

Clippinger - House - 46



AFT-Maryland Candidate Questionnaire for 2022 Candidates

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—whose members work for the city—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 region and 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 Metropolitan Baltimore AFL-CIO Council and the Maryland and DC AFL-CIO State Federation; the council and state federation will announce its final endorsements in early 2022. However, because we are a large contingency within the Baltimore 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. It may be returned to

Todd Reynolds, Political Coordinator
AFT-Maryland, AFL-CIO
5800 Metro Drive, Suite 100
Baltimore, MD 21215

Fax: 410-764-3008
Email: treynolds@aftmd.org

Please return this completed questionnaire no later than January 7th, 2022. If you have any questions, please contact Todd Reynolds, AFT-Maryland Political Coordinator, at 410-764-3030.

2022 Candidate Questionnaire
AFT-Maryland

Candidate for House of Delegates
Candidate's name Luke Clippinger
Address
Phone
Email
Occupation Assistant State's Attorney, Anne Arundel County

May we make your answers to our questionnaire public? Yes

Party affiliation: Democrat

Have you received an endorsement from a labor union? If so, which ones?

In previous election cycles, I have been endorsed by the AFL-CIO, the ILA, AFSCME and many others. I have received the endorsement of the AFL this cycle as well, along with AFSCME.

Have you ever held elected office? When?

I have been a Delegate since 2011.

General

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?

AFT-Maryland should support my campaign because I have supported the rights of Marylanders to collectively bargain since I was first elected in 2011. I hope to continue my support of organized labor in the General Assembly in my next term.

2. Have you ever been a member of a union? If yes, please give the union name, local number, and dates active.

No. My father was a Baltimore County Public Schools Teacher and was a member of TABCO.

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 support legislation to grant public employees the right to engage in collective bargaining. I was an early supporter of collective bargaining rights for Public Defenders. As the Chair of the House Judiciary Committee, I generally do not sponsor legislation that is going to be heard in another committee, so I am unlikely to sponsor legislation in this area.

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 would consider an increase to the minimum wage after the wage reaches \$15 in 2025. If legislation was approved by the Economic Matters Committee that provided COLA increases to the minimum wage over time, I would support that. As the Chair of the House Judiciary Committee, I generally do not sponsor legislation that is going to be heard in another committee, so I am unlikely to sponsor legislation in this area.

State service/public employee issues and rights

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?

I support binding arbitration for state employees. As the chair of the Judiciary Committee, I am not familiar with the details of how binding arbitration would work, so I would rely on the Appropriations Committee to figure out those details. I would be happy to hear from AFT members regarding those details after the legislation is introduced.

6. Public employee compensation.

Under the current governor's administration, it is rare for state workers to get the compensation they deserve, even though the state has often had a budget surplus. As a result, too many public agencies have staffing problems, as many employees leave for better compensation in the private sector. What is your plan to assure state, county, and municipal employees (including workers employed at BCCC, the Maryland School for the Deaf, and all public, state-supported higher education institutions throughout the state) that their compensation levels will be financially competitive with the private sector?

I work as an Assistant State's Attorney in Anne Arundel County, so I am also a public sector employee. My office has seen a number of challenges over the last two years as people have been able to find more lucrative employment elsewhere. I would support efforts to make public sector employment more competitive, potentially including student loan forgiveness for employees in departments where vacancies are particularly acute.

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 state and local jurisdictions should use surplus funds to lower the premiums employees and retirees pay towards their health insurance.

As the Chair of the House Judiciary Committee, I generally do not sponsor legislation that is going to be heard in another committee, so I am unlikely to sponsor legislation in this area.

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. Defined benefit plans provide more security for our retirees.

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 issue is subject to ongoing litigation. In the meantime, retirees continue to receive the same prescription drug benefits they have always enjoyed. I voted for legislation that would have kept the out of pocket expenses for retirees at the exact same rate as they are paying now. Additionally, while the continued health of our retirees and our pension funds is the most important issue, the ongoing litigation has the possibility of creating new contract law that each branch of state government needs to carefully consider.

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?

State agencies cannot provide strong regulation or full services without the necessary staff. I believe the state needs to do a better job of both retaining current staff, especially in agencies like the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and the Department of Juvenile Services while also reevaluating the barriers to entry for job applicants. We should take a critical look at the hiring standards in place to determine if they are necessary, beneficial, or lead to unintended consequences of understaffed agencies.

Public Education

11. General: What do you think are the major challenges facing Maryland's public education today? If elected, how would you help solve these problems?

The pandemic has negatively impacted our public education system in many ways. Virtual learning was not successful for all students, and the resulting learning loss has further exacerbated gaps between students in different parts of the state.

I will continue to vote to fully fund our public schools, including through my support for the Blueprint and my support for a second tranche of school reconstruction money for Baltimore City. As the Blueprint is fully funded over the next several years, I will support efforts to ensure we are properly funding the innovative programs that are required under the Blueprint.

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 was proud to vote for the budget to expand funding for the Blueprint in the most recent legislative session. I will continue to support efforts to fully fund the Blueprint, however, I am uncomfortable identifying specific funding mechanisms in a budget that is four years away.

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?

As the chair of the Judiciary Committee, I am not as familiar with the compensation of PSRPs in general, or as it relates to the funding in the Blueprint. I would be happy to hear from paraprofessionals and school related personnel in my district - particularly as to the challenges they face in our classrooms and the pay they receive for their work.

14. Public School Construction and Renovation.

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 would support another round of bonding authority or other funding for the next round of new City Schools. The new schools across the district at Patterson, Graceland Park, John Ruhrah, Arundel and Cherry Hill are incredible additions to their neighborhoods and have been positive to the students of those schools as well.

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 school teachers should be employees of the local school board. Oversight of these schools should not be 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?

I oppose BOOST and voted against Republican attempts to restore BOOST funding.

The State Government should not provide vouchers for private school education as those vouchers divert funding from public schools. As a member of the LBGT caucus, I was also troubled by reports from earlier this year that one school that had received vouchers also discriminated against LBGT Marylanders.

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 not credentialed 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 do not support efforts to circumvent existing 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?

As I mentioned before, I work as an Assistant State's Attorney in Anne Arundel County, so I am also a public sector employee. My office has seen a number of challenges over the last two years as people have been able to find more lucrative employment elsewhere. I would support efforts to make public sector employment more competitive, potentially including student loan forgiveness for employees in departments where vacancies are particularly acute.

19. Elected versus an appointed school board.

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 voted for the existing hybrid school board, and I would consider voting for a fully elected school board. I would like to speak with AFT members more about this issue, should the legislation be brought forward again as I would like to further consider what the optimal structure for the Baltimore City School Board, particularly as the Baltimore City School Board does not have the ability to raise revenue..

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?

Students do not learn effectively when they spend time during their regular class day to practice taking standardized tests. I would support efforts to limit the number of standardized tests students would be required to take.

Vision for Baltimore Metropolitan Area and Maryland in General

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 spoken with many constituents regarding Baltimore Link. Some constituents have seen modest improvements in their commute, but more have seen, at best, no significant improvement. I would support plans to revive the Red Line as part of a regional transportation plan to give Baltimoreans more efficient and effective options to get around.

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 support legislation to support combined reporting or a carried interest tax if it were passed by the House Ways and Means Committee. As the Chair of the House Judiciary Committee, I generally do not sponsor legislation that is going to be heard in another committee, so I am unlikely to sponsor legislation in this area.

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 generally oppose outsourcing and privatizing public services. Outsourcing costs more money in the long run, and does not always produce better results.

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 generally oppose outsourcing state, county and city operations. Outsourcing costs more money in the long run, and does not always produce better results. I am not familiar with the plans to close the facilities in Hagerstown and Salisbury, and I would be happy to speak with AFT members to learn more about the recommendations in the plan.

25. State's mental health and addiction crisis.

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

Yes.

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 believe unions and management should coordinate their efforts with local health departments to build out plans to vaccinate employees. I am surprised that does not already happen, and would be happy to convene the different groups if necessary to help.