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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

Self employed

Party affiliation

Democratic

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

Endorsements

MSEA, MCEA	2010, '14, '18
MCGEO	2010, '14, '18
SEIU Local 500	2010, '14, '18
AFT	2010, '14, '18
1199 SEIU	2014, '18
LiUNA	2014, '18
MD/DC AFL-CIO	2014, '18

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

Delegate to House of Delegates, President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Board Member of The Montgomery County Education Association

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?

As my voting record of over 11 years shows, I am committed to assuring the rights of unions and the right to unionize. I believe strongly that more unionization of the workforce can result in progress toward economic and social justice. I have experienced the important role that unions play firsthand as a lifetime member of a union.

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

I was an active member of NEA, MSEA and MCEA from 1981–2010. I was president of the Montgomery County Education Association from 2003–2009. I am currently a retired member of these three organizations.

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?

I have and will continue to strongly support bills that expand collective bargaining rights. I was very proud to vote to override the vetoes of HB 904 and HB 894 during the special session which gave greater access to new employees and collective bargaining rights to community college employees. I am also happy to sponsor bills such as these, but I have learned in my time in the House that having a sponsor in the committee of jurisdiction of a bill is often more effective. Since I am on the Health and Government Operations committee, at least currently, I would be a better supporter and advocate than sponsor.

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?

Yes. While the Fight for Fifteen was a tough battle, it was worth fighting. But we have not won the war on economic justice and another step would be the indexing.

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?

Yes, I would support strengthening bargaining rights for public employees and binding arbitration should be an option when impasse is reached.

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?

There are two aspects to achieving this goal—policy that improves the bargaining rights of these employees and budget language that provides the resources that recognize these employees as important assets in our state. I will support any legislation that addresses those issues.

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?

Yes, I would work with the unions on this legislation. I support a high level of transparency in government in general, including health care. As the chair of the Insurance Subcommittee of HGO, I am focused on making premiums more affordable. So that transparency is necessary for us to set policy that uses the resources in the system to do that.

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?

As a beneficiary of a defined benefit pension, I STRONGLY support maintaining this for our public employees. It truly is what has allowed me to have better choices and a quality of life in retirement from public schools and would want all public employees to have that level of compensation for a lifetime of public service.

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, not just ideologically, but also because of personal experience. The only circumstance that I could possibly agree to any decrease in benefits would be a catastrophic state-wide economic crisis where everyone would be affected--temporarily--not just retirees. And given that the State is strong economically for the foreseeable future, I do not see that happening.

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?

Yes, to both questions. Each year I speak with members of AFSCME, who eloquently make the case for more staffing. One issue we have had with this administration is that the positions are IN the budget, they are just not being filled. I am hopeful that a new administration will fill the budgeted position and do a needs assessment of what additional staff is needed.

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?

Due to the pandemic, the education system, like many other systems, is under extreme duress. So the most immediate challenge is to determine how to regain losses and rebuild one of the best educational systems in the country. My approach to this would be to create policy that allowed on-the-ground educators, in all positions, to be a part of strategic team in each district that would be charged with identifying a strategic and comprehensive approach to this, not a set of band aids.

Another issue is staffing. The pandemic took a toll on a aging workforce and it is a challenge to recruit. Professional salaries are important for attracting more candidates, and should be a part of the solution, but that is not all they are seeking. They are looking for professional respect, the on-board training to be able to successful from the beginning of their career and programs that help them recover when they are struggling. They want to know that there are opportunities--and support-- for advancement. I believe that the unions should be actively engaged in the development and implementation of the recruitment programs. With this investment, candidates can be assured that they will ultimately have the professional support needed for these very challenging jobs. As a legislator my role would be to create the opportunities for these kinds of collaboration.

Whenever there is strife around public education, and the current strife is related to the truthful teaching of American history with respect to race and social justice, there is an outcry for more money to private schools and vouchers. Responsible legislators and educators must join together in conveying the message that strong public schools are the foundation for social justice and to provide that all our young people have equal opportunities available to them when they graduate from our schools. That includes responsible and truthful curricula.

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?

Currently the state has a budget surplus and there are indications that unless there is a severe recession, that some level of surplus will continue under the current budget. Knowing that, it is important that set aside funds now to meet the requirements of the Blueprint beyond FY 2027 by creating formulas that designate that future funding. I would work with my colleagues on the Appropriations and Ways and Means committee to develop those formulas.

We can increase the chances that the budget surplus will continue beyond FY 2027 by making changes in our taxing policies, especially with respect to the wealthy and corporations, all of which I am willing to consider.

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?

As an educator union leader, I recognized that all personnel in the school system contributed greatly to student success, a concept that was not addressed in the Commission's report. The system does not work without is human infrastructure and we are seeing that now with the shortage of bus drivers. Living wages and fair working assignments (assuring access to health care, paid leave, etc.) must be a part of the recruitment. As the Blueprint is implemented, there should be modifications and I would support amending it to be more inclusive for paraprofessionals with respect to salaries and professional development opportunities.

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 a legislator, I represent all of Maryland, and I believe that the viability of Baltimore is essential to the economic well-being of the state. As an educator, I know how important the infrastructure is to successful public schools. Therefore, I am committed to supporting funds to renovate school buildings and will work with my colleagues and the leaders of Baltimore to identify what state funds can be used and what funds can be leveraged to improve the learning conditions for students.

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?

In my role as a consultant to school systems around the country since I retired from education, I have often provided Maryland’s public charter school law as the model for responsible innovation. I strongly believe that the elements of accountability, inclusivity and maintaining the staff as local board employees, covered by the same contract, are essential elements of this policy and would not support any weakening of oversight.

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?

Within budget debates I have consistently voted against any increases in funding non-public and I am committed to continuing to do so. The state should never give any kind of voucher or scholarship for students to attend private schools. And I advocate closing tax loopholes to make corporations to pay their fair share of taxes, not lower them to subsidize private schools.

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 am adamantly opposed to privatizing in any form, so I have and will work to ensure that public school staffs are public school employees. There are the basic union tenets of fairness and participation, but I believe that as a community we are much more successful when we share common goals and values. The only circumstances that an uncredentialed and non-unionized employee might be needed is on a temporary basis to fill an urgent need, such as a substitute. However, the system should exhaust every option in seeking a qualified person to fill position before resorting to this and efforts for hiring should continue while the temporary person is in place.

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 state could address staff churn and turnover in several ways. Professional salaries are important, as pointed out in the Blueprint, but that should consider all staff, not just classroom teachers, so that part of the law could be improved. However, we also need policies that address the issues of professional respect, the on-board training to be able to successful from the beginning of their career and programs that help them recover when they are struggling. They want to know that there are opportunities--and support-- for advancement. I believe that the unions should be actively engaged in the development and implementation of the recruitment programs. With this investment, candidates can be assured that they will ultimately have the professional support needed for these very challenging jobs.

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?

Local Boards should be accountable to the community, not the people who appoint them and therefore they should be elected. I would support transitioning to a fully elected Board over a series of elections, two seats at a time. This process should include an informational component for the community that identifies the role and responsibilities of the members and the time requirements, so potential candidates would be prepared. There should also be compensation that would make the job more attractive. I believe that a Board of 12 is too large and that a better number might be 9 community members and 1 student member, and that there be some configuration of some elected at-large, city wide, but the majority elected by identified districts within the city. Reducing the number would be more efficient and determinative, at least in my experience with groups, and elected commissioners would be accountable for bringing the perspectives and needs of their community to the Board to make decisions.

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 has a role—though a very limited one—as one metric in the assessment of school success. In 2017, the General Assembly attempted to address over testing and inappropriate uses of these measures in the passage of the Protect Our Schools and More Learning, Less Testing Acts. But students continue to spend 25 hours a year in actual testing and prep for these tests which have little value. I fully support limiting these tests to less than 10 hours per year and instead take a more comprehensive approach to assessment. We should use all currently required quality indicators, such as school attendance, disciplinary actions, and school culture measures as well as student learning as assessed by educators.

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?

For me, the bottom line with respect to decisions about public transportation in and around Baltimore, the primary authority for defining the needs and recommending ways to address them must rest with the city leaders, who represent residents. I cannot speak on how effective the Link has been, but I am sure that the Mayor and the President of the City Council can, and I would trust their judgement. I would advocate that the state work with city leaders and the leadership of surrounding counties to assess current needs and bring back the elements of the Red Line that are still needed and make additions and adjustments based on the current situation.

The state must work collaboratively with local jurisdictions to evaluate the transportation needs on a state level—making the right connections—that supplement and coordinate with local programs.

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?

I absolutely support legislation that would restructure our tax structure in a way that requires the wealthiest among us, including corporations, to pay their fair share of taxes that pay for the public infrastructure, programs and services that they benefit from. When I served as president of the Montgomery County Education Association, I worked with state legislators on combined reporting. Unfortunately, there was little appetite to move on this at that time. While the 2022 session is not realistic for this legislation, it is something we can work for in the terms.

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 addition to the accountability to the public they serve, public employees are more invested personally in the success of their work, there is higher job satisfaction and better results. Therefore, I would NOT support any effort to privatize or farm out work.

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 outsourcing these operations. Instead, I would advocate for working with the localities to improve utilization of the facilities and perhaps provide greater access to the kinds of services they provide.

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?

Sadly, it is true that the needs for mental health services have increased dramatically and because they have historically been delegitimized, we do not have enough resources in place to meet those needs. I have been actively working with coalitions of advocates and with insurance carriers to increase the network of mental health providers in the state. In addition to that, I have supported legislation that would increase the facilities available for more intensive needs by converting hospitals that are closing into places where there can be a range of inpatient and outpatient mental health services. I have also worked to increase the funding for 2-1-1 MD to provide more mental health services (2-1-1 Press 1 was created as a result) and I was the House sponsor of the Thomas Bloom Raskin Act, which is a proactive and preventative approach to suicide prevention. I am committed to continuing this work.

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?

The way you have framed your question is correct in my mind—labor and management **MUST** be partners in the effort to meet the challenges of the pandemic, including increasing vaccinations. I was the sponsor of legislation in my second term which created joint union management teams in state facilities to collaborate on workplace safety issues. Where those teams are operating, it is that group that should be developing the plan, with the union reps bringing the perspective of employees to the table for collaborative decision making. Where they do not exist, they should. With respect to the specific question of vaccine availability, employees should be given time off to get vaccines and where possible the employer should work with the Health Departments to set up clinics that make the vaccine more accessible.

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.



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