

# R. Lewis - 46- House

## 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 General Assembly and Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health

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## Party affiliation

Democrat

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

Yes in 2018. As I recall, I was endorsed by SEIU1199, SEIU500, LIUNA

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

Yes from 2017 to the 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 am seeking the endorsement of AFT Maryland because I believe that working people deserve family-supporting wages, high quality public education, workplace protections, affordable & quality universal healthcare, paid family leave, quality public transportation, sustainable energy and everything else that makes quality of life possible. I am the granddaughter, daughter and sibling of union members and it is my honor to always work for the benefit of working people.

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

I have not been a member of a labor union. I've never been employed in a position that made this an option. If I had, I would have joined!

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### 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 absolutely support the right to collective bargaining. If a bill comes before me, I will vote for it.

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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?

As you know, I voted for the minimum wage bill in 2019 and also voted to override the Governor's veto! I will continue to support legislation that ensures family-supporting, livable wage for working people, and this includes tying wages to inflation.

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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

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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?

The current administration's neglect and underinvestment in the public sector is unacceptable and, in fact, a danger to public health and safety. I sit on the Health & Govt Ops committee, which recently held briefings about this. I will continue to work for higher compensation and benefits for public sector workers.

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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

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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 i support defined benefit plans

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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 benefits for retirees, including prescription drug benefits. I cannot imagine any conditions under which I would support reducing retiree benefits - that is a non starter.

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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?

Of course I absolutely support recruitment and retention of public employees at all levels of government! I will support efforts to increase and retain staff. No brainer.

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### 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?

Baltimore city schools face many challenges. I am not an expert in education policy. From my perspective as a public health professional the key challenges include: 1) the oldest school buildings in the state, decrepit and dangerous to the health of children, teachers and staff; 2) inadequate resources to support students with needs, such as language/ESL, learning, mental/behavioral and physical disabilities and also the teachers and staff who work with these students; 3) public health measures, including communications, to keep everyone safe during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. I'm certain that there are other issues that I might have left out, which are very important, so any oversight of those issues lies with my still developing expertise in education policy. Regarding how I will help to solve these problems, I will continue to work for public health strategies and resources and policies, including continued new school construction/renovation, lead poisoning prevention, increased salaries/compensation/supports for teachers and staff, investments in pipelines for educators/staff and all the efforts to protect people from COVID-19. In addition, I will continue to listen to children, families, teachers and school staff about their concerns and needs.

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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 will always advocate and vote for education funding, as my record shows.

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?

That was an unfortunate oversight under Kirwan. I will support all efforts to increase paraprofessional wages. Regarding how else to show appreciation to these workers, I would ask them to tell us what they want, what would be meaningful to them, because they would know best. Then, I would try to give them what they identify as a meaningful expression of appreciation.

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?

I will follow the lead of education advocates and policy experts regarding how best to do this. I serve on a policy committee, not a budget committee and am not an expert in financing matters. I believe the various approaches include bonds and directed tax revenues. If a bill to increase funding for city school construction and renovation comes before me, I will vote for it.

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

During the early 2000's I was a leader in my neighborhood, which is called the Patterson Park Neighborhood. This is right on the border between East and Southeast Baltimore, one of the most racially- and economically-diverse part of our city. At that time, our neighborhood association started a grassroots effort to start a neighborhood school. In 2005 or so, the Patterson Park Public Charter School opened its doors. I'm glad to be one of the forty neighbors who founded this school, which today serves a student population that is 41% African American, 41% Latino and 12% white - just like our community. I'm very proud that this is a \*public school\* whose teachers are \*public employees\* covered by collective bargaining and worker protections. I am proud that this school remains under the umbrella and guidance of the local school board. This is important. Public Charter Schools should remain public. The public charter strategy worked for my community, but it might not work for other communities. I believe in public schools. Private charter schools are incredibly dangerous, and I vehemently oppose any weakening of our policies that would allow private entities to run our public schools. My opposition to voucher programs, such as BOOST, should make my position on this matter very clear.

16. School vouchers and the BOOST program. Maryland is a state that diverts public funding to send students to private schools - the BOOST school voucher program. While the program is not codified in law, the governor's budget every year has re-directed millions of dollars of public funds to these private schools, many of which discriminate against students and families who don't adhere to that school's beliefs such as gay marriage. If elected to office, what will be your plan regarding Maryland's BOOST school voucher program? Should the state ever give public dollars to students to attend a private school? Would you support tax breaks to corporations that fund student scholarships for private k-12 schools?

I absolutely oppose using public funds to pay for private education. I have voted against the BOOST legislation every time it has come up, and I will continue to vote against it, and against all bills like it. Public funds are for public goods, like our public 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?

Yes I will oppose all efforts to circumvent collective bargaining agreements

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?

This is a really important question. I believe the best people to answer the question of how to attract and retain teachers are the people who work in that field. My personal perspective is that better pay, more resources and supports, investing in the pipeline to bring more African American and specifically more African American men into the field - everything that we passed under Kirwan - are critically important tools for attracting and retaining teachers. I do not know what more we could do, beyond what was already passed in Kirwan in that regard, but I would love to hear from professionals in the field, because they know best. One other thought is that the COVID pandemic, with all of the associated externalities, is driving people out of the education workforce. We did not anticipate a global pandemic while developing Kirwan! So there is much we need to do in order to adapt the the challenges brought by the pandemic. I'm ready to listen and work for whatever makes sense to those at the front line, who are most affected.

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 support legislation to create a fully elected, or hybrid elected board in Baltimore city. I have no idea what is optimal, I would rely on people with expertise in this topic to advise. One of the things about being a legislator, something I have learned, is that I do not know everything and I don't have perfect solutions for every problem. I've also found that the best solutions are those that are developed in respectful collaboration with the people who are most affected. Since I'm not an education policy expert - I am did not grow up in Baltimore or in Maryland - so I look forward to listening to and working with those who are closest to this topic. But bottom line, even with all that, I know that jurisdictions with higher performing schools have all elected, or hybrid boards. Its working in other places. So that seems like a strategy we need to adopt in our city.

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?

Our kids need more time for learning, physical activity, arts & music and play - and less time spent taking tests. I believe that under Kirwan, we passed provisions to reduce the emphasis on testing. We need to keep pressing to reduce the emphasis on testing at the expense of every other benefit that schools offer.

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 a long, public track record of fighting for transit investment, starting with my establishment of Red Line Now PAC in 2011, the first ever grassroots political action committee to support transit ever in Baltimore, or anywhere in Maryland as best I am aware. My pronouncements and writings and media appearances on the absolutely critical need for transit are numerous, so I will not go into a long answer here. I have fought for three years to pass legislation to improve bus service. In fact I have a hearing on the bill in a few minutes, HB53. I support transit and will keep fighting for it in every way possible.

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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?

I support legislation to make tax code more fair

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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 oppose attempts to privatize public goods

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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 strongly oppose attempts to close public health care facilities, such as these hospitals. It is an absolutely terrible thing to do. I absolutely oppose outsourcing public goods to private entities.

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 support increasing all resources to address mental health and addiction

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?

For lack of time to go into this at length, I support all efforts to ensure public health approach to this pandemic and all other pandemics. I am a public health professional with over 20 years experience working in 14 countries on infectious disease prevention. Public health is the way to go with this virus and all others. Collaboration across sectors is essential. Failure to collaborate will continue to lead to harm.

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).



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