

Embry - House - 43A

# 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 [treyolds@aftmd.org](mailto:treyolds@aftmd.org).



## Candidate Information

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

Employer

Maryland Attorney General

Party affiliation

Democrat

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

Yes, the CWA when I ran for Mayor in 2016.

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

No

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?

Workers are the backbone of Baltimore. My commitment is reflected in a lifetime of dedication to workers and their concerns in a number of different roles. For example, I have been a Board member of the Public Justice Center, an organization that advocates for workforce justice on behalf of low-income people across Maryland and litigates to protect workers against wage theft and independent contractor misclassification. As Chief of the Criminal Division in the Office of the Attorney General, I organized a Task Force for crimes against vulnerable population that included wage theft as one of its principal areas of focus. I served as Special Assistant to the Secretary for the Maryland Department of Licensing, Labor and Regulation, where we pursued a wide range of initiatives on behalf of Maryland's workers. I understand and have deep appreciation for the work of Baltimore public school teachers and administrators. My sister who teaches elementary special education is a member of the Baltimore Teachers Union and I, like my father and siblings, am a proud product of the Baltimore City public school system. My mother founded Arts Education in Maryland Schools (AEMS), a non-profit dedicated to ensuring that public schools across the State have high-quality arts education by working with teachers, local systems, and MSDE. I understand the challenges that your members are facing in today's political environment and AFT-Maryland deserves a seat at the table when we are deciding how to address these challenges.

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

No, I have not.

## 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 believe they should have the right to engage in collective bargaining. I strongly support the right of workers, including public employees, in their efforts to bargain collectively for increased benefits and improved working conditions. I would sponsor and/or support such legislation and publicly advocate for it.

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, the inflation we are now experiencing is a reminder that we need to tie/peg the minimum wage to the rate of inflation and costs of consumer goods so that we have all necessary tools to combat the effects of inflation on working families.

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, binding arbitration is a necessary corollary to collective bargaining. I support implementing binding arbitration for public employees.

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?

Uncompetitive wages and failure to provide raises is disrespectful to state workers and makes it harder to attract and retain the workers that we need. Staffing shortages then lead to inadequate regulatory enforcement, slower public responsiveness and poor morale. As a part of the budget process, agencies should conduct and make public salary studies that include comparisons with equivalent states as well as staffing shortages. They should also provide the public and the General Assembly with plans to address inadequate compensation and hiring. I will be guided in the budget process by agency compliance with their plans to redress low and/or stagnant compensation and staffing shortages.

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 money should either be returned to employees or spent in a way consistent with the explicit and legislated desires of employees. I will sponsor/support legislation to force transparency and spending consistent the interests of the insured employees.

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?

State workers deserve a secure retirement, and maintaining the defined benefit plan (i.e. pensions) is the best way to ensure they receive it. People enter public service knowing that relatively low salaries are balanced by reliable benefits and the knowledge that they will be taken care of later in life. Pension funds have to be responsibly managed so they are fiscally secure. Defined contribution plans shift the long-term financial risk from government to individual workers, and they introduce unnecessary volatility into workers' retirement planning. Instead, the State should maintain defined benefit/pension plans so that workers have the retirement security that they earned.

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 support providing the health benefits to retirees promised to them, including prescription drug coverage.

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?

As a State employee and in my role at the Attorney General's Office, I have seen the impact of low staffing levels on environmental enforcement, oversight of safety in our State's nursing homes, and wage enforcement. I care deeply about this issue, speak regularly about it during my campaign and will make funding for recruitment and retention a top priority.

### Public Education in Baltimore City

11. General [for candidates running for Governor, Comptroller, or for office in Baltimore City legislative districts only]: What do you think are the three biggest problems facing Baltimore City public schools? If elected, how will you solve these problems?

As a graduate of the City public schools and a Board member of my high school's Foundation which has raised money to support the teachers and students through COVID, I know COVID's devastating impact on learning loss and the achievement gap. Supporting teachers, students and families must be a top priority for this District and the City. The Blueprint funds will be critical to this effort from outreach to chronically absent students, to higher salaries for educators, to dedicated funding to schools facing concentrations of student poverty. As Delegate, I will fight every year to ensure that full funding as recommended by the Blueprint for Baltimore schools is in the State budget.

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?

Funding public education must be a top budget priority period and not dependent on specific sources of revenue. Casino lock boxes have been a charade and arguments about supplanted funds are a distraction. If Maryland has budgetary shortfalls in future years, I support increasing taxes on the highest wealth individuals, closing corporate loopholes, and other forms of progressive tax relief.

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?

I support raising the compensation levels for PSRP's My sister, who is a special education teacher in the City public schools, relies heavily on excellent Paraprofessionals and I know their importance in our system.

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?

I will advocate for and sponsor/support legislation to increase the program to cover all public school buildings in the City that need renovation. The 43rd District has approximately 30 public schools buildings and many are in dire need of renovation.



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?

I believe that charter schools are a part of the equation in Baltimore. But, they are not panaceas. Some perform better than public schools, some perform worse. And so I believe it is important that we create a framework of policies that strikes the appropriate balance and sets the right incentives for success: we need innovation with accountability. And although we should always be examining our laws to see if there are opportunities for improvement or refinement in how they impact our schools, we need to be careful about the changes.

I have not seen any convincing evidence that the collective bargaining agreement is impeding the operation of charters in the state. And in point of fact, Maryland's charters have avoided the problems of fraud and mismanagement that we have seen in states such as Louisiana and Minnesota. What is more, there is plenty of evidence that charter schools are able to find the flexibility within the existing collective bargaining agreement to innovate in their approach to education. And finally, and most importantly, my understanding from talking to teachers and from public reports is that the vast majority of public school and charter teachers in Baltimore are against a move to exempt charter teachers from the collective bargaining agreement.

Against that background, I believe the answer is obvious: charter teachers and staff should not be exempted from the agreement. That is not to say that we cannot improve the conditions for innovation in Baltimore City schools, including charter schools. Charter operators complain about a poor relationship with City officials in working through potential issues. What I would like to see is a world where all of the stakeholders sit down together and roll up their sleeves to find opportunities for innovation, autonomy and flexibility.

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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?

No. School vouchers would divert money from our public schools in an already challenging environment, often do not lead to quality options, and all too often leave students with disabilities behind. They are not the answer to Baltimore's 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 will work to ensure that school districts are not hiring employees from nonprofit organizations or otherwise circumventing the collective bargaining agreement.

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 Blueprint will provide higher teacher salaries, which will be helpful. I look forward to working with the AFT and BTU on legislation to provide additional support.

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?

This is a challenging issue. On the one hand, more community involvement in the operation of schools through a democratic process is a positive for the City. On the other, the experience of other cities suggests that it may not lead to improved outcomes in schools, and could distract from some of the problems at hand. Of course, every City is different, and we need to explore every option for improving the fate of our own schools. Therefore, I support Baltimore's move to a partially elected board. The impact of the elected seats should be evaluated in determining the correct balance of elected versus appointed seats and whether a fully elected board would better serve educators, students and parents.

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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 understand the need for consistent student evaluation but the obsession with standardized testing over the past twenty years has been expensive, riddled with poorly researched theories, and most importantly has not benefitted students. Maryland should follow the lead of other states and rigorously evaluate the number, quality and usefulness of standardized test administered in K-12 with the goal of reducing the number to those that can be clearly defended.

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Vision for Maryland

21. Transportation. When Governor Hogan cancelled the Red Line rail project, he replaced it with a revision of the MTA regional bus lines and renamed the system the Baltimore Link. How effective do you believe this new bus plan has been? How can the state improve the transportation needs of its residents?

The new bus plan has proven to be mediocre at best. As someone who commutes to work by bus, I have experienced its unreliability and routine lateness. I support a regional transportation authority that will give a voice to local government, advocates and other stakeholders, substantial increases in funding, and a new bus plan that better serves our 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?

Yes, I support both combined reporting and a carried interest tax.

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?

First, the evidence shows that the privatization of these services – often to non-union operators – leads to a monopoly that eliminates competition and leads to poorer service. Second, the attempt to privatize is usually a pretext for removing union labor, reducing pay, and slashing benefits, a result that is punishing to the middle class. All too often, privatization is counterproductive and harmful to hardworking Baltimoreans. As a result, it is not a part of my plan for the future of the State.

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 outsourcing state, county or city operations and oppose the closing of the two facilities.

25. State's mental health and addiction crisis. The need for mental health and addiction services has increased during the pandemic. Mental health beds in the state hospital system are filled with court ordered patients. If elected, would you support increasing private and public resources for treatment to be sure all Maryland residents have access to the care they need?

Yes, as a prosecutor in Baltimore City and at the Attorney General's Office, and as Director of the Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice I am very familiar with this problem. I support increased resources to meet the mental health needs of Maryland residents.

26. Vaccines and working with unions to return to work. The COVID-19 pandemic has of course been a challenge for the safety of Maryland residents and our members who have been returning to work. While we hope that the worst of the pandemic is behind us, we know from past experiences with mutations of this novel virus, recovery and a return to normalcy may not be linear. Vaccines must be a part of a comprehensive strategy to get past the pandemic, as well as an important tool for fighting public health threats in the future. What role do you believe unions and management have in constructing a plan to vaccinate their workforce? What in your mind is the way unions and management can work together to make sure represented employees are offered a COVID-19 vaccine?

Unions should be involved from the outset in the plan to vaccinate State workers. Unions enjoy a position of trust as well as understanding the circumstances of their members and are invaluable in planning our workplace pandemic response.

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](mailto:treynolds@aftmd.org).



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