

D. Jones - 30A - 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 May 12th, 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

Maryland General Assembly

Party affiliation

Democrat

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

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

I was appointed back in 2020 to serve as the Delegate for D30a in the Maryland House of Delegates

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 you will see from my voting record in the MD House of Delegates the last two years since my appointment - I am a pro-labor candidate and have proven so with my voting record.

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

No. Raised in a Labor home. My father is still President of APWU Local #517

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?

Yes, I am in support of any legislation that would expand the rights of collective bargaining. For example, there are several bills in the last two legislative sessions for which I supported collective bargaining. In 2021 I supported HB894 which helped to expand collective bargaining rights for community college employees.

Additionally, I supported SB9 State Employees - Collective Bargaining - Applicability, Bargaining, Processes, and Memorandums of Understanding.

In 2022 I supported HB 90 State Personnel Management System - Office of the Public Defender - Placement and Collective Bargaining

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?

Marylanders deserve a living wage. While I was not in office for the vote on raising the minimum wage I do support it. I would like to hear more about tying the rate of the minimum wage to 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?

Yes, I support binding arbitration and strengthening these rights.

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?

We have seen this same problem with school bus drivers. Which is why I sponsored and passed HB 753 - School Bus Driver Wage Study For years, local school boards have struggled to recruit and retain an adequate number of school bus drivers to ensure our students have reliable transportation to school. Many of you felt the impact of this school year when school bus drivers left their jobs for higher-paying positions with companies like Amazon and UPS. In response, I introduced HB 753 to alleviate the challenges of hiring qualified bus drivers. This bill will help local jurisdictions identify issues related to school bus driver wages so they can make more informed decisions about how to attract and retain these desperately needed employees, and will help ensure all students have access to safe and reliable transportation to and from school.

Additionally, another we should do for public sector employees is through comprehensive benefits programs and ensure that workers actually receive their benefits upon retirement. This Session I co-sponsored HB 892, legislation to restore prescription drug benefits to retirees who were promised them.

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?

I fully support more transparency from employers that provide their employees with self-funded insurance 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?

I support keeping the public employee retirement plans as defined benefit/pension plans. Public employees spend their entire careers in public service, often not being compensated at the same level as those in the private sector. Civil servants deserve benefits for their years of service; one of those should be strong retiree benefits.

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?

Yes, I support full health benefits for state retirees This Session, I co-sponsored HB 892 which would reinstate prescription drug benefits for state employees who began State service before July 1, 2011. This would at least partially fix the reduction in benefits by making sure everyone who was promised these benefits when they started working for the state actually receive them.

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, I would support any legislative initiatives to increase recruitment and retention rates among state employees. I joined several of my colleagues in co-sponsoring HB 727, the Great Maryland Outdoors Act. This bill is the largest investment in our State Parks in Maryland history and will help address overcrowding & understaffing at our parks.

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?

In 2022 supported HB 1450 which incrementally increases the sales and use tax revenues that are directed to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Fund. Additionally, in 2021, I supported the "Blueprint 2.0" which included needed fixes to education funding that were exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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?

Support staff are an essential aspect of our schools. They aid teachers in giving the needed attention to each individual student and ensure that wraparound services are implemented in our community schools. That is why I proudly supported HB 1349 - Education Support Professionals - Workgroup and Bonus. Although I was glad to see this small step taken to support these workers, in the long term, I would like to see support staff salary increases incorporated into the Blueprint.

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?

Charter schools can be a helpful tool in our public education system but they MUST remain under the control of local school boards, held to the same standards as other public schools and staff members have the same collective bargaining rights as their counterparts in mainstream public schools.

Additionally, I think it is crucial that these schools do not receive a disproportionate amount of state funding in comparison to traditional public schools.

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?

I am strongly opposed to giving state dollars to private schools. Public funds are only for public schools and any diversion of public funds to private institutions only hurts our public schools. I do not support the BOOST program and believe that diverting money into this program forces taxpayers to subsidize private education.

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 strongly oppose contracting out to the private sector any services currently or traditionally provided by public school employees. Private contractors have the goal of making a profit often at the cost of their employees or sacrificing the services offered to students. Providing services through our public schools ensures that we have control over the treatment of our essential support staff and the quality of the provided service.

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?

I fully support the efforts of AFT, MSEA, local unions, and the General Assembly in improving educator recruitment and retention. We ask so much of our teachers' and through the pandemic, we watched as they adapted to a new normal and learned how to serve the needs of their students through a whole new platform, overnight, with limited resources, which understandably has caused burnout. Our teachers deserve a salary that reflects their skill sets and hard work in addition to strong benefits, and improvements in factors that affect working conditions such as classroom sizes, equipment availability, and even functioning HVAC systems. I intend to use my position as a delegate and member of the Ways and Means Education Subcommittee to address critical shortages and fulfill the promise of 15,000 additional educators in the coming years while supporting collective bargaining.

We need to trust our teachers and their background which is why I was against numerous bills in committee and floor amendments which would have negatively impacted our teachers and their ability to do their jobs. (HB 618/HB 758)

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 think we tend to over-test our students. Preparation for these standardized tests can often take away from other learning objectives which overall have negative impacts. I will continue to support policies that take a more holistic approach to measuring our students' success.

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?

I was disappointed by Governor Hogan's decision to cancel the Red Line as this project would have helped connect traditionally underserved communities to essential public transportation to help them access resources and economic opportunities. Scrapping the Red Line was not only a waste of the \$300 million that the MTA spent on planning and designing the project but it also left many in the Baltimore area with less reliable public buses as their main or only means of transportation. I think giving localities more of a say in transportation decisions could help better address the needs of residents.

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?

As a member of the Ways & Means committee, I am always working with my colleagues to find better ways we can work with the needs of our constituents and the tax code. I introduced a bill last year, which became law, HB 712, that expanded the scope of the Tax Incidence Study, which identifies where Maryland's tax burden lies to use a wider range of data to make it as comprehensive as possible. If re-elected I plan to use the findings of this tax study to make informed policy decisions and help make our 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?

As stated in my previous answer, I strongly oppose contracting out to the private sector any services currently or traditionally provided by public school employees. Private contractors have the goal of making a profit often at the cost of their employees or sacrificing the services offered to students. Providing services through our public schools ensures that we have oversight over the treatment of our essential support staff and the quality of the provided service.

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 the closing of these state facilities. Those facilities have provided excellent care throughout the pandemic and patients depend on them for long-term care. Their care will still be needed after they close state-run hospitals, and moving patients to private facilities will only drive down the wages and benefits for workers.

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?

Yes, I would support additional funding and support of these resources. This Session I voted in support of HB 1018 which would give additional support to the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services to help bolster efforts in identifying and treating at-risk Marylanders. The bill will help to certify additional peer support specialists, provide additional funding for regional training workshops and behavioral health screenings, and improve behavioral health crisis responses to help save lives and hopefully alleviate some of the pressure the pandemic has put on our mental health and addiction services.

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?

Making sure that vaccines, and adequate PPE, are available to workers is an essential aspect of getting workers back into their daily routines. These basic & reasonable accommodations should be a constant consideration and should be addressed proactively rather than reactively in order to help avoid supply shortages as seen at the beginning of this pandemic.

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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