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AFT-Maryland Candidate Questionnaire for the 2022 Election

AFT-Maryland is a federation of local unions of the AFT within the state, including the Baltimore Teachers Union and the City Union of Baltimore, as well as state employee members of the Maryland Professional Employees Council, AFT Healthcare-Maryland, and the Maryland Classified Employees Association. Together, with the Baltimore County Federation of Public Employees, and Baltimore County Federation of Public Health Nurses, AFT-Maryland has thousands of members who work to make the state a better place for its residents.

The AFT-Maryland has prepared the following questionnaire for candidates running to represent us in Annapolis as a means to familiarize the candidates with issues that our members care about most. It also allows us the chance to see where the candidates stand on these issues.

AFT-Maryland locals participate fully in the endorsement process of the Maryland and DC AFL-CIO State Federation; the state federation will announce its final endorsements in early 2022. However, because we are a large contingency within the Maryland AFL-CIO, the unions of the AFT-Maryland have a heavy influence on who labor chooses as its candidates for endorsement.

Please take the time to complete this candidate questionnaire by no later than January 7th, 2022, at 5:00 p.m.

If you have any questions, please contact Todd Reynolds, AFT-Maryland Political Coordinator, at 410-764-3030 or treynolds@aftmd.org.



Candidate Information

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

Employer

Education Trust

Party affiliation

Democrat

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

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

Former Secretary of Education under President Obama

General Questions

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

As a former teacher, principal and Secretary of Education, I have the most firsthand experience working with schools and their staff and understand the unique challenges they face. Additionally, I will be a champion for workers' rights as Governor, including speeding up Maryland's timeline to a \$15 minimum wage and tying it to inflation so it's a living wage, ensuring every worker in Maryland has the right to collective bargaining and is fully protected by anti-retaliation laws when speaking up about conditions in their workplace and fighting for paid family leave. I also support protecting our state pension system and its current benefits, while shifting its management so the state no longer pays such high fees for such poor returns.

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

No, but my mother was a New York City teacher and life-long AFT member as was my wife at the start of her career.

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, as Governor I will support collective bargaining rights for all state and public school employees, without exception. The right to join a union and collectively bargain should not be dictated by an employer's ability to classify employees as seasonal or part time. Every worker should have the right to join a union and bargain for fair wages and good benefits that respect the dignity of their work. We must also end the practice of having long term contractual employees; some have spent their entire career working for the state but labeled as contractual. Specifically in higher education, I will work with the legislature to ensure that the state employees that work at our higher education institutions have the workplace protections they deserve and the ability to bargain directly with those that make the decisions on their contracts.

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?

As Governor, I will support making the minimum wage a living wage by tying it to inflation. I also believe 2025 is far too long to wait for a \$15 per hour minimum wage, and plan on accelerating that timeline if elected.

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, as Governor I would support binding arbitration to ensure our state employees are not held hostage by political whims.

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?

As Governor, key parts of my education platform are centered around attracting and retaining talented teachers. I will phase in a minimum starting salary for teachers of \$60,000 by 2023 as well as increase salaries of education support professionals while investing in their career development. As Maryland currently faces a staffing crisis, it's important we properly use the state budget funds and American Rescue Plan funds to jumpstart rebuilding state government, which includes raising compensation, protecting the current pension system, expanding collective bargaining and eliminating the practice of reclassifying full-time employees and long-term contractors. These investments will make public-sector jobs attractive and competitive with the private sector.

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?

As Governor, I would support more transparency for state employee health care coverage. Surplus funds should be going back into employee health care plans and be used on health care coverage, not diverted for unrelated purposes.

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

As Governor, I will not support changes to public employee retirement benefits and will keep defined benefit pension plans. Defined benefit pensions are vital to attracting and retaining public employees and compete with the private sector, especially public school teachers, which helps Maryland to continue to provide quality education. Defined benefit pensions are also responsible to Maryland taxpayers, with most of the funds paid out coming from employee contributions and investment earnings, while every dollar paid by Maryland taxpayers into pension plans supports \$4.86 in economic activity here. Every public pension dollar spent by a retiree in Maryland supported \$1.39 in economic activity here, supporting 43,006 jobs. This is especially important as we recover from the economic effects of the pandemic. We don't see those benefits with 401(k) and similar retirement plans.

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 absolutely support keeping full health benefits for retirees, including prescription drug benefits. Maryland should keep its promises to employees, and many retirees planned their lives around these benefits. To back out of our side of the deal is not just unfair, it also does not treat health care as the human right that it is.

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?

The staffing crisis is the direct result of Hogan's failed leadership, which has seen an attempt to dismantle many of Maryland's strong public institutions, and as Governor I would make adding staff a priority. We must provide additional support by filling these vacancies and providing the additional staffing needed for our public employees to be successful. My administration would do an immediate assessment of the staffing needs including an audit of how many PINs were eliminated under the Hogan administration, how many positions were converted to contract status, and how many new positions need to be created in order to restore a properly functioning state government. When it comes to funding, many of the current vacancies already exist in the state budget. I would make sure my administration is properly using state funds to fill these positions. I would also utilize resources from the American Rescue plan, and as the recovery from COVID continues, we can also anticipate increased state revenues.

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?

- Aging school infrastructure, like the very well-known lack of air conditioning, which causes early dismissals and interrupts students' educations.
- Teacher retention rates, causing teacher and staff shortages in Baltimore City schools.
- Lack of diversity in our teachers, which does not reflect the student population in Baltimore City's schools.

The answer to all these problems is increasing funding. Increasing school funding will address the widespread HVAC replacements needed as well as help raise salaries for teachers. My plan to attract more teachers is to phase in a minimum starting salary of \$60,000, increase the amount of loan forgiveness and education support professionals in high-need schools such as Baltimore and eliminate more student loan debt for those that serve communities with families from low-income backgrounds. I will also increase the amount allocated to Maryland Teaching Fellows under the Blueprint to \$20 million over the next five years and support 1,000 future teachers annually through the program. We can increase the diversity of our teaching workforce by having enhanced recruitment of teachers of color in subject areas where they are particularly underrepresented and by doubling to \$2 million annually the amount the Blueprint pledges to the Maryland Higher Education Commission to increase the quality and diversity in Maryland's teacher training pipeline. I will invest an additional \$500,000 in a pipeline of bilingual teachers and invest \$4 million annually to start and sustain a robust HBCU-focused teacher recruitment and preparation program to bring more Black Marylanders into the teaching profession, including paying for their education if they commit to teach in Maryland communities for at least four years.

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?

One of the biggest steps we can take to maintain and even increase state funding for the Blueprint is fixing Maryland's broken tax code. Our current tax code is regressive, and a progressive tax code would ensure the wealthy pay their fair share to support our public schools as well as provide relief for the middle class. Additionally, there are glaring corporate tax loopholes we can close. If Maryland switched to combined reporting, companies doing business in the state could no longer hide their profits by shifting them around their subsidiaries, which would greatly increase tax revenues we can direct to education. Creating new sources of tax revenue, such as cannabis legalization, are important solutions as well. In my campaign for Governor, I am actively running on these issues, so that when I am elected I will have a strong mandate to get my policies through the legislature, and there will also no longer be the threat of a Republican veto on progressive bills.

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 believe the minimum wage should be a living wage. As Governor, I will work to make our state minimum wage tied to inflation, and speed up the timeframe for increasing our current minimum wage to \$15 an hour. In Baltimore the bare minimum living wage is \$15.83. It is unacceptable that hard working education professionals should have to wait to earn a living wage. As Governor I will work to speed up the living wage and ensure it never falls behind again.

A living wage for PSRPs will be a priority to me because I am running on having a living wage for everyone.

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

As Governor I would work to build on the 21st Century School Program - and the promise of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future - and increase school construction and renovation funding. There is no excuse for the current state of Baltimore public schools. I have made it clear that we will not only make sure Baltimore schools have the funding they need to modernize but also ensure the process is streamlined to ensure the funding is utilized efficiently.

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?

As Governor and as an educator, I oppose any weakening of Maryland's current charter school law. Private, out-of-state operators should not have more say than local school boards in children's education. I also oppose anything that would undermine our public school teachers' collective bargaining rights, meaning charter employees should remain school district employees.

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?

As Governor, I would eliminate the BOOST Program, and oppose any other plans for a voucher system. I believe public money should go to public schools, not be redirected to private schools. This means we also can't be handing out tax breaks to corporations that essentially end up funding private schools, making less money available for our public schools and allowing corporations to get out of paying taxes by subsidizing private schools.

17. School Staffing. In too many of our public schools, administrators are not following the law and are hiring people who are employees of non-profit organizations, some of whom are uncredentialed and untrained. Because they are not direct hires of the school district, they are not covered by the collective bargaining contract, nor are they held to the same accountability standards as certificated employees. If elected, will you work to ensure that school districts follow the law to prevent public schools from hiring employees from nonprofit organizations, circumventing the collective bargaining agreement? Under any circumstances is it acceptable to you for a school to hire an uncredentialed and non-unionized employee to be involved in the education of Maryland students?

No. As Governor I will support collective bargaining agreements and crack down on attempts to circumvent them. It is a disservice to our students to have them taught by uncredentialed and untrained employees.

Employers and especially our schools should not be trying to misclassify employees to avoid the requirements that ensure people are paid and treated fairly.

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?

As I mentioned above, as Governor I would attract and retain more teachers by phasing in a minimum starting salary of \$60,000 by 2023, increase the amount of loan forgiveness and education support professionals in high-need schools such as Baltimore and eliminate more student loan debt for those that serve communities with families from low-income backgrounds. I will also increase the amount allocated to Maryland Teaching Fellows under the Blueprint to \$20 million over the next five years and support 1,000 future teachers annually through the program. When implementing the Blueprint's career "ladder" framework across Maryland school districts, I would do so with educators' input every step of the way, so they have a say in creating a clear pathway for our educators to grow professionally and be compensated.

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 am in support of transitioning Baltimore city to a fully elected school board. It is imperative that school board positions be responsive to the community and not just be positions reserved for the wealthy and politically connected. Furthermore, to ensure these positions are not just for those that can finance their own campaigns, we should work to make sure public financing is available for school board campaigns and school board members are properly compensated for their work. This will help ensure community members and educators have a voice on the school board.

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?

While it is important for parents, educators, and policymakers to have information on student learning to incorporate into decision-making on how best to help students succeed, standardized testing today too often distracts from rather than supports effective, joyful teaching and learning. High-quality and fair assessments that take up the minimum necessary time should be designed to support student learning, promote equity, and help provide students and teachers with the support they need.

As the former Deputy Secretary and U.S. Secretary of Education for President Obama, I was deeply involved in the development and early implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act moving the nation away from the narrow standardized testing focus of NCLB. While ESSA requires transparency with respect to the performance of groups of students as a matter of civil rights protection, Maryland - and all of its school districts - can and should move away from traditional "bubble" tests toward more performance-based assessments aligned with high-quality instruction. Maryland should continue to supplement the federally required assessments in English, Math, and Science with other measures of student progress including access to and success in advanced coursework (AP, IB, high quality Career and Technical Education (CTE), etc.), indicators of school climate, etc.

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 system has been a huge disappointment. It was an incredibly poor substitution for the Red Line, and some research indicates it even led to fewer passengers than before able to commute to the Baltimore region's jobs in under an hour. The biggest way the state can address the transportation needs of its residents is to simply re-authorize the Red Line. With the passage of the federal infrastructure bill, we again have an opportunity to access federal funding for the project, and all the research and plans had already been completed before Hogan canceled it. In addition, the state should invest in enhanced bus service, transit-friendly street design, etc.

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 would support making our state tax code more fair. Implementing combined reporting and a carried interest tax would finally help level the playing field.

23. Privatization, General. As public employees, each of our members works for an entity that is directly accountable to the residents we serve. Far too often, when jurisdictions and school districts choose to contract out or privatize those services, the level of accountability changes with those services. A private company or nonprofit is accountable to its board of directors or shareholders, and not necessarily to the residents that rely on its services. In addition, their employees are seldom unionized. If elected, would you support any plans to privatize and/or farm out work to a private company or nonprofit in our state and local governments or local school systems? If so, why?

As Governor, I would oppose moves to privatize government services. I would eliminate the practice of having long-term contract employees that are also non-union.

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?

As Governor I would oppose efforts that have been led by Governor Hogan to roll back government services and their reach across the state. Privatizing government services only leads to higher costs and more problems for Maryland families. I would oppose the closing of these facilities and outsourcing them to private 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?

I believe health care is a right - and that includes mental health and addiction treatment. As it stands now, Maryland faces a bed crisis. This is about what we prioritize in this state. Providing proper mental health services and increasing not only the capacity of beds but of providers across the whole state, especially in underserved communities is paramount to our overall public health system. My administration will work with local partners to invest in the needed infrastructure to provide access to care for those experiencing mental health issues and ensure our system is better able to coordinate the care they provide so it is delivered in proper settings. I will work to ensure community behavioral health providers receive regular and adequate rate increases to properly serve individuals with mental health and substance use disorders in the community in which they live.

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 and management have an important role to play in vaccinating their workforces. Unions represent a direct line to employees and can act as a trusted source of information to their members when it comes to vaccination, which is important for overcoming vaccine hesitancy. Unions also can serve as important messengers on how getting everyone vaccinated is in employees' best interest and for their protection. When it comes to management, they should work with union leadership to ensure a plan for paid time-off to get vaccinated, as well as time-off to take family members to get vaccinated and to rest if they are experiencing side effects. They should also work with union leadership to provide free testing to employees, comprehensive health benefits and clear information in the workplace about getting vaccinated and clear communication that no one's job will be in jeopardy if they need to take time off to get vaccinated.

Thank You!

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



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