSA at the time). Yet, for many times of the year, especially pre-MSA in March, even my class was usurped for test prep. Teaching to the test robs schools of valuable resources and spoils learning; with thousands spent on test prep. In my school, we did not have music instruction, what a failure for the 700 students who attended. Moreover, the level of rigor on the test are lower "understanding" level questions rather than synthesis and creation level. You simply cannot assess high level skills in a standardized test in a fair manner. Teaching to the test is killing education: ruining the teaching experience for educators and constraining what students could learn for a formulaic curriculum; especially as performance indicators and pay are tied more closely to student performance on these tests than ever before.

Yet, our hands are tied by the ESSA, signed by Obama into law in 2015. We must advocate for change at the Federal Level while changing Maryland's curriculum. We must prepare children for the future and integrate coding, computer programming, engineering and data analytics as mandatory parts of the K-12 curriculum.

We should implement more project and portfolio based learning. History should be evaluated by research project. ELA/English should be evaluated by a paper submission. Science should be evaluated by lab reports. Foreign language should be evaluated by reading/writing sample.

Vision for Maryland

21. Transportation. When Governor Hogan cancelled 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?

The LINK mad a bad situation worse. It pained me that my babies, some only 10 years old, had to wake up at 5 am just to stand on dark street corners to catch 2-3 buses to school. We expect Baltimore City (and Baltimore City only) secondary students to catch public transit to school like this is NYC without a NYC level transit system.

Transit equity is not just about transit, but about economic mobility and racial justice. In the Baltimore region, only 9% of jobs are currently accessible by public transit in an hour or less. Commuters need & deserve reliable & affordable transit options to travel to and from work, school and recreation. We can strengthen the city's reach to have more jobs accessible by public transit by building light rail transit lines, and investing in a north-south transit corridor along York road in the 43rd district.

And, we must address institutional racism within our transit system by building a Red Line that links our communities through sustainable transportation & connects working class Baltimoreans to a broader range of jobs and opportunities.

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?

Yes, as stated in a previous answer, I support a more progressive state income tax system and a wealth tax. Let's use this revenue to implement a green new deal for schools and ensure the Blueprint is fully funded.

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?

We must be vigilant in this area. My previous employer, Deloitte, is huge contractor for state governments. I know firsthand how these contractors operate; often, they cannot deliver the expertise they promise and pad their fees to reap MILLIONS in profit for the company owners. Even Brandon Scott has paid a similar company, E&Y, hundreds of thousands for "strategy" work. This is why someone of my lived experience is needed in Annapolis. I have worked as a teacher and now in healthcare consulting. I can effectively evaluate proposals with an expert's point of view and spot the BS as needed. Certainly, there are times when high specialized services should be solicited. However, more often than not, 'the answer is in the room' and it is a matter of assembling the right team or finding the right talent for positions. Large scale outsourcing should not be on the table.

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?

I do not support closing these entities. The job of the state is to provide for the public good not turn a profit, unlike private facilities.

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?

Mental & behavioral health services are getting less attention than they have before, competing with socioeconomic priorities which are seen as more pressing, such as employment and housing. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic uncertainty, deep & wide pockets of poverty, and community violence & isolation from the rest of the state all contribute to a higher need for mental healthcare across the city. Now isn't the time to neglect this urgent issue. Instead, let's address what residents actually need by widening access to mental & behavioral support through telehealth, fund more school counselors for K-12 youth, & increase the number of social workers available for the unhoused.

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?

Unions and management must work hand in hand. Healthcare and education workers must always be a priority in testing, vaccine and boosting roll outs.

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 treyolds@aftmd.org.



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