

Wells - 40 - 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.



Candidate Information

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

Employer

Baltimore D.C Metro Building Trades Unions

Party affiliation

Democrat

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

Yes, SEIU 1199,, Metro Baltimore AFL CIO, Baltimore D.C. Metro Building Trades Council, UFCW local 400, LIUNA, SEIU 32BJ , United Brotherhood of Carpenters, UNITEHere

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

Yes. I am currently a Maryland State Delegate serving my first term in the General Assembly

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?

Supporting organized labor and workers right to collectively bargain is my number one priority. I have been committed to this even before being elected. During my tenure I hav supported several pieces of legislation to strengthen and expand collective bargaining rights of workers that AFT Maryland representts.

In the 2021 session I took on legislation to make Baltimore City School Board an elected board as well as expansion of the voting rights of the Student Member of the Board. I worked with coalition partners, members of AFT MD and BTU to bring BCPS School Commissioners and the Mayor to the table to identify a path forward for a bill during the 2022 legislative session.

As one of only a few members of organized labor serving in the legislature, I am committed to supporting orgnaized labor and to educating my cilleagues about the challenges facing organized labor. Moreover, I also understand how important our teachers, paraprofessionals and additional state and city employees that AFT Maryland represents are to our state and our communties. It is important to me that these workers who make our schools, state, and city keep moving are able to work with dignitiy and work safely.

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

Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 486

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?

Absolutely. I have been supportive of previous bills to help adjuncts have access to collective bargaining and I will continue to support/introduce legislation to allow additional public employees right to collective bargaining with their employer.

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?

I will absolutely support or be the lead sponsor on a bill to tie minimum wage to inflation. The cost of living continues to increase exponentially and the minimum wage has not kept up. We must ensure that the rate at least keeps pace and you have my full support.

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?

Absolutely. Having an impartial arbitrator levels the playing field for both parties. This is ultimately the goal of collective bargaining negotiations. I will support legislation to implement binding arbitration.

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 understaffing that you highlight has a tremendous impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of public run agencies and programs. Increasing the compensation level is critical to ensuring that we maintain employees and attract employees who might otherwise choose the private sector. With the budget surplus that the state has, I would be supportive of budget legislation and I will also support any ask of the Executive branch. As always, I invite your partnership and recommendations on a solution and path forward.

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?

Absolutely. Employer sponsored health insurance can often have financial burdens that employees must shoulder and these costs dig into the pockets of workers. Additionally, there are levels of coverage that employers avoid in order to pad their profits and pass more onto workers. I know first hand how the pay check deductions or how the limitation in coverage of services can impact a workers pocket. It is important that there is transparency so workers can negotiate for better coverage and have access to data and information that can level the playing field in negotiations.

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?

I support keeping public employee retirement plans as defined benefit/pension largely because of the guarantee on income and the inconsistency of income for retirees with only a 401k. Additionally as wages and benefits stagnate and cost of living increases it is so difficult for workers to save enough for retirement on their own.

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?

Maintaining affordable prescription drug coverage is important especially for retired workers who are aging in place across Maryland. This is an issue that I recognize has both federal and state interventions. I will admit this is an issue that I need to have further education on to ensure that I can support workers and to ensure I can effectively advocate for retirees with leadership and colleagues.

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?

During my time as a legislator I can say that I have witnessed first hand how understaffing is a critical issue to many agencies, impacting adequate service provision, oversight, enforcement and accountability. I wholeheartedly support efforts to increase recruitment and retention of qualified state, county and municipal employees. Additionally, I am committed to solutions to ensure prioritization of funding for essential staffing.

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?

1. Ensuring adequate funding for Baltimore City Schools from the state and the city
2. Addressing the quality of our school facilities including overall modernization and HVAC
3. Addressing closure and declining enrollment

In my first term I worked diligently to support the passage of the Blueprint for Maryland's future. I will be working to ensure that our schools also get the necessary funding to modernize and upgrade additional schools across the district. Currently for constituents in the 40th, there has been schools slated to be closed (Eutaw Marshburn and Stuart Mill), both are community schools that have had significant impact on educational outcomes of students, I am advocating to keep these schools open and to have BCPS work with the communities to come up with a plan. Additionally, I as well as other colleagues are working to get resources to improve the quality of our building stock. I am working with City Delegation colleagues and the mayor to ensure that the city has the support they need to meet the local match for the blueprint. Addressing declining enrollment requires several approaches. We are working to increase development and retain residents, additionally we are also working to maintain schools especially those that offer key support such as Community Schools, Judy Centers and expansion of early childhood development. I have also been working to support our CTE programs and partnerships with registered apprenticeships and industry partners to show the success and value of CTE education and programming to our schools and communities.

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?

The state currently has a 2 billion+ surplus in addition to our 2 billion+ structural surplus with both being opportunities to forward fund the Blueprint. I also believe that we can utilize a new Governor to commit a portion of the budget while also leaning on the comptroller to identify additional streams of tax revenue. Lastly, I believe that we must identify direct revenue for education and training from Maryland's robust network of businesses and industry. Our state continues to be exceptionally supportive and friendly to businesses in the way of tax breaks and rebates and I believe that they still remain an untapped resource yet they have some of the deepest interest in our young people accessing a world-class education. Perhaps we must create a public education and training fund that businesses pay directly into, this could also be paid by special tax assessment on education for projects receiving tax increment financing (TIF) or designated as payment in lieu of taxes (PILOTs)

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?

The state can better show its appreciation by increases the pay for PSRPs. There is a need to expand the coverage of the Blueprint to ensure adequate support and pay for PSRPs

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

As a member of the Baltimore City Delegation I will continue to advocate for state funding and appropriation to support Baltimore City Schools for renovation of our buildings

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?

The oversight of charter schools should never be weakened and their employees should be considered staff of the local school board. Additionally many charter and private schools receive public funding and continually seek additional public funding which should also make them subject to the local school board.

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?

This is a subject area that I am still grappling to understand. I recognize that some of my constituents find value in the BOOST program yet I also know that the majority of my constituents do not attend private schools accepting BOOST vouchers. The reality is that programs like BOOST take money away from our public schools which are far more accessible. I would not be supportive of legislation that increases the funding at the expense of public school funding. Additionally I would not support private businesses receiving a tax break for supporting private education as this is not an equitable way to support education. Lastly, Baltimore already provides ample tax deferrals that impact revenue and the city's contribution to education, this is another reason why I would not support incentivizing tax breaks to private businesses.

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 will work toward and support all efforts to prevent public schools from circumventing collective bargaining agreements by hiring employees from non-profits. I do not believe a school should hire an uncredentialed or non-unionized employee. I would like to understand this issue and how I can prevent this from happening in the future.

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?

Improving pay is a big aspect as well as the quality of the facilities/buildings of instruction. From my conversations I've had with teachers, I believe that they also want to feel like their concerns and feedback are heard and implemented in policy.

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?

Yes, I have previously introduced legislation to move Baltimore City to a hybrid board. I have worked with AFT Maryland staff and members to identify a viable pathway to a hybrid board and I am committed to working with partners to identify a viable path to an additional elected board

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

Standardized testing remains the golden standard of assessment despite data showing that it is limited in showcasing student achievement. I would welcome learning more about testing that is less effective and opportunities to use non standardized measures to evaluate student achievement.

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?

Baltimore needs rail centered transportation to reduce the time that residents spend on public transportation. The bus plan that the Governor put in place has not been effective in getting people where they need to be on time. The state has underfunded public transportation in Baltimore and needs to dedicate funding to key rail projects to connect the city and region to the places riders need to access including students. I am working closely with the Baltimore City Delegation to push the Governor to secure federal infrastructure investment for the Red Line.

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 would absolutely support or sponsor legislation that will make our state tax code more fair. We must close loopholes as they leave revenue for key services like public education on the table.

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 would not support any efforts to privatize local governments or local school systems as these efforts are a part of efforts to undermine collective bargaining

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 would work in collaboration with organized labor to keep these facilities open and to prevent outsourcing of 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?

Absolutely. We need to ensure equity in access

26. Vaccines and working with unions to return to work. The COVID-19 pandemic has of course been a challenge for the safety of Maryland residents and our members who have been returning to work. While we hope that the worst of the pandemic is behind us, we know from past experiences with mutations of this novel virus, recovery and a return to normalcy may not be linear. Vaccines must be a part of a comprehensive strategy to get past the pandemic, as well as an important tool for fighting public health threats in the future. What role do you believe unions and management have in constructing a plan to vaccinate their workforce? What in your mind is the way unions and management can work together to make sure represented employees are offered a COVID-19 vaccine?

Unions and management are crucial to encouraging/incentivizing vaccination and organizing vaccination drives. I think education and incentive are the best ways for the union to increase vaccination of membership.

Thank You!

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



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