

# Ziegler-9A- 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

Carroll Mill Farm (self-employed)

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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?

Maryland State and D.C. AFL-CIO, MSEA, AFSCME, UA Local 486 Plumbers and Steamfitters

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

no

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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?

If I had to pick a single issue that is most important to me, it would be education. I serve on the Board of Trustees of Howard Community College, on the Education Committee of the Howard County NAACP, and volunteered for many years as a literacy tutor at South Baltimore Learning Center. Schools quite literally would not exist without teachers, paraprofessionals, and the many other professions that work in and for our school systems, and yet we have allowed the burnout they feel to reach crisis levels. If there ever was a time when teachers and other school personnel have needed organized support, this is that time.

I am running to beat two far-right and strongly anti-union candidates who think the free market can and does solve all problems. I think it's clear that is not the case, and strongly support organized labor.

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

no

### 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 will. Faculty at our state's community colleges will soon have collective bargaining, and as a community college Trustee, I am keenly aware of the balancing act we must engage in to allocate always scarce resources as well as possible. That said, I believe in 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?

Yes I will. Wages at lower end of the scale have been stagnant for decades, and although inflation was low, it adds up over the years. At the moment it is really significant, making the issue even more important.

#### 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 would.

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?

Bearing in mind that compensation is much more than a salary (see question 8, for example), there is no question that numerous public agencies have very high vacancy rates. I would explore the potential of requiring some relatively high percentage of jobs be filled, which would in turn require offering competitive compensation packages.

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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?

There is no excuse for any lack of transparency on the part of any public agency. When you handle other people's money, they deserve to know where it's going. In this case it should be used to lower premiums or raise benefits.

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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?

In theory, I would like to say "yes", provided that it is considered as part of the overall compensation package, but have to admit that I just don't know what the numbers are, and I'm well aware they can be very, very big numbers. I would say yes, if it is possible to do so going forward, and absolutely we need to keep agreements made in the past.

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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?

The State of Maryland needs to keep its agreements to it's employees. I would agree to take a look at a reduction in benefits only if federal legislation passed that dramatically reduced the cost of prescription drugs to something in line with costs in most wealthy countries-- which is to say cut them at least in half.

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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?

Absolutely. People complain about government inefficiency, and then fulfill their prophesy by saddling public agencies with ancient technology and salary levels that simply are not competitive. Then we complain when we can't get the service we need.

### 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) The expectation that schools can solve every problem poverty creates. Schools are a good physical location from which to deliver added services. That doesn't the added services should come out of the education budget or be the responsibility of school personnel who already have demanding full-time jobs.
- 2) Teacher turnover - with all that that implies.
- 3) Crumbling buildings/maintenance issues

This is a longer discussion of course, but the short answer is money, with heavy duty oversight and accountability.

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 answer is going to have to be tax increases, because, while I firmly believe that the Blueprint will eventually not only pay for itself, but in fact be a tremendous economic engine for the state, that is going to take a significant amount of time. I will advocate with data, of which there is a huge amount, showing the incredible return on investment in education, starting with the 7 dollars we got back for every dollar we spent on the GI bill, not to mention the doctors and accountants and other useful professionals we created.

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 it will, for many reasons, starting with the need to attract the best 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?

N/A



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?

Charter schools absolutely need local school board oversight and teachers and staff should be considered employees of the school board.

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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?

In general, I am not in favor of public funds going to private schools. A possible exception might include students with special needs who could not reasonably be accommodated in a public school.

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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?

Administrators should, of course, follow the law, and employees need to be held to the same accountability standards. There might be very rare circumstances when hiring a non-union, uncredentialed employee might make sense, such as someone who could translate a very obscure language, for example.

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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 terrible problem which the Kirwan commission has, I think, done a good job of addressing. Teacher's need to be paid more, respected more by society in general, and provided with reasonable work environments, to include reasonable workloads, assistance in the classroom, heat, air conditioning, hot and cold running water with no lead in it, etc., AND last but not least, some freedom in the classroom!

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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?

N/A

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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?

We have far too much standardized testing. Clearly we need some, but it should be rare. Standardized test taking is not a useful life skill in most of adulthood. Let's teach actual educational material instead.

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## 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?

Bring back the Red Line!

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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?

Absolutely. These are two good examples and there are many more.

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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?

That would only make sense to me if we are talking about a very short term situation that requires specialized skills or equipment that it doesn't make sense to buy.

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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 have to admit ignorance of these specific situations, but in general, health care in rural areas is a very serious issue. We are losing hospitals in rural areas hand over fist and it is a very serious problem. This is an area where the free market may not produce what we need and the government is going to have to buy some needed facilities and services.

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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?

A resounding yes. I will never forget interviewing Carroll County's Sheriff, who also serves as the chief of police, and having him tell me that EVERY SINGLE prisoner in his jail was on some kind of psychoactive medication. This has been a growing problem since the late seventies when we closed so many mental institutions and changed the rules about keeping long term mental patients.

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?

I love this question- it's a great way to think about it. While I would love to just round up every single American over the age of 5 and stick a vaccine in their arm, I recognize that's not possible! I also don't think shaming or brow beating people is likely to be successful, but unions have a very positive role to play as trusted sources of information who are on the employees side and work for them, not for management. Different points of view and the same objective should be a powerful combination.

**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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