

# Quaker-Gov



## **AFT-Maryland Candidate Questionnaire for 2022 Candidates**

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—whose members work for the city—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 region and 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 Metropolitan Baltimore AFL-CIO Council and the Maryland and DC AFL-CIO State Federation; the council and state federation will announce its final endorsements in early 2022. However, because we are a large contingency within the Baltimore 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. It may be returned to

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Please return this completed questionnaire no later than January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022. If you have any questions, please contact Todd Reynolds, AFT-Maryland Political Coordinator, at 410-764-3030.

## General

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?

*The State of Maryland is facing a series of crises, from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its fiscal, economic and public health consequences, to violent crime, climate change and national attacks on the reproductive freedoms of women. It is essential, in these uncertain times, that Marylanders elect an experienced leader with a bold vision for our future and the proven ability to deliver.*

*Working with our public sector, service and industrial trade unions, I can chart a better course for Maryland than what we have had over these past eight years. Nowhere is this more important than in our classrooms. We can and will adopt policies that reward and empower teachers, improve our learning conditions and - through universal pre-kindergarten, affordable childcare and high speed Internet in all of our communities - take on the structural inequality that exists between those who have and those who don't.*

*I can make this commitment because I've led before and have a demonstrated ability to work within all three branches of state government - executive, legislative and judicial - to make meaningful improvement to our state's quality of life.*

2. Have you ever been a member of a union? If yes, please give the union name, local number, and dates active.

No.

## 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?

*Absolutely. I believe the expansion of collective bargaining rights helps attract and retain quality employees, and actually improves the relationship between employers and employees, by introducing a measure of stability and predictability to the workplace experience.*

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 current economic situation in the United States, as families struggle to adjust their household budgets to a seven percent rate of inflation, underscores the essential importance of adding an index provision to our state's minimum wage law.*

### **State service/public employee issues and rights**

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 to both questions. Eight years of Republican governance in the State of Maryland has provided us with countless examples of bad faith negotiations on the part of management. The mere possibility of binding arbitration incentivizes both sides to*

*come to the table in a spirit of good faith and negotiate in a shared spirit of compromise.*

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?

*Over the past several years, the salaries of state government employees have gradually become less competitive with those of their counterparts in local and federal government. Far too often, we become a mere training ground for the best and brightest public sector workers before they understandably leave for better opportunities. This creates an unwelcome "brain drain" within state government and deprives us of both continuity and institutional knowledge.*

*One of my first actions as Governor will be to convene a comprehensive study of Maryland's wage and salary structure, comparing ours to those of our neighboring states and select peer states across the nation, and developing a body of recommendations that will include both costs and an optimal timeline for adoption.*

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?

*Under no circumstances should these dollars be redistributed to other programs. Should the State of Maryland find itself in this situation, I would ensure these dollars would be reinvested into our statewide mental health care system that is now woefully inadequate.*

*I have introduced a comprehensive strategy for addressing our mental health care system that includes building and operating 10 new regional behavioral centers across Maryland, ensuring that all 1,428 public schools in the State of Maryland have at least one licensed and certified mental health professional for every 250 students, and*

*provide direct grants to Maryland's 23 counties and Baltimore City to hire additional providers with specialized experience in Applied Behavioral Analysis for autistic children.*

8. Retirement for public employees: defined benefit versus defined contribution.  
Most Maryland public employees have **defined benefit** retirement plans like a pension. This allows employees to plan for their retirement because they know exactly how much income they will be receiving. With **defined contribution** retirement plans like a 401(k), employees contemplating retirement are never quite sure when the right time is to retire because of changes in their plan's investments. Do you support keeping public employee retirement plans as defined benefit/pension plans?

*Yes. It is essential that we preserve the primary means of a safe and secure retirement for our public employees. Moreover, I will, as Governor, act decisively to preserve the integrity and long-term stability of our State Retirement and Pension Systems. I will appoint SRPS trustees who will reject, emphatically, any proposals - such as the infamous "corridor funding" strategy of recent years - that reduce the legislature's annual funding obligations to the pension system but leave it in danger of being underfunded.*

*Second, I will commit that under no circumstances will state funds designated for the SRPS be diverted to fill gaps in Maryland's operating budget. Finally, I will advocate in opposition to strategies to shift all funds within our pension system from active to passive, or indexed, management. There is ample evidence to suggest that a passive investment strategy, regardless of the savings from management fees, is ill-suited for periods of economic and market volatility.*

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. If we are to attract and retain qualified employees and preserve the State of Maryland's hard-earned reputation as a desirable career destination, we must fully restore the prescription drug benefits that were negotiated in good faith with our employees. Under no circumstances would I attempt to balance the state's budget on the backs of our current or active retirees.*

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. Over the course of this questionnaire, I have unpacked strategies that I would use to attract highly qualified employees, reduce the rate of turnover and rebuild our state employee workforce to full strength. These measures, coupled with a renewed emphasis on succession planning that provides a clear path to management jobs for younger professionals, will be a primary goal of the Gansler Administration.*

## **Public Education**

11. General: What do you think are the major challenges facing Maryland's public education today? If elected, how would you help solve these problems?

*Of all the challenges and opportunities facing our public schools, six stand out from the rest:*

- **Teacher burnout.** *Grossly underpaid, overworked and routinely subjected to unsafe, unhealthy and demoralizing workplace conditions, so many of our teachers were already approaching their breaking point even before this two-year onslaught of COVID-19.*
- **Deepening inequities.** *Students in predominantly low-to-moderate income, minority school districts are typically subjected to dilapidated buildings, outdated learning materials and technology, long-term substitute teachers and substandard Internet connectivity, yet are expected to compete on the same level as students from far more affluent districts, who take safe, comfortable and ultra-modern learning technology for granted.*
- **Homeless and Food Insecurity.**
- **Politicization of School Boards.**

- **Preoccupation with Standardized Tests.** *Our obsession with testing, and our inclination to define the progress of our students and teachers by their performance on exams that are often inherently biased, robs the teachers of their ability to teach the lessons that students must learn, in a way that would make students find greater value in the public school experience.*

*As Governor, I would promise to govern in accordance with the following core principals:*

- *Education is best left to the educators and not to politicians;*
- *Education should not and must not become a political football for right-wing demagoguery;*
- *Every student must have the same access to the same learning facilities, equipment and technology, regardless of where they live or their socio-economic status;*
- *To make Maryland's public schools the best in the nation, we must offer the best workplace experience in the nation to our teachers;*
- *To ensure that we are providing our children with the tools to compete and succeed in college and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, information-based economy, we must ensure that the landmark Kirwan plan is fully funded.*

*In other words, it is not the Governor to determine how our children are educated. Rather, it is our job to ensure that our teachers have the resources, support, compensation and workplace environment needed for them to teach, and that our children are able to learn in safe, secure and equitable learning conditions*

## 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?

*First, I have proposed that the State of Maryland legalize recreational cannabis in the 2022 legislative session. Should this not happen, it will be a leading goal of mine in 2023. By regulating and taxing this highly lucrative product, and establishing a fair market value for licensing fees, we can and will ensure that we have hundreds of millions of new dollars that can be used to implement Kirwan.*

*Furthermore, I will as Governor recommit the State of Maryland to a climate of true tax fairness. Studies have repeatedly confirmed that about one-third of Maryland's top 150 companies pay no corporate income taxes. This deprives the state of revenues*

*that would otherwise be reinvested in our public schools, and also inflicts undue harm upon our local, independent businesses. As Governor, I would be a strong advocate for measures such as combined reporting, and would provide the Maryland Comptroller's Office with the tools it needs to ensure compliance with existing laws and lead the fight against costly tax fraud.*

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?

*Without the support of these dependable and talented professionals, we wouldn't have the tools to provide a quality classroom experience for the students in nearly 1,500 schools across the state. To illustrate our appreciation, we must offer these accomplished professionals an attractive rate of compensation, provide safe, healthy and comfortable workplace environments, provide the same scale of official recognitions and awards as we provide to our teachers, and do whatever it takes to protect their hard-earned retirement security through effective stewardship of the pension system.*

14. Public School Construction and Renovation.

In 2013, the state passed the 21st Century Schools Program, which allowed the Baltimore Public School System and the Maryland Stadium Authority to leverage bonds to renovate roughly 25 public school buildings. While a good start, Baltimore city still has the largest portfolio of aging and obsolete school buildings in the state; therefore, the program needs to be expanded. If elected, what will your administration do to assure more aging school buildings in Baltimore city will be eligible for renovations?

*As Governor, I would take advantage of a historic confluence of circumstances - a multi-billion budget surplus, an improbable reduction of our debt service to revenue ratios and extraordinarily low interest rates - to make an aggressive move into the bond market and secure the affordable capital financing to dramatically accelerate Maryland's Public School Construction Program. Never again, perhaps, will the circumstances be more advantageous to make a generational investment in our public schools, and we must have the will to take advantage of it.*

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?

*The answer to the first question is YES, and the answer to the second question is NO.*

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 philosophically opposed to the use of taxpayer dollars to incentivize private school enrollment, and as Governor would critically examine the value of the BOOST scholarship initiative - by speaking with parents, students, administrators and faculty members from many of these schools - as part of my reassessment of the rationale for this program.*

*I believe there are many factors that determine the suitability of state financial incentives for private businesses - such as the number of jobs created, the aggregated value of the wages and salaries they pay, and the economic and philanthropic contributions they make within their communities.*

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?

*Yes. I believe strongly that our students deserve to be taught by full-time, trained and certified teachers who are members of their local collective bargaining unit. I am increasingly concerned that far too many students are relegated to classrooms and courses that are being led by long-term substitute teachers, to the detriment of the student's long-term learning proficiency. It is one of many learning inequities that I will address as Maryland's next Governor.*

#### 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?

*In addition to implementing the steps I've outlined previously within this questionnaire, I would strong advocate for the following measures:*

- Student-loan forgiveness for any Maryland college or university graduate who makes a commitment to teach for a minimum of five years within one specific Maryland public school system or a minimum of 10 years in multiple school systems combined;
- Formula-based housing allowances that will enable teachers in jurisdictions with higher costs of living to reside within that jurisdiction;
- The implementation of my Administration's affordable housing initiative that includes investment in multi-family housing, amended height restrictions on multi-family units, redevelopment of vacant and abandoned properties and repurposing of vacant commercial and office space;
- The development of pilot programs to assess the effectiveness of on-site daycare for educators and other public school employees, provided both by the local school system and by a private or third-party provider; and,

- Designated seasonal positions within Maryland State Government for educators who wish to supplement their income over the summer.

19. Elected versus an appointed school board.

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?

*As Governor, I would be happy to leave this decision to the wisdom of the Mayor and City Council, Baltimore City's legislative delegation, educators, parents and other stakeholders in the success of the Baltimore City Public Schools.*

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?

*As stated earlier, I believe our state's unhealthy preoccupation with standardized test scores as the primary metric of student achievement has:*

- *Deprived good teachers of the independence and flexibility they need to truly educate students;*
- *Has deprived students of the capacity for critical and analytical thought, as well as creative writing and professionally valuable communications skills;*
- *Cost state taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars in contracts with the out-of-state vendors who design these tests.*

*As Governor, I would highly encourage our 24 school systems to work collaboratively to provide metrics of student achievement that are locally developed, reflect the student's aptitude in a broad range of subject matter and their ability to read, write and think critically, and avoid inherent social, cultural and racial biases.*

## **Vision for Baltimore Metropolitan Area and Maryland in General**

### **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 believe the entire sequence of events was a fiasco that reflected the inexperience of a new Governor and a transportation secretary who didn't understand the transportation needs and culture of our state. The decision to cancel the Red Line was a tragedy that left nearly one billion dollars of federal transit dollars on the table, and the bus plan that was developed as an impromptu response was woefully inadequate.*

*Given the urgent and growing need for better mobility options for low-to-moderate income residents, the mounting traffic gridlock in our metropolitan regions and the existential threat to our planet posed by carbon emissions, I have developed a comprehensive statewide transit initiative, as part of my "Green Maryland" program, that includes the following investments:*

- *Restore Baltimore's Red Line to the State of Maryland's Comprehensive Transportation Plan, with input from the Baltimore Metropolitan Council, the Citizens Advisory Committee and other crucial stakeholders.*
- *Work with the State of Maryland's jurisdictional funding partners to meet WMATA's (Metro) long-term system preservation needs.*
- *Work with our jurisdictional partners in Virginia to support the extension of Metrorail services from Prince George's County into Alexandria, via the Woodrow Wilson Bridge.*
- *Expand the State of Maryland's investment in suburban bus connections throughout metropolitan Baltimore.*
- *Further address the economic and environmental disparities within urban communities by creating a network of transit circulator routes within communities across Maryland. These routes would feature distinctively designed and branded vehicles, circular routing patterns, high service frequencies and peak-period, midday, evening and weekend service.*
- *Initiate project planning for the future extension of light rail from the Branch Avenue Metro Station to White Plains, in Charles County.*
- *Initiate project planning for the future extension of light rail from the Shady Grove Metro Station into Frederick County.*

- *Double Maryland Transit Administration funding for Locally Operated Transit Systems throughout Maryland, which will provide support for greater peak-period frequencies, expanded midday, evening and weekend services, and circulator services within population and commercial centers.*
- *Secure federal funds to restore aging rail freight lines to operability, which increases the likelihood of light industrial job creation while taking diesel trucks off the road.*
- *Establish a multistate Northeast Corridor Coalition, from Virginia to Maine, to advocate in support of the federal funds necessary to improve Amtrak's rolling stock, station facilities and tracks, bridges and switches while making passenger fares more affordable for non-business travelers.*
- *Create a separate modal administration within the Maryland Department of Transportation for the planning, funding and administration of a statewide bicycle network.*

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, and I've addressed this priority elsewhere in the questionnaire.*

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?

*Putting aside the obvious need to initiate contracts with private vendors for those services that can only be provided by outside personnel – such as facility improvements, renovations and repairs, acquisition of vehicle rolling stock and the like – I am a strong proponent of policies that concentrate daily operational responsibilities within the purview of full-time system employees. It is a policy that provides for greater*

*accountability and safeguards against the short-circuiting of essential services due to profit considerations.*

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?

*No on both counts.*

25. State's mental health and addiction crisis.

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

I believe that our state has failed at every turn to deliver appropriate mental health care services to Marylanders in desperate need, and that this pattern of longtime failure is being magnified now as a result of the pandemic. In response to this existential crisis, I have developed a comprehensive mental health care strategy, called "Mental Health Matters." Its provisions are as follows:

- **Take advantage of our multi-billion surplus and our state's AAA credit rating** to finance, build and operate 10 new regional behavioral centers across the State of Maryland, each to be staffed with psychiatrists, social workers and therapists, to be funded by a combination of federal and state dollars.
- **Work with our federal and county partners** to ensure that all 1,428 public schools in the State of Maryland have a certified and licensed mental health care professional per 250 students on staff, and on site, to help students, faculty and staff experiencing trauma.
- **Ensure that all state, county and municipal police departments have immediate access to mental health professionals** with specific expertise in conflict resolution, substance addiction and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- **Require all law enforcement agencies to institute a program similar to Baltimore's** that diverts 911 calls related to a mental health crisis to mental health professionals, with law enforcement to only be used as back-up. We will also require sworn officers within all Maryland state law enforcement agencies to undergo de-escalation training every two years.

- **Provide cost-free higher education and continuing education to any psychiatrist, therapist or social worker** who pledges to practice in the State of Maryland for 10 years or within an underserved region for at least five years.
- **Subsidize the difference between the in-network and out-of-network rates** for up to one year in those instances where a patient is at risk of losing a provider relationship because that provider moves outside of the patient's insurance network.
- **Provide direct grants to Maryland's 23 counties and Baltimore City**, awarded on a population-based formula, to ensure that there is an adequate number of providers with specific experience in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) to children who are diagnosed with autism.
- **Establish the first permanent, standing Maryland Autism Commission.** This Commission will be chaired by the Secretary of Health and will convene regularly in the Governor's Reception Room in Annapolis. This Commission will serve as a platform for review of ongoing medical and scientific advancements in the treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorder, education of state and local policymakers about the magnitude of the challenge, and discussion of potential legislative and programmatic initiatives that would improve the quality of care for all diagnosed Marylanders.
- **Ensure that Maryland's prison population is provided with continuity of mental health care** during their period of incarceration, as a public health and community safety imperative.
- **Establish a Cabinet-level, Interagency Department of Suicide Prevention**, which will coordinate staff and informational resources from agencies throughout State Government, including:
  - Department of Health
  - State Department of Education
  - Governor's Office for Children
  - Department of Human Services
  - Department of Juvenile Services
  - Department of Veterans Affairs
  - Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services
  - Maryland Higher Education Commission
  - The University System of Maryland
- **Encourage Maryland's elementary schools to set aside 10 minutes at the beginning of each school day** for the practice of mindfulness through the use of both financial incentives and instructional resources.
- **Require all taxpayer-funded colleges and universities to establish peer support programs** for students living with mental health conditions on campus, to identify strategies to improve the access and quality of mental health care services for the

student population, and adopt specific policies to immediately engage students who are in need of mental health services.

- **Establish and maintain an in-person or remote, trauma-informed mental health care services** 24 hours a day, and seven days a week for first responders.
- **Establish a permanent, revolving fund dedicated to improving the mental health care infrastructure** available to all first responders. Among other priorities, this fund would be used to subsidize the balance between in-network and out-of-network provider costs for state and local first responders.
- **Require that all aspiring police, fire and emergency services providers receive a minimum amount of mental health awareness education** as part of their mandatory training process, and that the required number of hours be completed prior to certification.
- **Establish a mobile crisis unit**, specifically constructed to assess the unique circumstances and needs of first responders, that will be deployed, as needed, to state and local agencies in response to traumatic occurrences.
- **Establish a new check-off on the Maryland state tax return exclusively for mental health care.** Designated as the Mental Health Care Fund, it will be used to subsidize the expansion of state-funded mental health care in the State, such as a free intake assessment for any Marylander who requests one.

26. Vaccines and working with unions to return to work.

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

I believe every school system in the state should adopt a policy of mandatory vaccines and booster shots for teachers, administrative and executive personnel, eligible students and visitors. We cannot afford to back to the days of remote learning, which has led to catastrophic levels of anxiety and depression among students, irreparably widened the learning gap and exacerbated longstanding inequities between the "haves" and the "have nots" within communities across Maryland. A universal vaccination requirement, similar to what has been adopted in other high-risk, high volume professions, is truly the only way we can avoid a return to remote learning while keeping our teachers and children safe.



