

Queen - MI - Delegate

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

Morgan State University

Party affiliation

Democrat

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

MCGEO, MD State AFL-CIO, MSEA, MCEA, 1199 SEIU, IAFF local 1664, LiUNA

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

Yes, Maryland State Delegate (2016 to present)

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?

I have demonstrated with my voting record and advocacy that I understand the important role that unions play in protecting employee rights, providing training to develop well-performing, skilled workforce, enabling workers to advance in their careers, and fighting for equitable wages for women and persons of color.

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

I come from a family of union members, but I am not a union member.

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?

I will continue to support efforts to enable employees to participate in collective bargaining. Collective bargaining provides a means for employees to negotiate benefits and wages that result in a highly motivated and productive workforce which is a win-win for employers and employees.

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, indexing the minimum wage to inflation should be a goal for Maryland. We can study the US states that currently have laws in place to index their minimum wage for pros and cons. Some of these states are considered more conservative than Maryland.

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?

As with any contractual relationship, there will be disagreements and disputes, there needs to be mechanism in which a neutral party can solve disputes. I support a mechanism in which an arbitrator is used to resolve conflicts to prevent a breakdown in communications and a "shut down" of services.

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 believe the recent change to Maryland's budgeting process to enable the Maryland General Assembly to have great voice in setting budget priorities will improve past issues with the Governor. Also, going forward efforts to make state employees' wages more aligned with the private sector should be explored.

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 support greater transparency in health insurance actual costs, rebates, and refund programs. I would explore State "right to shop" programs in which insurers share a portion of cost-savings with health plan enrollees to offset deductibles or out-of-pocket expenses.

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, at a minimum, I support a defined benefit retirement plan (pension) for state employees. However, an option for additional retirement savings with employee contributions, matched at a certain level by the State is beneficial to employees.

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?

The courts will decide this pending case about prescription drug coverage of retired state employees. I agree that retired state employees should have access to prescription drug coverage, not at a loss of total coverage, but possibly at some co-pay arrangement as retirees live longer and prescription drug prices increase. Some federal and state collaboration will be needed to reach an equitable solution.

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, increasing efforts to recruit and retain qualified state, county, and city employees in critical positions should be a priority with appropriate funding to obtain additional staff.

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?

I believe the Blueprint for Maryland's Future is an important first step to provide equitable educational opportunities for students. The focus is to completely fund this initiative, provide needed resources, monitor and continuously seek improvements. The goal is to better prepare all students for post-graduation opportunities with well-paid and well-prepared teaching and support staff.

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 support the efforts to seek dedicated funding sources for the Blueprint for Maryland's Future – Casino gambling, sports betting, legalization of marijuana, and other revenue sources. I will continue to advocate to fully fund educational initiatives.

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, this is a priority for the Maryland General Assembly to ensure pay and incentives for paraprofessionals and other school personnel is competitive and appropriate for the duties and skills of the job.

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?

In the spirit of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, resource needs may be different for jurisdictions. Greater capital funding for aging schools is important, especially for Baltimore City Schools. I will continue to advocate for greater funding for school building renovations for jurisdictions with aging school buildings. This need has been highlighted as school re-open after COVID-19 closings.

15. Public charter schools and local oversight. There are over 50 public charter schools in the state of Maryland, and the vast majority of them reside in Baltimore city. Private, out-of-state charter school operators have previously wished to weaken the state law overseeing charter schools to make teachers and staff employees of the charter board rather than employees of the local school district. This would remove all protections that teachers and staff have under their collective bargaining agreements. It would limit oversight of these privately run public charter schools by taking them out from under the purview of the local school boards. It would also give the private operators a “blank check waiver” from any local school board policy. Should charter school teachers and staff be considered employees of the charter school or of the local school board? Should oversight of these schools be weakened?

I believe oversight for charter school teachers should be similar to other public school teachers whether in charter, magnet, special or traditional schools. Oversight of public school teachers should be from one central local government agencies.

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?

The intent of the BOOST program to provide greater educational options for low-income students has a place in a comprehensive, large school system. This program should be reviewed and revamped with funding adjusted such that public education is not negatively impacted and the quality of public education is not diminished.

Corporations can be incentivized to support both public and private education, especially for underserved areas with greater incentives for charitable contributions to public schools. Greater corporate support to K-12 education can lessen the State’s proportion of general fund support for K-12 education.

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

I would work to ensure public school administrators are following hiring laws in Maryland. Also, I would seek to find the root cause for jurisdictions not being compliant – unable to find qualified workers, long credentialing process, uncompetitive salary and compensation, or other reasons.

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?

Teacher retention is extremely important to maintain instructional quality and reduce costs of recruiting and training. We need to collect survey data on why teachers leave and what factors would encourage them to stay. All the common factors that impact retention – salary including incentives and raises, working environment, work-life balance, training, upward mobility, involvement in decision-making, and mentorship should be analyzed across school jurisdictions.

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 cannot speak to what is the optimal structure for Baltimore City's School Board, but I believe that elected school board members provide greater accountability to residents. Therefore, I support efforts to have some elected members for school boards in all Maryland jurisdictions.

20. Standardized testing in the schools. In our state's public school system, instruction time in our classrooms is often pushed aside so that students may prepare for and take a plethora of standardized tests. What is your view on standardized testing in our state's public schools? If elected, what policy positions would you take regarding the number of standardized tests required of our students?

As an educator in higher education, I embrace the philosophy that testing is only one component of evaluating knowledge gained. I am supportive of legislation such as "less testing, more learning" in which students are exposed to multiple teaching methods and assessments. I support efforts to revise K-12 instruction and curriculum development to use higher levels of Bloom taxonomy of learning to foster critical thinking and creative thought.

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?

From most accounts the Baltimore Link bus system has not had stellar improvements in service quality for Baltimore City residents. Reliable and affordable public transportation is a major draw for individuals wanting to live in a city. Improving bus service within Baltimore City and surrounding jurisdictions would be a big economic boom for Baltimore City and the state. Maryland needs to mirror "best practices" from other U.S. cities that have improved bus transit services in congested, high traffic areas.

I was born in New York City, grew up in Washington, DC; no one in my family owned a car. When I moved to Montgomery County, Maryland, I always lived near a major Metro bus route and used Ride-on to get around. I didn't own a car until I started working in Howard County in which there was no reliable public transit system to get me to work.

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?

Over the past few years, I have supported the efforts by the House Ways and Means Committee with proposing new revenue sources and closing tax loopholes.

As guidance and comparison with other state efforts, the Tax Handbook from the National Council of State Legislatures (<http://www.ncsl.org/documents/fiscal/TaxPolicyHandbook3rdEdition.pdf>) is a good source that outlines criteria for assessing tax policy in terms of reliability, equity, compliance, administrative, competitiveness, economic neutrality, and accountability.

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?

No, I don't have any plans to privatize state and local government jobs and services.

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 have concerns about 100% privatization of healthcare facilities throughout the state and its impact to access and affordability to residents. I agree that the Facilities Master Plan should be revisited to address loss of services and health care for Western Maryland and in Salisbury on the Eastern Shore.

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

Yes, increased private and public resources are needed to address the mental health crisis in Maryland and throughout the country. Since the 1980's with a federal focus on closing state-run mental facilities, resources for mental health care have dwindled. With increasing in Opioid addiction and COVID-19 stresses, more resources are needed to treat addictions and mental illness.

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?

It is imperative that we address the COVID-19 health crisis from a fact-based approach in which vaccines are a part of the best recovery plan. Managers and workers in both the public and private sector must agree that a fully vaccinated workforce with common exceptions is necessary to keep the workplace and community safe. Management and unions must work together to develop and implement plans to vaccinate the workforce.

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 treyolds@aftmd.org.



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