

Bean - 34 A 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

Business owner

Party affiliation

Democratic

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 but I came within 67 votes of winning in 2018 on a shoestring budget. My opponent was censured for calling Prince Georges the n word and is a Democrat.

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?

You should support my campaign because I have served as an educator for more than 15 years at my last institution and have been an educator for over 20 plus years. I am an expert of creating curriculum and understanding the process and protocol of the Educational system. I will be perhaps the only person in my race with an educational background which means supporting educational policy is important to me and also a part of my platform.

I am a prominent environmentalist as a part of the Rebuild Maryland Coalition advocating for environmental legislation. I have been an integral part of other organizations including Our Revolution, Progressive Maryland and the Sierra Club. As a Policy expert, I have dedicated my time to multiple coalitions for the betterment of Maryland and Harford County. I am the Chair of the Multicultural Student Services Advisory Board at Cecil College. I am the official Chair of the Harford County Women of Action, an official arm of the Maryland Democratic Party.

My platform is strongly rooted in advocating for Education, environmental justice, a reconstruction of the Maryland transportation system, small business revitalization, legalizing cannabis, and helping to reform our Health insurance system by trying to transform it into an actual Healthcare system.

I am also a leader in the arts community. As the executive legislative director of Voices Maryland, I use my background in music to consult in music and media. I understand the legislative process and have used my voice to speak for those who truly need it. As a Black woman candidate, I will bring a new voice and seat at the table that has not been represented in District 34. My unique voice, a well-known advocate and an expert in writing and getting votes for legislation would be an asset to the cause of educators and education.

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

No. However my Uncles and my Nephew is currently a member so I have always appreciated those in labor unions. I also had always wanted to join the musician's union but in prior employment was never required to do so because they were always independent contractor and work for hire circumstances.

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?

If elected, I will sponsor and/or support legislation to grant these public employees the right to engage in collective bargaining with their employer.

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 will author and/or support legislation to tie the minimum wage to the rate of inflation.

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?

When not forced with relatively equal bargaining power, I would support binding arbitration for contract negotiations for school district, city, county, and state employees as a means to resolve issues. Also with certain stipulations spelled out in the collective bargaining on how the binding arbitration will be negotiated will help as well.

I would support strengthening those rights for the public employees that fall under my jurisdiction particularly because labor in my area in my assessment have little or no rights in general.

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?

My plan will make sure that wages are tied to inflation to ensure that workers wages don't remain flat as the economy inflates. I also desire to create a program that will provide Marylanders that attend in state college institutions for degrees or additional education would receive tuition free grants for attending if they agree to take on public service jobs. This would allow for public employees to acquire higher levels of compensation by receiving additional training and education while still being able to keep student loan debt at minimum or zero. Providing a covid compensation package that addresses sick pay that does not dip into their sick leave if they acquire covid, vaccination incentives, and provide hazard pay. These things would make compensation levels for all public employees financially competitive with the private sector.

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?

When money is refunded to employees' health insurance programs the public body should pass the savings to the employees or at minimal allow the employees to make a collective decision on what they want to do with refunded monies in a collective bargaining agreement.

As an elected official, I will 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.

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?

Yes I do support keeping public employee retirement plans as defined benefit/pension plans because it allows employees to plan for their retirement knowing exactly how much income they will be receiving. Retirement should not be a mystery.

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?

I do support full health benefits for retirees including prescription drug benefits. I believe we need to work on transforming our system from health insurance to an actual healthcare system to address these issues universally.

I can not make predictions on whether I would agree to a reduction in benefits without knowledge of the factors that would drive the need for the reduction of the benefits.

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?

I would support efforts to increase recruitment and retention of qualified state, county, and city employees.

I would make funding of additional staff a priority.

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?

N/A

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?

If elected, I would propose the state fund the Blueprint:

1. advocate for more educational funding from the feds
2. create more revenue streams by reforming the tax structure in Maryland such as reforming the loopholes for corporate reform.
3. Make sure the State enforces the collection of revenues from Casinos, Sports Betting, other laws, etc. since the past 13 years there has been zero collection in regards to casinos. Those are some suggestions but not all.

I would advocate for these necessary revenues by advocating directly to our entire Federal Delegation then move to the Congressional Black Caucus, then the Democratic Caucus, etc. to gain enough support to receive the educational funding from the feds. I would write the bills for tax reform to close the loopholes. Finally, as a legislator I will make it my job to look and review some of these laws and the State agencies that were required to enforce the law and see how effective and productive they are in enforcement and put out a report.

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?

PSRP compensation will be a high priority for me when I am elected to office.

Providing a tax credit for being PSRP would be a way of showing appreciation. Also, providing a small one time PSRP bonus from the State may be a way to retain them. Finally, providing a tuition free grant to a State college for PSRP to further their education to move to a higher position in the Educational system in Maryland would be a way to show its appreciation.

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?

N/A

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?

Public Charter schools teachers and staff should be considered employees of the local school board because they work for the Public.

Oversight of Public Charter schools should not be weakened because they are to be transparent and accountable to the public.

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?

If elected my plan regarding Maryland's Boost school voucher program is to attempt to reform it first by codifying it in law or making a decision to discontinue it altogether because in its current state the Boost program is only serving those students predominantly that are already in private school and there are numerous forms of discrimination.

Here are a list of some reforms: all students must be eligible for the program, equal standards to other public schools, Staff have ability to form a union and collective bargaining rights, must be controlled by local school boards, because they are private schools they should not receive disproportionate amount of state funding in comparison to public schools, and finally there must be a proven difference that qualifies over and above the public school besides parental choice alone.

I would support tax credits to corporations that would be willing to fund student scholarships for private k-12 schools. This is a proven model that gives an incentive to corporations and also provides needed funding to Students who would like to attend private public charter schools. So this could be an addition to reforming the Boost program.

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?

I will work to ensure that school districts follow the law to prevent public schools from hiring employees from nonprofit organizations, circumventing the collective bargaining agreement.

Currently, we are in a pandemic and staffing is unstable due to illness so in that circumstance it would be acceptable to have substitute labor in education of Maryland students while credentialed staff is recovering. I don't foresee any other circumstances unless the education system has not taken steps in retention and recruitment or any other staffing emergencies.

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?

The Maryland State Board of Regents must set an intention to address this issue, and to clearly articulate its expectations for retention of the highest quality educators while being able to recruit more to their ranks. The policy should be guided by some of these issues below:

1. Take an informed look or analysis at recruitment, admissions, and hiring practices of Teachers
2. There must be an intentional plan to develop, retain, and promote effective candidates of color. This must be created through an analysis of this issue at the State level.
3. Further explore educator diversity with all known stakeholders and create a plan of action to address it in yet another education analysis.
4. Take an informed look at wages, healthcare, and any other financial aspects that would lead to losing good Teachers in education analysis.

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?

N/A

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?

I believe standardized testing in our state's public schools have shown in most cases only the cons and negatives of what they provide and very few positives. For instance standardized testing has shown:

1. which students are good at taking tests but it has not offered no meaningful measure of progress, and has not improved student performance.
2. I believe standardized tests are biased to those in different classes, racial groups, and in some circumstances gender/sexism.
3. I know for a fact that standardized tests do not predict whether the student will have future success or not because there is more evidence that children who couldn't pass tests or quizzes could still go on to be very successful in America.
4. I believe it serves to frustrate more than encourage.
5. I believe there is evidence of teacher's teaching the test as opposed to teaching the curriculum content because they are pressured to ensure that students attain a certain level on those tests and so they are not fired from their positions.

If elected, I believe that we need to review the curriculum of our current education system in Maryland and focus on producing the producers of tomorrow and less of the worker bees of today. I believe we have too many standardized tests that are required of our students. I believe that I read that 50% or less of the students pass the test because it's just that difficult to pass. If you want to chip away a child's confidence and not show a true picture of the type of student you have, keep providing excessive standardized testing. Education should be more engaged and fluid and currently our system is not providing either especially in a pandemic where stress is high.

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 Baltimore Link has been completely ineffective. Baltimore Link has been deficient, unreliable, no-shows, and constant breakdowns. It is said there is a lack of adequate bus drivers to drive the routes as well. You can not replace a multibillion dollar rail project that would have provided thousands of high wage jobs that would have connected significantly marginalized parts of the city with parts of the city it never had been connected with before and say Link is a success. Baltimore Link is such a failure that Hogan is canceling his own bus line by canceling many of the routes.

The State must invest in the Regional Transit Authority. There is no way around it. What has made cities and states like New York successful is their transportation systems. Even Washington DC has surpassed our State with a more developed transportation system than Maryland has. We can not continue to expand highways and create paid toll lanes to solve the issue of transit because it's also creating negative environmental impacts on our state. Creating a Regional Transit Authority will provide needed opportunities for those who reside in rural, suburban, and urban areas to travel where they may not have been able to travel before for high paying wage jobs and consistently get there. A bus system can not produce such a thing. No matter how colorful it is.

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, I have already spoken on the fact that we need to close loopholes in our tax structure. So yes, I believe the state must work to do so.

I would introduce and/or support legislation that would make our state tax code more fair.

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?

I would not support plans to privatize as stated in the scenario above. Undercutting should not be the purpose, loyalty and consistency should. However, based on prior acknowledgements that there are state and local staffing shortages there may be a need to hire private services in certain circumstances to fill a need as opposed to undercut.

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 would not support the plan to close these State facilities especially because they are only long term care options for Maryland residents on dialysis or who are dealing with chronic respiratory problems. I was my parents caregiver and I have a particular sensitivity to elder and disability care. We in Maryland need to be doing more. Private facilities in many cases are almost unaffordable for most Marylanders and in many cases do not provide transparent care when mistakes are made in care and engage in some predatory billing practices.

I would not support outsourcing state, county, or city operations without being shown proof that would be to the benefit of Marylanders. Based on my experience, complete outsourcing is not the answer.

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?

I would support increasing private and public resources for treatment to be sure all Maryland residents have access to the care they need. Mental health and addiction services are extremely important especially during the pandemic.

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 believe unions and managements' role in constructing a plan to vaccinate their workforce starts with: educating their workforce first,

encouraging them through incentives,

providing paid time off for vaccination or testing

Most tests and vaccines are free so the union & employer just need to determine a place to send employees.

Consequences of non-compliance with the policy (i.e., disciplinary action)

set up time frame for employees to get vaccinate

Exceptions or accommodations for medical, pregnancy, and religious issues (and any requisite documents);

Whether periodic testing, masking, and social distancing are viable alternatives;

How vaccination status will be confirmed.

Paid time off for adverse reactions to the vaccine

Unions and management can work together to provide covid 19 vaccine clinics on site once a week or as regular as needed to vaccinate the entire staff. Or Unions and Management can find a vaccination site they can send employees too.

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.



This form was created inside of AFT-Maryland.

Google Forms