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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

Horizon Foundation

Party affiliation

Democrat

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

No

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

No

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 a social justice advocate and public health leader who has a heart for the community. I am a proud K-12 public school graduate and was raised by two Detroit Public School (DPS) educators who changed the lives of hundreds of DPS students for close to sixty years combined. They were also proud members of Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) and I learned about the importance of unions and their power at a very young age. I witnessed my mother attending union meetings and I hit the pavement with my mom when DFT was out on strike in the 1990s, making demands to have a contract that provided better benefits, pay and working conditions. In 2013, Detroit Public Schools elected to switch health insurance carriers to HMOs, which led to a drastic cut in pay and no choices for educators to choose their health care plans. As a result, DFT went to work. While it took time, it was only because of DFT's successful litigation that led to former and current employees receiving compensation for the poor and intentional backdoor dealings of the administration.

I know and understand the importance of the AFT as this union has made a significant impact in our family and in my life. I am someone who has worked within the nexus of civil rights and public health during my time at NAACP and consistently fights for racial equity and justice through policy and systems change in my ongoing work. I am an advocate you can depend on who has a solid foundation and looks forward to building relationship with all members across AFT.

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

No. Unfortunately, I have not had the opportunity to join a union, but if I did, I would have been a member. Unions are the cornerstone of protecting workers rights and make sure workers are supported, protected, and championed.

Questions on Worker Rights

3. Expanding the right to collective bargaining. Currently, a number of state and public school employees in Maryland have collective bargaining. However, many still do not. For example, state judiciary branch workers; grad students, adjuncts, and full-time faculty in the University of Maryland System; faculty at our state's community colleges; coordinators in community schools; and many county and city librarians; do not have the right to bargain collectively. If elected, will you sponsor and/or support legislation to grant these public employees the right to engage in collective bargaining with their employer?

Yes, I believe that the thousands of employees described here should have collective bargaining. I would sponsor and support this legislation. We must work to support these public employees and ensure they have the right to collective bargaining.

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 applaud the work that has been done to increase the minimum wage, but we must do more. I am in support of legislation that would tie our minimum wage to inflation to ensure employees have a livable wage. We must also do more to expedite the pace of this increase to ensure Maryland does not fall behind.

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, I support binding arbitration for contract negotiations to hold employers accountable to come to the table in earnest and commit to coming to a resolution. Having a third-party voice and decision maker, that is objective and impartial, is necessary. I would support strengthening these rights and make this available for those in my District and across Maryland.

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?

Our state must use the resources we have to better support the people who continue to serve our communities and make improvements to our infrastructure. In addition to funding, our state must be competitive in salaries, benefits and other wrap-around support services, and take assessments to ensure we are keeping up with the private sector. As someone with student loans who is a part of the federal student loan forgiveness program, Maryland must do more to provide relief to those with student loans. Strengthening existing opportunities for student loan forgiveness through state employment is another solution as well as supporting federal forgiveness programs.

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?

I believe the monies refunded should be given back to employees or create a program that would benefit the employee like a wellness program to encourage a healthy work culture. I am supportive of legislation that would require transparency related to claims, rebates and refunds.

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 defined benefit/pension plans for public employees as this will allow greater stability and retirement planning for employees. Even though many employees may be unsure or afraid of making the decision when is the right time to retire, at this point in time, this remains the best option.

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?

Absolutely. I support retirees having full health benefits and do not believe there should be a reduction in these benefits during retirement. Health care including prescription drug coverage should not be a concern or burden for retirees. Under no circumstances would I agree to a reduction in benefits for retirees.

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, we must bolster our recruitment and retention efforts and tap into all of our educational institutions at all levels including community colleges, HBCUs, trade schools and apprenticeship programs. Paired with recruitment and retention, we must prioritize funding to close these gaps and address infrastructure needs that translate to competitive salaries with benefits.

Public Education in Baltimore City

11. General [for candidates running for Governor, Comptroller, or for office in Baltimore City legislative districts only]: What do you think are the three biggest problems facing Baltimore City public schools? If elected, how will you solve these problems?

12. Education funding. The state has enacted the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, an ambitious plan developed by bipartisan education experts and stakeholders. The Blueprint will provide a world-class education our students need. Despite hand-wringing from the current governor, the state has the funding to pay for the Blueprint through Fiscal Year 2026. Beginning in FY 2027, the state will have to make decisions regarding revenues to continue to provide every student in the state the education they need. If elected, how would you propose the state fund the Blueprint? How will you advocate for these necessary revenues?

Beyond FY26, we must take a look at our tax code and see what changes need to occur to ensure corporations and companies are paying their fair share in taxes and remove special tax breaks. We should also consider looking at other streams of revenue like sugary drink taxes or increasing the state's tobacco tax. Through sports betting and continued casino revenue this could potentially be another source of revenue. I would partner with key advocates including AFT to identify solutions based on polling data and other research to push for the necessary revenues.

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?

All personnel who serve our students and families must be prioritized. If elected, PSRP compensation would be a priority and consider this an equity issue. To show our appreciation, we must continue fighting for a living wage, strengthening career pathways and ensuring their voices are elevated at decision-making tables.

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

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

I believe public charter schools should be under the authority of the local school board. And the oversight of these schools should be strengthened, not weakened.

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

Public funding should not be used for private school education. If elected, I would seek to reduce funding for this program and move to phase it out. Tax breaks should not be given to corporations to fund student scholarships for private 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?

Yes, I will work to ensure there is greater enforcement and accountability of public schools to hire qualified employees. I believe that hiring uncredentialed and non-unionized employees is unacceptable.

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?

As previously shared, I would work to bolster our recruitment and retention efforts. As a daughter of parents who received calls to go back into the classroom, I believe we must give those who have served our students and families for decades and opportunity to enjoy their retirement and focus our efforts on strengthening the pipeline of educators. I would work to improve working conditions, make sure teachers are adequately paid, receive a cost of living increase, provide the necessary resources for comprehensive professional development opportunities and offer high quality-teacher preparation programs without student debt.

19. Elected versus an appointed school board [for candidates running for Governor, Comptroller, or for office in Baltimore City legislative districts only]. In 2022, the citizens of Baltimore city will finally be allowed to elect two additional members to the school board. Baltimore city is currently the only jurisdiction in the state whose entire School Board of Commissioners is appointed. In 2022 the board will expand from 10 to 12 seats, with the two additional seats being elected rather than appointed. Of the 23 other Maryland county school boards, 19 are fully elected, and four are an appointed/elected hybrid, with only Wicomico County having more appointed than elected positions. If elected, would you support legislation transitioning Baltimore city to a fully elected or hybrid board with the majority of seats being elected? What is the optimal structure for Baltimore City's School Board and why?

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

I believe we should better balance standardized tests and instruction time by working to reduce the number of standardized tests for our students. Some of our standardized tests are needed. However, it should not be prioritized at the expense of critical instruction time that prepares our students for the future. Standardized tests should be used as means to see what a school and teachers need to focus on, not on how well schools are doing.

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?

Communities of color need greater access to a diverse range of transportation options like the red line, not solely relying on the expansion of bus services. The cancellation of the red line is an example of systemic racism and an illustration of how zoning, planning and transportation policies have shaped our communities. This expansion has not been effective and our state must provide greater investment in our transportation infrastructure and modes of transportation like rail, biking and walking, and micro-mobility. I also applaud our legislature for passing and overriding the veto of the Transit Safety and Invest Act that will provide critical funding to meet capital needs of the MTA.

22. Revenues and closing unfair tax loopholes. In order for the state, county, city, and local school system to continue to provide the services to Maryland residents that they deserve, do you believe the state must work to close loopholes in our tax structure? From things like instituting combined reporting (where out-of-state corporations no longer avoid paying taxes on the revenues they generate in Maryland) or a carried interest tax (where wealthy hedge fund managers pay the same income rate that the rest of Maryland residents pay), would you introduce and/or support legislation that would make our state tax code more fair?

Yes, I believe we must close loopholes in our tax structure and support these and other pieces of legislation to make sure our tax code is fair. For far too long, out of state corporations reap the benefits of doing business in Maryland without paying their fair share of taxes as well as hedge fund managers.

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 be supportive of these plans. These companies have no accountability but to the board or entity that they serve. As a daughter of former educators, I know first hand what it means to care and work in the community you live in. A school district should reach out to individuals who want to serve residents, working in the community and be accountable to the people they serve, and not the board of directors or shareholders. We need to have a level of accountability that makes sure we are adequately serving residents and being held accountable by them.

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 not support the closure of these state facilities, especially in areas where access to health care may be limited. Plus, transferring patients to private facilities could translate to higher out-of-pocket costs. I also do not support outsourcing 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?

We must do more to ensure all Maryland residents are able to access the mental and behavioral health supports that they need. As a Sr. Program Officer at the Horizon Foundation, I applaud the work we are doing with many of our partners across the region, through the Greater Baltimore Regional Integrated Crisis System (GBRICS), which will invest \$45M over five years that will better coordinate and expand capacity to respond to behavioral health crises across Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Carroll County and Howard County. Overall, as a state we must make the necessary investments in our public health infrastructure to address mental and behavioral health along with addiction treatment services.

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 must be at the table to help shape employer plans related to COVID-19 vaccines and COVID-19 protocols. We need to make sure that employees understand the way to get past this pandemic with getting vaccinated and boosted and access to testing. Unions and management should work together to provide access to COVID-19 vaccines and ongoing testing to keep everyone safe. Unions and management should also take into consideration that some employees may have medical and religious exemptions that should be considered when negotiating COVID-19 protocols.

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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