

Feldmark - House - 12A

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 May 12th, 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

MGA / Howard County Government

Party affiliation

Democratic

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

Yes. In 2018, I was endorsed by MSEA (HCEA & TABCO), AFL-CIO, LIUNA, AFSCME Maryland Council 3, IAFF Local 2000, Baltimore County FOP Lodge 4, and Howard County FOP Lodge 21. So far in 2022, I have been endorsed by MSEA/HCEA.

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

I am currently serving my first term in the House of Delegates.

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?

In my first term, I have established myself as an effective legislator and advocate for my constituents, demonstrating my ability to collaborate on solutions without compromising on values. I have consistently supported and sponsored legislation to strengthen and expand workers' rights, from the Federal Shutdown Paycheck Protection Act to expanding whistleblower protections for Department of Juvenile Services employees to requiring good labor standards for tax credits. I am proud of my record and look forward to continuing to work with labor on our shared goals and values.

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 continue to support legislation to expand collective bargaining rights for all employees. I would also like to see us enact legislation to simply give all public employees the same rights to organize that private sector employees have. We should not have to keep fighting the same legislative battle for each different group of public employees.

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 support indexing the minimum wage to keep pace with inflation. I think the fundamental issue is that someone who works full time should be able to enjoy some basic level of financial stability. I spent a lot of time reviewing the United Way's ALICE Report when I was working on my Job Creation Tax Credit legislation. There is not a single jurisdiction in Maryland where \$15 per hour offers a single adult financial stability, or even enough for a basic survival budget if that adult happens to be supporting a child as well. I also think our living wage law needs to be revisited. At the very least, the wage amounts need to be updated, but I would also want to reconsider some of the policy decisions about exemptions from the requirement and whether or not the tiered levels are appropriate.

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 believe binding arbitration is a critical tool to help ensure serious, meaningful, good faith negotiations and to resolve differences which persist through those negotiations. I was proud to work on the legislation establishing binding arbitration for police officers and firefighters in Howard County, and I believe it should be available for all public employees.

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?

We need to invest in our workforce. It is both the right thing to do for our employees, who deserve fair compensation, and absolutely critical to maintaining a high quality of public services. I am hopeful that with the legislature's new budget authority we can make significant progress on compensation next term. We need to offer competitive wages and should be doing regular assessments to compare our compensation to other sectors.

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 money refunded to the health fund should stay in the health fund where it can help mitigate future cost increases or support programs to increase employee wellness and decrease overall future costs for the fund and for employees. Yes, I support full transparency in how all public funds are managed and spent, and where that transparency is lacking, I would support legislation to ensure it.

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 strongly believe that public employee pension systems should remain defined benefit plans. A defined benefit plan offers a more secure retirement, and I believe our retirees who dedicated their careers to public service deserve that security.

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?

I support full prescription health benefits for State retirees. If the courts don't require the State to maintain full prescription drug coverage, then I hope the General Assembly will choose to do so. Ideally, for the good of many more seniors across Maryland and the entire country, I would like to see Medicare Part D fixed so that it is in fact full prescription drug coverage. In the meantime, however, we still have an obligation to the retirees who spent their careers serving Maryland.

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, understaffing is a serious problem across State government. This staffing crisis puts significant strain on the existing staff creating working conditions which range from unfair to downright dangerous, and those conditions eventually make it harder to retain the remaining staff members. Adequate funding is essential, but only part of the answer when we have a Governor who refuses to fill positions that are funded. Hopefully, we will have a better partner next term, but I am also open to any suggestions for legislative solutions to make sure we don't find ourselves in this position again.

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?

Maryland could raise significant revenue by implementing measures such as combined reporting, the throwback rule, and taxing carried interest as well as cleaning up a variety of tax exemptions, deductions, credits, and outright loopholes to make sure corporations pay their fair share in taxes. This would give us the ability to fully fund the Blueprint moving forward without impacting the average Maryland family.

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?

Paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel keep our schools running and are terribly undercompensated. I was proud to cosponsor HB 1349 and remain committed to increasing wages for these essential employees.

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?

It is absolutely critical to maintain appropriate standards, safeguards, and oversight for charter schools. Charter schools must be under the control of local school boards and held to the same standards as traditional public schools. Enrollment must be open to all students, and discrimination must be prohibited. Teachers must be certificated and should be employees of the local school system with the same collective bargaining rights as their colleagues in traditional public schools.

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 believe the BOOST program should be terminated. Public dollars intended for education should be directed to public schools. Diverting funding to private schools pulls resources away from our responsibility to provide a high-quality free education for all Maryland youth. Tax breaks for corporations giving scholarships for private schools offer a more convoluted route to subsidization but ultimately achieve the same diversion of public funds to private schools, and therefore, I would oppose them.

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 strongly believe that collective bargaining agreements must be honored and that violations of those agreements must be addressed. Our certification and credentialing processes for educators must be followed - they are in place to protect our children and ensure their quality education.

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?

Educators are and have traditionally been severely underpaid. Correcting that issue is one of the goals of the Blueprint and is an absolutely critical step. Beyond compensation, however, working conditions must also be improved...class size, workload, increasing requirements, lack of paraprofessional support, and lack of adequate planning time are among the challenges educators face. All of these challenges call for higher levels of staffing, yet the shortage of educators is unfortunately pushing staffing levels in the wrong direction, further exacerbating those challenges and making retention even more difficult, especially with the stresses of COVID layered on as well. We must make meaningful improvements in compensation, working conditions, and professional respect to make education a career path that more educators will want to stay in.

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 am concerned about over-reliance on standardized testing for a variety of reasons including the time it takes away from instruction, the cultural bias in testing, and the danger in using a single measure to define success. Especially in light of the opportunity gaps that exist in our society and our schools, I think evaluation efforts should give more consideration to the growth of individual students. Quality learning is about so much more than test performance, and rating schools based on test scores is incredibly harmful. It completely misses the fact that there are excellent schools where students face significant challenges, and unfortunately, such ratings end up contributing to a system of self-selecting segregation which further exacerbates disparities.

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?

The cancellation of the Red Line rail project was a tremendous mistake, not only for Baltimore but also for the entire region. The Baltimore Link system is inadequate, and I believe it is not too late to correct our course and revive plans for the Red Line. We need to make meaningful capital investments to expand and modernize our fleet as well as operating investments to increase service and decrease wait times. We must make a significant shift in our transportation budgets to prioritize transit and pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure improvements.

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

I support a variety of reforms to make our tax system fairer and less regressive, including measures such as combined reporting, the throwback rule, and taxing carried interest to make sure corporations pay their fair share in taxes. Maryland has a vast assortment of different corporate tax exemptions, deductions, credits and outright loopholes. I believe these provisions need to be carefully evaluated, cleaned up, and in some cases eliminated. For any corporate tax incentives which we choose to maintain, we should ensure that the corporations receiving our public subsidies are at least creating good quality jobs that pay family-sustaining wages, provide benefits, and offer opportunities for career advancement. That is why I sponsored HB278, which passed last year, and HB1096, which unfortunately did not move this year. When the State provides an incentive or subsidy to a particular project or business, I believe the State has a responsibility to leverage that public investment for the maximum public benefit.

23. Privatization, General. As public employees, each of our members works for an entity that is directly accountable to the residents we serve. Far too often, when jurisdictions and school districts choose to contract out or privatize those services, the level of accountability changes with those services. A private company or nonprofit is accountable to its board of directors or shareholders, and not necessarily to the residents that rely on its services. In addition, their employees are seldom unionized. If elected, would you support any plans to privatize and/or farm out work to a private company or nonprofit in our state and local governments or local school systems? If so, why?

I oppose privatization of government services. Government must be focused on maximizing public benefit, not maximizing private profits. Where privatization claims to offer cost savings, it generally comes at the expense of the quality of service provided or at the expense of employees, or both.

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?

As stated above, I am generally opposed to any privatization of government services, and this example is particularly striking because the patients involved are among our most vulnerable. These patients are among the most expensive and resource intensive to care for, so it seems very unlikely that the private sector would be able to offer a better (or even an acceptable) alternative. I believe privatization will lead to an inferior quality of care for patients and inferior working conditions for staff and, therefore, cannot support the plan to close these facilities.

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

I believe Maryland must invest in expanding access to mental health and addiction services at every level of service. This includes community-based providers, behavioral health specialists in our schools, crisis response teams, inpatient beds, and everything in between. I have consistently supported increasing behavioral health resources and will continue to do so.

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?

The COVID-19 vaccine is now a critical component of having a safe and healthy workplace, and access to recommended vaccines and boosters is a fair and reasonable expectation for employees who have returned to (or never left) working in person. I believe unions and management can and should work together with their local and state Department of Health to ensure timely and convenient access for employees to be fully vaccinated.

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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