

Edelson - 46 - 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

Silverman, Thompson, Slutkin & White LLC

Party affiliation

Democrat

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

Yes. In my 2016 race for Baltimore City Council, District 1, I was endorsed by the following:

- Unite Here - Local 7
 - CHOICE Building Trades - Baltimore
 - Metropolitan Baltimore Council AFL-CIO
 - LiUNA Baltimore-DC
 - AFT-MD
 - IAFF - Baltimore Fire Officers - Local 964
 - IUPAT
 - Baltimore City Firefighters Local 734
 - AFSCME Maryland Council 3
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Have you ever held elected office? If so, when?

Democratic State Central Committee - District 46 (current)

General Questions

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

I am an active community leader, civic-minded attorney, educator and organizer. My passion for service and commitment to inclusive policies that strengthen our collective spirit and success is rooted in my formative experiences as a foreign-born immigrant to the U.S. The resilience, grit, and fortitude modeled to me by my parents – intent on providing every opportunity to succeed despite the struggle and sacrifice this often required on their part – ingrained in me a great sense of purpose, duty, and responsibility.

I am a proven community leader. I currently serve as the President of the Canton Community Association, one of the largest neighborhood associations in Baltimore City. During my tenure, I coordinated the launch of the Canton Farmers Market and led efforts to improve lighting and safety throughout the 10,000 resident community. Recently, I brought together a diverse group of community members, historians, elected officials, and advocates to create the Canton Anti-Racism Alliance. As a result of many community conversations, the Alliance recently successfully advocated for the removal of the statue of Captain John O'Donnell in the Square.

I am also an educator, serving as an adjunct professor at Goucher College, where I teach a pre-law undergraduate course on the intersection of law and society. My course is designed to challenge my students to think critically about the construction, evolution and impacts of our cultural norms and values. We also analyze how the trajectory of society and major events in history have impacted the laws and customs we follow today. We focus an entire section on the union movement, the value of collective bargaining, and the importance of protecting the most vulnerable among us.

I also utilize my legal background to move the ball forward on social issues in the City. In my first major case after graduating from law school, I successfully represented the victims of lead-paint poisoning against the Housing Authority of Baltimore City and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. In addition, in 2017, I won a landmark legal case working with the leadership of Bikemore and a team of lawyers and transit advocates. I successfully argued a Temporary Restraining Order against the City of Baltimore and then-Mayor Pugh, preventing the planned demolition of a protected bike lane on Potomac Street in Canton that serves numerous communities throughout Southeast Baltimore. This victory, on behalf of all Baltimoreans who lack access to reliable transit, is even more critical in light of the fact that MTA is consistently unable to effectively transport our young people to school and because an estimated 30% of Baltimoreans lack access to a car or personal vehicle.

My background in advocacy and leadership and my experiences as an educator and immigrant provide me with a unique perspective to advocate for working families and pursue progressive policies in Annapolis.

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

No

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 support legislation that grants these public employees the right to engage in collective bargaining. Many of these workers are front-line public service employees that have diligently worked to provide critical government services through the COVID-19 pandemic. They deserve the right to have a seat at the table with their employers. As a lawyer that often represents those that have been marginalized or rendered voiceless, whether by unscrupulous contractors or unfair state laws, I recognize the importance of strength in numbers and the value of being able to join forces and obtain quality representation in order to create a more fair and democratic process. Collective bargaining is a pathway to living wages, employment with quality benefits, and retirement with dignity that all of our public employees deserve.

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?

If elected, I will support legislation that indexes the minimum wage to inflation. Unfortunately, our nation is currently experiencing high levels of inflation that drags down wages and makes everyday goods more expensive for the average Marylander. Indexing the wage to inflation will ensure working Marylanders do not have their buying power diminished.

5. Binding arbitration in contract negotiations.

Maryland recognizes the importance of collective bargaining as a way to assure employees at the state, municipal, and school district level have a fair and democratic voice in the conditions that govern their employment. For many of those employees and their unions, when disagreements arise during negotiations, there is no mechanism by which those disputes can be resolved. In most cases when the parties reach an impasse, management can implement their proposals without the consent of the employees. Because of this, management often realizes there is no need to bargain in good faith. To fix this flaw, many states and local governments have implemented binding arbitration. When an impasse arises at the bargaining table, management and the union agree to take their case to an objective, third party arbitrator. The arbitrator hears the case, and issues a ruling that both management and the employees must agree to. There is some form of binding arbitration for state employees in Connecticut, Delaware, and Maine, and Baltimore County offers binding arbitration for its municipal employees, for example.

Do you support objective, binding arbitration for contract negotiations for school district, city, county, and state employees? As an elected official, would you support strengthening those rights for the public employees that fall under your jurisdiction?

I absolutely support efforts to create a third-party dispute resolution mechanism during the collective bargaining process, such as binding arbitration. This could include binding arbitration or creating a state labor board to resolve disputes. As a litigator, I have successfully arbitrated dozens of arbitration matters on behalf of my client and always push for binding arbitration provisions whenever I am drafting a contract for a client. I am well aware of the value that these provisions provide, especially for the party that typically has less bargaining power. Requiring binding arbitration in front of a third-party neutral can often result in the opposing side negotiating in good faith and not taking advantage of leverage disparities between the parties. As someone who has done this for over a decade as a lawyer, in support of the legislation I will also argue that binding arbitration is beneficial to both parties as it keeps legal costs contained and is more expedient than awaiting a potential court decision.

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?

I appreciate the needs and hard work of our public employees in our state. For critical staffing areas lacking qualified applicants, we need to examine our compensation packages to ensure we are appropriately staffed and are able to attract the necessary talent to effectively serve our great state. Further, to keep pace with the rate of inflation, our workforce deserves a raise to support their families.

However, I would reframe my response to this question slightly. I believe that public servants have different incentive motivations and structures to the private sector and therefore compensation levels will likely always reflect this to a certain extent. Public servants, in many cases, receive strong healthcare, leave, and retirement benefits and a sense of purpose gained from working for others that is not the same as the private sector. Private sector companies do not answer to the voters of Maryland and are not responsible for safeguarding taxpayer dollars in the way that state agencies are. The private sector is interested in profitability and sustainability of its business enterprise, which leads naturally to higher compensation for the select few employees that move up the ranks, however it does not offer nearly as stable an employment prospect as the public sector. That being said, we must be doing more to counter the job losses in our agencies and most importantly, to pay public sector employees the compensation they deserve for the tireless work they perform on behalf of the citizens of Maryland.

Bottom line: our workers deserve a raise, especially for areas in which there are critical staffing shortages that are impacting the function of our government.

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?

The funds should go back into employee health care packages to lower the out of pocket costs paid by employees for health care. In addition, I would absolutely support this legislation. Access to affordable healthcare and a lack of transparency within our medical insurance system are two of the major problems plaguing Americans, and in particular, public sector employees today. Most people have no idea how the health insurance system works or where their hard earned money is going. Employers and insurance carriers routinely take advantage of this fact. This is a primary area where more accountability and transparency is needed. I am well aware that there are very powerful and well-funded special interests that do not want this system to change, but the taxpayers need a champion on this issue and I have never been scared of fighting for what I believe in.

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 ensuring that employees and workers that currently have access to a defined benefit plan do not lose these benefits. Pensions provide workers dignity and financial stability during retirement, benefiting our state and communities. It is also important that our retirees stay in Maryland, providing our economy the much needed boost that comes with the money they spend. Treating our retirees properly will make them more likely to remain in Maryland and spend their money in our local economy. It will also help to attract the next generation of public sector employees. If a need arises at the state-level due to financial pressures and insufficient funding for defined benefit plans, I look forward to working with you to ensure families are protected while maintaining the state's outstanding record of financial integrity.

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 agree. A major reason for being a state employee is the benefits you receive. We cannot just strip these benefits away upon retirement. It is unfair, cruel, and bad for recruitment of future employees. This is of particular importance given the incredible staffing shortages we are seeing across state agencies. I would only agree to a reduction in a time of catastrophic financial hardship for the state in which other critical services could not be supported and I would only do so in constant collaboration and consultation with you and your members.

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 absolutely support efforts to ensure appropriate staffing levels for our state and local government agencies to carry out their critical missions on behalf of Marylanders. Recently, the state of Maryland announced a six billion surplus of revenues for the most recent fiscal year. We must deploy these resources to ensure Marylanders have access to critical government services. I would support utilizing surplus funding to address worker retention and hiring efforts. It will also require a holistic approach to solve this challenge; meaning, we need to ensure we are protecting livable wages, employee benefits, and retirement with dignity in order to course-correct our current staffing levels. All Maryland taxpayers will benefit from having fully staffed and high-functioning government agencies.

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?

First and foremost, my family endured the hardships of immigration so that my sister and I could have a shot at an American education. We are a proud public school family. The central motivation for me in running for office is to ensure that every child in every neighborhood has access to a top quality public school education. In my opinion, the challenges facing our public education system today center around access, funding, and equity. First, particularly for our students in Baltimore City, the bus system is woefully inadequate to transport them to school in a safe and reliable fashion. So they begin each and every day with transit insecurity. Then, when they get to school, many of them are in buildings with inadequate ventilation, no heating/cooling, lead-paint in the walls, and crumbling infrastructure. They are taught by dedicated and talented teachers who are also overwhelmed, underpaid, over-stressed, and more recently at risk of catching a deadly disease because we have not prioritized resources such as testing, high quality masks, proper ventilation, and sufficient vaccines in our schools. We are also rushing them back to class with 25-35 students per classroom before we have solved these issues. Finally, when the school day ends, we do not have wrap-around services, after school activities, or recreational opportunities for our young people to participate in. Over and over we are sending them the message that their future is not our priority. If we are to achieve anything meaningful as a society and as a body of elected representatives, this has to change.

While I realize these challenges are systemic, racially motivated, and generational. I will be spending each and every day working towards improving our public education system, whether it is via the full and equitable implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, the 21st Century School Building program, and/or other legislation that we work on together in the future. I will also be focused, as always, on issues relating to transit and improving conditions for our students getting to school.

Finally, one of the biggest issues facing the Maryland Public Education system is the digital divide.. We have seen many low-income and rural areas struggle with distance learning through the pandemic. These struggles stem from the lack of access to equipment and broadband wifi. This will be important as we start to develop the future of education post-pandemic.

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 work closely with you and my colleagues in the House of Delegates to develop sustainable revenue sources to implement the Blueprint. I believe that any revenue raised should be put in a lockbox for the purpose of funding the Blueprint, preventing political interference from the Governor's mansion in the future. One revenue raising idea I'm excited to explore is revenue derived from sports books or sports gambling. We already have an established history in our state of utilizing gambling and casino revenues to fund education efforts. I would strongly support pursuing sports gambling as a potential revenue raiser to fund the Blueprint, provided we can ensure that the funds will actually go to implementing the Blueprint and doing so in an equitable and thoughtful manner.

However, this will not be an easy task. Already ideas in the General Assembly to raise revenue through a digital advertising fee and a professional services tax have either failed to pass or have gone through major policy changes. It is critically important that our advocacy on revenue raising be transparent and tied to an actual government service - like the Blueprint - to win over skeptics and the Maryland public at-large.

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?

Yes it will. As a lawyer, I know that the success of my practice is dependent upon the paraprofessionals on my staff. For that reason, we pay living wages, offer great benefits, and excellent retirement plans. Our paraprofessionals are highly respected, happy, and appreciated. For that reason, their productivity is incredible, resulting in a very successful legal practice and many satisfied clients. I intend to take this same mentality with me to the General Assembly. Our paraprofessionals are the backbone of some of our critical systems and they should be treated as such.

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?

If elected to the House of Delegates, I would work closely with you to advocate for additional bonding and school construction capabilities in Baltimore City. As Delegate, I will work to ensure the 21st Century School Buildings Program is fully funded and potentially expanded to address aging infrastructure. Having knocked on nearly 20,000 doors throughout the district in this cycle alone, I have seen firsthand the positive impact the Program has had on communities that have new, beautiful school buildings that serve as anchors for the community. Expanding this Program to more communities is so important it must be a top priority for us.

Compared to other large cities and urban areas across the United States – and other jurisdictions across Maryland – Baltimore’s children are falling behind their peers. Our city has some of the oldest school buildings in the state; many low-income high school students must travel more than an hour, often in unsafe conditions, to get to school; in-school primary and mental health care services are insufficient; and our teachers and staff lack the tools to adequately do their jobs.

Our education system is in desperate need of transformative change. We must boldly invest in our facilities and teachers immediately.

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?

What we know with respect to charter schools, particularly those run by out of state for-profit entities, is that when we weaken the state laws that govern these institutions they take full advantage of the weaknesses and our public school system is harmed in the process. As delegate, I intend to do everything in my power to strengthen collective bargaining protections for teachers and staff, enhance oversight over publicly run charter schools, and ensure that they remain under the purview of local school boards. This is the only way that we can protect our public school students and all of our teachers and staff from the unfair and financially driven practices of out-of-state, for-profit institutions. The motivation to properly educate our young people cannot be driven by the need to maximize profits and please shareholders. It must be predicated upon the need to create a vibrant, well-educated, and well-rounded academic future for our students.

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 disagree with the redirecting of public funds to private education. If elected, I would work to reallocate this funding to public education, especially given the catastrophic impact of the pandemic on our public school students, particularly those in under-served areas of the state. This reallocation would seek to better the quality of public education, through improving infrastructure, materials, and the quality of teachers in the classroom. These improvements would work to uplift the quality of the overall educational experience for students. This in turn would have an effect on educational equity, as schools in low-income areas tend to have less resources. It would make a strong statement that our focus as educators and leaders is on our public school system. When we divert public dollars to private school funding it also sends a strong message about the low priority we place on public school education. This message is heard loud and clear by our students. We must change this narrative, for the future of our students.

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 would support efforts to ensure that school districts follow the law and not hire employees from organizations like Teach for America, CityYear, and other non-profits that actively circumvent the collective bargaining and certification process. Numerous studies have shown that these programs have had mixed if not negative results on the education of our children and the ability to recruit and retain young education talent in the future.

I believe these schools should not be directly hiring individuals that are not subject to collective bargaining and credential requirements. However, if these nonprofits are open to paying for their employees to assist our schools, I believe we should be open to working with them to provide as many resources as possible to our students and existing, overworked teachers and support staff.

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?

First and foremost, we need to prioritize teachers for what they are - front line workers shaping the future of our country. We also need to recognize that they are overworked, over-stressed, and underpaid. Specifically, teachers, like many degreed professionals, tend to suffer from student debt, caused by their advanced education. In order to retain and recruit the highest quality teachers we must do two things: develop better incentives and raise salaries. Currently there are programs in place that assist teachers in paying off student debt and purchasing homes, these programs must be expanded. For example, the development of a tax credit for teachers, who are renting or buying a home in the county they are working in, would be a magnet for many professionals. Coupled with a cost of living increase based on the most expensive area in the county, these two programs will attract new teaching talent and help to retain our current, seasoned teachers. We also need to do everything we can to lower the pupil-to-teacher ratio in our schools. For many of our teachers, their class sizes are so overwhelming that they spend most of their time simply trying to keep their students well-behaved, without the ability to delve deeply into the learning experience.

19. Elected versus an appointed school board [for candidates running for Governor, Comptroller, or for office in Baltimore City legislative districts only]. In 2022, the citizens of Baltimore city will finally be allowed to elect two additional members to the school board. Baltimore city is currently the only jurisdiction in the state whose entire School Board of Commissioners is appointed. In 2022 the board will expand from 10 to 12 seats, with the two additional seats being elected rather than appointed. Of the 23 other Maryland county school boards, 19 are fully elected, and four are an appointed/elected hybrid, with only Wicomico County having more appointed than elected positions. If elected, would you support legislation transitioning Baltimore city to a fully elected or hybrid board with the majority of seats being elected? What is the optimal structure for Baltimore City's School Board and why?

I fully support creating a majority of elected positions to the Baltimore City School Board. Educators, parents, and families deserve a School Board that is accountable to the public and can implement the wishes of the voters. Further, Baltimore City's lack of local political control of its institutions has harmed the region and left too many decisions either in the hands of the state or unelected bureaucrats.

With that being said, maintaining a few appointed School Board members helps to ensure stability and long-term thinking on the Board. I would support that, after their initial appointment, appointed officials must stand for election to be retained, similar to our electoral process for Circuit Court Judges.

I support having at least 8 elected officials on the Baltimore City School Board and I remain open to working with you on the right balance between elected and appointed officials.

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 always been a controversial matter, due to its origins, rooted in socio-economic discrimination. The instructional time taken away for test centered learning prevents students from truly expanding their knowledge base. At the same time this form of education centers around college, and neglects mentorship, apprenticeship, and vocational based career paths. This pushes students away from pursuing vocational careers in favor of the idea that college is the answer for everyone. Moreover, the American education system has been consistently falling behind other developed nations for years now. Primary reasons for this include the lack of modernization and innovation as a result of a strict adherence to a standardized testing approach. If we want to retain our footing in the global community, we will need to drastically change our approach; central to this must be a broadening of learning opportunities and a renewed focus on learning skills and trades.

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?

That is simple: completely ineffective and frankly insulting to the entire Baltimore region. Governor Hogan's decision to cancel the Red Line has put our region and city through unnecessary harm and continued the cycle of disinvestment in the state's largest city: Baltimore. Walking away from nearly \$1 billion in federal funding has robbed communities in both west and east Baltimore of needed investments, Transit Oriented Development (TOD) opportunities, and exacerbated issues around connectivity in our region. Our bus system, which is woefully underfunded, fails to connect residents to employment and educational centers. Further, the decision negatively impacted unionized employees by robbing our brothers and sisters in the building trades and transit operating unions.

The BaltimoreLink bus investment plan is not a replacement for the Red Line and has already shown to have poor on-time performance, poor reliability, and poor connectivity to the rest of our region. In order to improve our transit system, the state needs to reimagine its approach to transit in Baltimore and we must pursue an all-options-on-the-table strategy.

As you know, the Maryland Transit Administration, a state agency, controls the vast majority of transit in Baltimore outside of the Charm City Circulator and the Water Taxi/Harbor Connector. I strongly believe Baltimore needs more control over its transit destiny. As a member of the Mayor's Transition Team for Transportation and Infrastructure, I have consistently advocated for the creation of a regional transportation authority with the ability to raise revenue, and, broadly, creating greater local control across MTA's transit assets, like the MARC commuter train.

In the short-term, I will push the MTA to study possibilities of improving our transit system today. This would include studying the potential for extending the light rail into south Baltimore, building the subway system further east, creating state support for ferry services, and building a new MARC station in east Baltimore. The Red Line debacle showed us that we cannot put all of our eggs in one basket. We need multiple plans and multiple solutions to build real multi-modal connections for Baltimore 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?

I would absolutely support efforts to close tax loopholes and ensure that businesses and individuals are paying their fair share. These efforts are crucial to generating revenue for our state without raising taxes, which can be a politically painful proposition for many General Assembly members. Further, I would support funding to increase enforcement resources at our tax agencies to pursue individuals and businesses taking unfair advantage of our state. As a lawyer who spends time focusing on and analyzing tax policies when representing individuals that have been taken advantage of by unscrupulous employers, I am uniquely positioned to support and sponsor legislation that will create a more fair tax structure and ensure our hard earned taxpayer dollars are being utilized for the betterment of our students and schools.

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?

No. I am not in favor of outsourcing our state, county, or city operations for all of the reasons you lay out so effectively in the question. When we outsource, we lose some of the most important aspects of these roles - accountability, transparency, and collective bargaining. When the focus is on profits, shareholders, or a board of directors, the taxpayers and employees always lose.

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 facilities. This is a bad plan, and I will oppose any attempts to privatize these services that would negatively impact the care of patients, or the pay and benefits of healthcare workers. These are government services that are needed in the state. This is just another example of Governor Hogan's failure to invest in infrastructure in the state. I will always prioritize patients, healthcare workers, and quality of care over privatization.

I am not in favor of outsourcing state, county, or city operations. Healthcare workers deserve decent and fair benefits that they can count on to be protected. A stable workforce ensures the highest quality of healthcare for every patient.

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 increasing private and public resources for treatment to ensure all Maryland residents have access to the care they need. We need private providers and state funding to address this issue. Our bed capacity in the state is not nearly enough. It is very difficult for facilities to operate when they are over 85% full.

We need more beds so we don't have to transfer mental health patients to the criminal justice system which is definitely not a positive scenario. We know the pandemic has caused an extra strain on everyone's mental health, and for some more than others who were already suffering prior to the pandemic. The state's mental health system was strained prior to the pandemic, and it should be a priority in the Maryland legislature.

As someone whose fiance is a clinical psychologist, I am acutely aware of the strain placed on our mental health professionals during the pandemic. We must also prioritize compensating mental health providers appropriately and provide sufficient resources in order to address burnout and reduce staff turnover at our medical institutions.

As a legislator, I will explore ways we can reallocate resources to ensure all patients are treated and beds are available for every patient who needs one. And as part of my platform, I believe we should treat people with mental health and substance use issues with the same compassion as we treat those with physical health conditions. We need to treat people with broken spirits the same way we treat people with broken legs.

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?

It is my firm belief that unions and management must work together if we are to keep the public safe, defeat the virus, and achieve some semblance of a new normal for society. This must include making the vaccine available for every single employee, providing educational and incentive structures for the vaccine-hesitant among us, regular and consistent testing (as we have seen the Omicron variant can infect even those who are fully vaccinated), and protocols to ensure safe work environments such as social distancing and regular sanitizing. At the end of the day, making sure that we reach herd immunity via vaccine and booster shots must be the primary focus for all levels of the public and private sector. Management and unions must put any differences aside and work together in the interests of public health. This will also require soliciting feedback from all levels of unions and management to ensure buy-in and collaboration in the process. What we know about human nature is that if people feel forced into something they will naturally resist. At the end of the day, there is no economy if all workers are sick and there is no education system if all students and teachers are sick. All options must be on the table to ensure our workforce is vaccinated and our students and teachers are kept safe.

Thank You!

Thank you for taking the time to complete this candidate questionnaire. If you have any questions, please contact Todd Reynolds, AFT-Maryland Political Coordinator, at (410) 764-3030, or treyolds@aftmd.org.



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