

Perez - Gov

AFT QUESTIONNAIRE – TOM PEREZ

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.

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

I am proud to have received the endorsement of many labor unions in this race, including:

- **AFSCME Councils 3, 67, and 2250**
- **Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) International and Locals 689-Washington DC and 1300-Baltimore, MD**
- **Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (BAC) Local 1**
- **Communications Workers of America (CWA): Maryland/DC State Council, 2100, 2105, 2106, 2107, 2108, and 2336**
- **International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Locals 70 and 410**
- **United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Locals 27, 400, and 1994**

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

I was previously elected to the Montgomery County Council in 2002 and became Council President in 2004. I was also elected Chairman of the Democratic National Committee in 2017. While not an elected position, I served under President Obama as United States Secretary of Labor and previous to that, served in the United States Department of Justice as Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. In 2007, I was appointed to serve as Maryland Secretary of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation.

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?

My life has been about jobs and justice, and it was inspired by my family. In 1974, when I was just 12 years old, my dad passed away suddenly of a heart attack, leaving my mom to raise us on her own. Luckily, I had a strong support system growing up after his passing, which included my surrogate father.

He was a Teamster. It was through him that I saw the awesome power and strength of the labor movement. He worked hard and, in return, was able to live a comfortable life. And when he eventually lost his job, it was his union that stepped in to help. The lessons I learned from my surrogate father led me to a career fighting on behalf of working people.

This is personal for me, and I have carried it with me through every chapter of my life.

In 2007, I was appointed by Governor O'Malley to serve as the state's Secretary of Labor, and we were able to transform that agency into a powerhouse that advocated on behalf of Maryland's working people. We implemented the first statewide living wage law, passed legislation to prevent employers from misclassifying their employees to save a dollar on the backs of workers, and led efforts to protect homeowners from predatory lenders and brokers when the housing crisis hit in 2008.

I was honored to join President Obama's cabinet as Secretary of Labor during his second term. I oversaw an agency with more than 17,000 employees and a budget of over \$40 billion. We pushed for an increased minimum wage and expanded access to paid leave, worked to expand job training programs, fought to expand the rights of home care workers, and enacted policies to ensure that no one has to sacrifice their health or life to earn a living.

I've had the opportunity to meet with union leaders and members from all across the country and all across our state. I've seen firsthand the prosperity that comes from empowering working people and strengthening the labor movement.

When unions succeed, the middle class succeeds. When unions succeed, Maryland succeeds, and if I have the privilege of becoming your next Governor, working people will always have a seat at the table.

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

No

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. It is crucial that all workers have the right to organize. Throughout my career, I have stood alongside labor to ensure that these rights are protected and to support workers in their efforts to bargain collectively. As Governor, I will continue this fight to ensure every Marylander has humane working conditions, fair wages, and a pathway to a family-supporting job.

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. As Governor, I will not play politics with workers' wages but work to ensure that future increases in the minimum wage are indexed to inflation. Indexing is a sustainable solution that ensures that Maryland's minimum wage keeps up with the rising cost of living so working families don't fall behind and provides more predictably for Maryland businesses. I will also work to accelerate the increase in the minimum wage to take place before 2025. In the aftermath of COVID and the second financial crisis of the 21st century, Maryland families cannot postpone earning a fair wage any longer.

5. 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. I have spent my life defending the right of workers to organize, including through binding arbitration. As Governor, I will continue to support new binding arbitration legislation and will strengthen existing binding arbitration for employees under the Governor's jurisdiction.

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?

Keeping our pay competitive would help avoid vacancies to begin with. We lose too much staff to the private sector and to other local or federal government agencies because of pay scales that are not competitive. To start, funding annual steps cannot be optional. Steps are part of the compact we make with public employees. I am also committed to undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of pay scales to better understand whether our current pay scales are actually costing the state money by contributing to high turnover and attrition. In addition, we need to modernize the skills of our state workforce and pay our workforce accordingly.

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. Government transparency is crucial to trust in our public systems and public servants. As Governor, I will ensure that our state's spending is responsible, transparent, and accountable.

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. As Governor, I will ensure that state employees receive the pension that they were promised, including defined benefits. For state positions to be competitive, fair, and sustainable, we must protect our workers and keep our word.

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. Prescription drug costs across our state are out of control. Marylanders with and without insurance are bearing the burden of these staggering cost increases. This ongoing court case is crucial to ensuring that those employees who have served our state have access to the life-saving medications they need. As Governor, I will work with the Prescription Drug Accountability Board to analyze and implement all the tools we have at our disposal to control the cost of prescription medications, including for retired state employees.

10. Appropriate staffing levels. This past fall, numerous news reports confirmed what many state employees have already known: that staffing in a number of state agencies have fallen to levels that the safety of workers and the ability to carry out their duties has been compromised. For example, the Maryland Department of Health has not been able to admit court-ordered patients to state mental health facilities in accordance with the law due to the lack of staff. Likewise, the State Investment Park Commission found that park ranger staffing levels are too low to meet the demand of Maryland Residents wanting to visit our state's parks. The most recent state analysis shows nearly every state agency has at least a 10% vacancy rate, with some of the larger agencies having a vacancy rate over 15%! Would you support efforts to increase recruitment and retention of qualified state, county and city employees? Would you make funding of additional staff a priority?

I am dedicated to taking immediate and longer-term actions to revitalize an overworked, undervalued, and underpaid government workforce.

As your governor, I will:

- **Authorize additional positions where needed to address critical understaffing;**
- **Provide step/merit increases for state employees;**
- **Get creative with benefits, providing alternative schedules, remote work, student loan assistance, and more.**
- **Give my cabinet explicit instructions to tackle this crisis in staffing and hold them accountable to metrics that demonstrate they are succeeding.**

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?

The three largest challenges facing Baltimore City public schools are: inadequate funding, teacher shortages, and insufficient facilities.

As Governor, my first priority will be to fully fund the Blueprint with an agenda focused on equity in funding. We need to make sure we have a series of solutions to

make sure we have adequate resources at hand. We have tremendous opportunities to grow the economy and create middle class jobs in Maryland. As U.S. Labor Secretary, I was part of President Obama's economic team. President Obama presided over the largest streak of uninterrupted private sector job growth in our nation's history. At the moment, Maryland has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. We can change this by growing the clean energy economy in so many ways, such as becoming a national leader in offshore wind power. We are only beginning to make progress in this area because Governor Hogan did not lead. I will work together with key stakeholders to expand our tax base by creating these clean energy jobs, as well as jobs in other high demand, high paying sectors.

In addition, I will work to close corporate loopholes, such as the combined reporting loophole, that create an unlevel playing field for many businesses. Many states, including Texas, have acted to close this loophole. If Texas of all places can close this loophole, Maryland ought to be able to do the same thing.

Another major challenge to Baltimore City public schools is teacher recruitment and retention. As Governor, I will fight to ensure that teaching is a sought-after profession by increasing teacher pay and incentivizing college students to enter the field of education through educator scholarships. I will also elevate the profession by investing in educational atmospheres and resources which make it easier for teachers to do their jobs, including investing in community schools and smaller classroom sizes. Additionally, we need to make good on the Blueprint promise to provide the resources necessary to increase diversity in Maryland's teacher training pipeline. We will strengthen partnerships with HBCUs, Black and Brown alumni associations, and solicit stakeholder feedback to create diversified teacher pipelines. We must also invest in recruitment programs at HBCUs, as the primary conduit for Black and Brown educators is currently alternative certification programs. We must also invest in programs that encourage ESLL students to pursue careers in education.

Facilities are also a major challenge in Baltimore City public schools. Many Baltimore schools were designed for 20th century students to learn 20th century skills. As Governor, I will ensure that our facilities are not only inhabitable, safe, and stocked, but also that they leverage technology to make sure that our students are ready to enter the workforce of the 21st century. Improving facilities also means ensuring that our facilities are centered within communities and are able to meet the holistic needs of students, including mental health and nutritional needs.

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?

Yes. See question 11.

13. Living Wage for Paraprofessionals. One element that was unfortunately unresolved by the Kirwan Commission recommendations was the pay for Paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel (PSRPs). For too many PSRPs throughout the state, their compensation levels are not enough to be considered a living wage. Will PSRP compensation be a high priority for you if you are elected to office? How can the state better show its appreciation to PSRPs working in our state's public schools?

Yes. The vision underlying the Blueprint is powerful but there are areas for growth. One of those is pay raises for Paraprofessionals. Paraeducators and PSRPs are an essential and critical part of our public education system. As Governor, I will work to ensure they are given the respect and wages they deserve.

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, these programs 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?

Students deserve a safe and healthy learning environment. This means structurally sound facilities with up-to-date systems and ample space for small class sizes and wraparound services. The 21st Century Schools Program was a good first step to help address the significant backlog in renovating and updating Baltimore City Public School buildings. However, it shouldn't serve as a long-term solution to ensuring that all Baltimore City school children have access to 21st century learning environments. As Governor, I will champion long-term solutions to completely renovate and construct new buildings for Baltimore City school students which are embedded in

the statewide school construction program that utilizes updated policies, procedures, and population predictions to ensure equity in decision making.

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?

My life has been dedicated to preserving the right of workers to organize and ensuring that these organizing efforts cannot be undermined. Unions ensure the quality of teachers’ working conditions, and therefore the quality of our students’ learning conditions. As Governor, I will support local school boards continuing to serve as the authorizers of public charter schools in Maryland. Maryland’s public charter school law ensures that charter schools remain within the public school system and that the educators and school staff are part of the collective bargaining unit. My administration will oppose any weakening of the law that would allow for multiple authorizations and diminish accountability for charter schools.

17. 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?

My administration will not support any increases to the BOOST program. Public funding is for public schools, and I will ensure that all schools which receive any public funding are held to high non-discriminatory standards.

18. 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?

Students deserve credentialed and experienced educators who have access to the strength of a union. Too often, uncredentialed and inexperienced educators are placed in schools with the most need, particularly those with a higher population Black and Brown students.

19. 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?

For many teachers leaving the profession, their reasoning comes down to impossible workloads and lack of support. While the new pay scale for educators in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future does begin to address the necessity of paying educators what they deserve and is comparable to professions with similar education and experience levels, there is so much more to be done to truly support educators. Increased staffing capacity will make a monumental difference in teacher workload. Educators are expected to work miracles in their schools by not only delivering culturally competent and trauma informed instruction but also handle counseling, mediation, family engagement, community outreach, extracurriculars, purchasing supplies, staffing lunch and bus duty, behavior management, phone calls home, tutoring, differentiating, translating, mask reminders, pandemic mitigations, and so much more. Once we prioritize the full staffing of schools to meet the many needs our students bring to the classroom, educators will be able to focus their full attention on what they do so brilliantly - engaging and rigorous instruction and positive relationship building with students.

20. 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?

School systems and boards need to be accountable to students, parents, and the public. Elected school board members create that accountability and allow for parents to have more of a voice in schools and classrooms. As Governor, I will support legislation that includes elected seats on the Baltimore school board.

21. 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?

Our classrooms need to see a balance between valuable instructional time and crucial data collection procedures. As Governor, I will streamline the number of assessments so that valuable class and instruction time is not encumbered by over-testing. In addition, I will ensure that Maryland continues to have one of the most progressive rubrics in the nation, with its measures of school climate, student attendance, access to a well-rounded education, and on-time 9th grade promotion. By administering more robust assessments in a more efficient manner, we will seize the opportunity to utilize the full range of data points to more accurately assess the state of Maryland's schools for the purposes of addressing gaps in equity and opportunity.

22. Transportation. When Governor Hogan canceled 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?

While the Baltimore Link has provided some additional transportation options to the Baltimore region, it is no replacement for the Red Line. Most importantly, it doesn't solve Baltimore's largest transportation problem: connecting East and West

Baltimore. As Governor, I will champion the redevelopment of a robust transportation system that connects neighborhoods of Baltimore, including East and West Baltimore, with economic opportunity across the region.

23. 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. Our tax structure cannot be littered with loopholes that skip the intent of the law. This is not fair. As governor, I would support legislation to close loopholes like combined reporting, taxing corporate “nowhere income”, and pass-through loopholes and others.

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

No.

25. 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 not support closing these crucial state facilities nor outsourcing operations. These facilities are crucial to Marylanders in some of our most vulnerable communities across our state and we cannot afford to leave these

patients behind. Under a Perez Administration, these devoted public servants would see an increase in beds, an increase in resources, and an increase in their capacity to serve patients in Maryland.

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

Yes. The mental health and addiction crisis that is sweeping our nation has hit Maryland extremely hard. Baltimore has the highest overdose mortality rate in the nation and the COVID-19 pandemic has only made matters worse. Each mental health challenge or substance use disorder is an individual experience that requires an individual response. As Governor, I will ensure that we have more beds to care for not only court-ordered patients, but also that we have greater capacity to treat individuals without a court order, including expanding out-patient services, integrating mental health into our primary care system, and ensuring our schools are equipped to identify mental health challenges early. Part of addressing our state's mental health crisis must be to increase the number of mental health providers by providing scholarships and targeted loans to students entering the field and providing grants to clinics to ensure they can hire, train, and deploy mental health workers.

27. 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?

To overcome this global pandemic, we need to work with all stakeholders, including unions and their members, to develop response plans, ensure adequate supply of public health materials, and execute an efficient and equitable distribution of the vaccine. Ensuring access to vaccines is indeed a critical part of the strategy to get past the pandemic.