

# Lee-16-Senate

## 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](mailto:treynolds@aftmd.org).



### Candidate Information

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

Employer

Maryland State Senate

Party affiliation

Democrat

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

AFL-CIO Metro Washington Council; Maryland State Education Association; Montgomery County Education Association; SEIU Local 500; MCGEO UFCW Local 1994; Fraternal Order of Police Montgomery County Local 35; and International Association of Fire Fighters Local 1665, AFL-CIO, CLC.

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

Yes, I was elected as a Delegate to the Maryland House of Delegates and in 2002 and served there until 2014; and I was elected as a Senator to the Maryland State Senate in 2014 and I am currently serving as Senator now.

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?

Protecting the rights, benefits, working conditions, safety, and wellbeing of all our workers have been top priorities for me. Before and since being elected to the House of Delegates in 2002 and the Senate in 2014, I have sponsored and supported legislation: to support collective bargaining for educators and education staff at all levels, higher education faculty and staff, health care and public sector workers, essential workers, and other professionals. This year, to protect our essential workers who at the frontlines of keeping our country and state operating during this pandemic, I and my colleagues supported and voted to pass the Maryland Essential Workers' Protection Act, an emergency law to require employers to provide safe working conditions, reduce the risk of workplace transmission, provide leave and other measures. I have strongly supported and helped pass legislation to support a living wage and prevailing wage, increase the minimum wage, the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act (earned sick leave bill), creation of a Public Labor Relations Board, and other similar legislation. In 2016, I was the Lead Senate Sponsor of the Maryland Equal Pay for Equal Work Act (now one of the strongest pay equity laws in the nation) and during my tenure as President of the Women's Legislative Caucus, I led the passage of laws to economically empower women, children and families and reduce health care disparities and increase funding for health and developmental disabilities. I was also the House Lead Sponsor of one of Maryland's first Telemedicine laws to help save lives, increase health care access, and produce better outcomes, especially for individuals in underserved communities. As the Senate Majority Whip, over the years, I have helped the legislature override a number of Governor Larry Hogan's vetoes of bills dealing with collective bargaining, minimum wage and other legislation to help hardworking individuals. If re-elected to the Maryland State Senate, I will build on my track record and continue to support legislation to address economic inequality such as paid leave, collective bargaining, workplace safety, healthcare disparities, and other legislation. As the former Chair of the Maryland Legislative Asian American & Pacific Islander Caucus, I have and will continue to work with the leaders of labor, Black, Latino, Asian American & Pacific Islander, women's, faith, LGBTQ, civil rights, community, and other organizations, the Legislative Black Caucus, Legislative Latino Caucus, Women's Caucus, and other organizations on legislation to uplift and empower the lives of all hardworking individuals.

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

Yes, prior to entering private law practice, while working as an Attorney with the US Patent & Trademark Office, I was a member of the National Treasury Employees Union.

## 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

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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

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### 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

6. Public employee compensation. Under the current governor's administration, it is rare for state workers to get the compensation they deserve, even though the state has often had a budget surplus. As a result, too many public agencies have staffing problems, as many employees leave for better compensation in the private sector. What is your plan to assure state, county, and municipal employees (including workers employed at BCCC, the Maryland School for the Deaf, and all public, state-supported higher education institutions throughout the state) that their compensation levels will be financially competitive with the private sector?

I will continue to work with AFT and partners in supporting legislation to increase compensation of our state, county, and municipal employees to ensure they are fairly and better compensated for their work and expertise, especially during this pandemic and to enable our state, county, and municipalities are able to recruit and retain the best and brightest.

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?

Yes, I would like to continue to work with AFT and its coalition partners on legislation to increase transparency with actual claim cost, rebates, and other refund programs.

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

Yes

9. Prescription drugs for retired state employees. The State of Maryland is currently being sued by a group of retired state employees over the loss of their prescription drug coverage. Their position is the state has backed out of the promised retiree prescription drug benefit. Do you support full health benefits for retirees including prescription drug benefits? Under what circumstances, if any, would you agree to a reduction in benefits for retirees?

Yes, I support full health and prescription drugs benefits for state retirees. I know of no circumstances in which there should be a reduction of benefits

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, and make funding of additional staff a 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?

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?

I have supported legislation to ensure there is available revenue and funding, including supporting and voting for a new tax on digital advertising, and this year, voting to override the governor's veto of that bill. My colleagues and I also passed legislation to ensure casino revenues go to public education. To build on what has been passed and to ensure we provide adequate funding, I believe we must look at many options to raise revenues. Some of these include reviewing and updating our current income tax code to ensure fairness in taxation and have corporations pay their fair share by closing loopholes. If marijuana is legalized, I would support regulating and taxing marijuana sales and ensuring the revenues go to education and other important priorities. The state must move away from BOOST and school vouchers which diminish vital funding for our public schools. I and my colleagues also have and will continue to work with our federal partners to obtain greater avenues of federal funding and with AFT and its coalition partners on revenue raising legislation.

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 will work with AFT and coalition partners and organizations on legislations and policies to ensure Paraprofessional and School Related Personnel, who contribute enormously in a myriad of ways to our public education system, receive greater priority, compensation and benefits.

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?

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 support Maryland’s current charter school law and do not support legislation to weaken this law. The current law provides that public charter schools that are under the control of local school boards, require making enrollment open to all students, require the hiring of certificated teachers, are held to the identical high standards as traditional schools, and protect collective bargaining rights and benefits of employees hired at the school. As such, they should be considered employees of the local school board. Oversight of these schools should not be weakened.



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?

Funding diverted to private schools impedes the progress and goals of public schools to achieve excellence in education and to ensure that every student has the opportunity to receive a quality education. As such, the governor and state should be moving away from funding the BOOST school voucher program. Any corporate tax breaks also impede the ability of public schools to meet their goal of providing a world-class education for every student.

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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, school district must follow the law. Currently, there are no circumstances where for a school should hire uncredentialed and non-unionized employees for public education.

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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?

Since being in the legislature, I have and will continue to work hard to pass measures to increase and to fund pre-K and K-12 education to ensure our educators and staff have the resources they need to be successful. The Blueprint included provisions to increase teacher pay, expand recruitment and career development, particularly educators from communities of color and all backgrounds, expand and increase behavioral health professionals, paraeducators, and other vital measures. Also, in 2019, we passed legislation to add an active teacher and parent on the Maryland State Board of Education to ensure educators have critical input in teaching, learning, and other working conditions. Collective bargaining is important in ensuring educators protect their rights, working conditions, professional development, and future security. I have supported legislation to protect collective bargaining rights at all levels of education. In the past years, I helped pass legislation to eliminate the sunset on the Public School Labor Relations Board; to promote fair, transparent, educators' input and researched based educator evaluations; more learning and less testing (SB 452); and the Protect Our Schools Act. The Blueprint, collective bargaining, and other measures passed over the years will enable our educators to have the resources to teach in a positive and safe environment that is nurturing and conducive to learning for our students and attract and retain the best educators in pre-k through secondary education.

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?

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?

Over the years, I have supported and helped passed the Protect of Our Schools Act; More Learning, Less Testing Act; and other related bills, including voting to override the Governor Hogan's veto to guide Maryland's implementation of ESSA. I support the state plan that is embodied in the Protect Our School Act that utilizes all required school quality indicators, limits over-reliance on standardized testing, uses a holistic approach in evaluating schools instead of a labeling system, respects and prioritizes local autonomy in developing and carrying out any interventions for low-performing schools.

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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?

I have and will continue to support legislation for more rail transit, including the Red Line. I was disappointed with Governor Larry Hogan turning away federal assistance and state support for the Red Line, as this line would greatly uplift and empower many low income, underserved, communities of color, students, and all hard working individuals. In other major cities and other countries, light rail has been shown to provide an effective and efficient means of public transportation, that also connects and brings together vibrant communities. In 2021, we in the legislature passed and overrode the Governor's veto of legislation to support rail transit. I believe the state should continue to work with our Congressional and federal partners and seek federal funding.

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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 or sponsor legislation to make our tax code more fairer and progressive.

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?

I do not support any plans to privatize or farm out work conducted by public employees. Very often, when there is outsourcing, the quality of services, worker safety, transparency and accountability are diminished and sometimes resulting little or no cost saving. Outsourcing should only be allowed if there is no specialized expertise to perform a required specific service.

24. Privatization, specific. On September 2, 2021, the Maryland Department of Health announced the Facilities Master Plan, which includes plans to close Western Maryland Hospital Center in Hagerstown and Deer's Head Hospital in Salisbury within the next 5 years by transferring patients to private facilities. In many cases, these facilities offer the only long-term care options for Maryland residents on dialysis or who are dealing with chronic respiratory problems. If elected, would you support the plan to close these state facilities? Would you support outsourcing state, county or city operations?

I do not support the plan to close these state facilities nor to outsource state, county, or city operations.

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 would support increasing resources for mental health and addiction services, especially needed during this pandemic.

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?

Covid-19 is one of the most serious health crisis Maryland and our country has faced with Omicron and other variants now surging across the nation. Ensuring that all hardworking individuals are able to receive a vaccine and work in a safe and healthy workplace should be high priorities and common goals for both the unions and management. This includes unions and management also working with the state and federal government to achieve those goals. We are all facing a common crisis and threaten with devastating consequences. Working together would be in all our best and common interests in defeating Covid and getting everyone to the finish line. As such, guided by CDC guidelines, unions and management can develop strategic, proactive plans to ensure that every individual has an opportunity to receive a vaccine and booster, have in place an effective tracing and testing program, have steps and measures to ensure the workplace is safe, create flexibility in work schedules, leave, and telework, and have adequate resources, including tapping state and federal relief funds to implement their plans. In addition, in 2021, we in the legislature also passed the Covid Relief Act, established a Recover Now Fund, created a Senate Vaccine Oversight Workgroup, and passed and overrode Governor Hogan's veto of the Covid-19 Testing, Contact Tracing, and Vaccination Act and other bills.

**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).