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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 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

Catholic Charities of Baltimore

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?

Throughout my federal career (when eligible), I belonged to the union. I recognize the importance of having union support to make sure that all workers are treated with fairness and dignity. Outside of my membership, I have also taken action to support local labor including United Here Local 7 recently in the ongoing dispute with the Lakehouse hotel, because I have seen firsthand in both my work with human trafficking and my job as an immigration attorney how easily workers can be exploited without protection.

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

AFGE - 2008-2015

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?

Anyone working in a school or for the government needs to be subject to the same rules and guidelines of any other employee. In addition, especially for grad students and others at the collegiate level, they need to be full colleagues, integrated into the education system to allow for full support for students as well as the teachers primarily focused on their education. They all need to be on the same team with the same rules governing their conduct and expectations. Many times, offices, agencies, and other work places use contractors to get around their union obligations - we need to call that labor avoidance for what it is and provide the opportunity for all workers to have the protection of labor and 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?

The minimum wage needs to be raised and then pegged to inflation/cost of living to insure that it does not fall behind again. Tipped workers should be guaranteed the minimum wage through a system that allows them to report their tips with the employer picking up the difference if it exists (i.e. a waitress is guaranteed minimum wage so if she only earns the equivalent of \$5/hr during a particular shift either because too many people are scheduled or the day is slow, the restaurant should make up the difference instead of paying a reduced hourly wage; if the waitress makes the equivalent of \$50/hr then the restaurant would pay the regular wage). Agricultural workers should also be guaranteed at least the minimum wage and potentially hazard pay as well depending on conditions of their particular location and crop.

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, everywhere in the law we find consequences so to have a situation where one party has no accountability, we will always find issues and potential for abuse. We need to make sure that the system has those checks and balances whether in the form of binding arbitration or the ability to bring suit in court to require a decision be made on the merits as opposed to defaulting to one side's position.

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

The Department of Labor publishes guidelines concerning the prevailing wage per jobs and per industry which provides a ready guide for state level workers to determine what their work is worth. Using these guidelines as a starting point (as they may not raise as quickly as wages do in industries where workers are in demand), the state should keep pace with the compensation earned and due to its employees. Where great attrition occurs, we should be giving retention bonuses and other incentives to retain employees since having to recruit and train a new worker would surpass any cost of these benefits.

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?

As a fundamental human right, health care and health insurance should be made as inexpensive as possible for every worker and, at the very least, previous agreements need to be adhered to. Any healthcare surplus funds should be used for their intended purpose - healthcare - so should go back to workers in the form of lowered premiums or to otherwise subsidize healthcare for government workers.

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, these plans protect workers and make sure that they have adequate retirement support no matter when they choose to retire so should remain in place.

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?

To me, your word is your bond. Where the State has already promised or pledged certain benefits, the State must stand behind those promises or pledges. We cannot talk about health care coverage without talking about prescription coverage so to eliminate that part of health care, we are yanking the rug out from our hardworking, dedicated State employees at a time when they are particularly vulnerable. Especially at a time when prescription costs are rising, we need to make sure that we protect those who relied on the State's promises in choosing to work for and remain with the State to earn those retirement coverage benefits.

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?

In a tight labor market, those employers who are able to offer the best compensation and benefits will always win the fight to attract the best employees, the State should be no different. We are hamstringing our agencies and doing more harm than good by allowing dedicated, qualified people to walk away from their positions. By offering retention bonuses and raising salaries to match prevailing wages, we can not only meet continuation of service goals, but save money in the long run by not having to do recruitment processes which takes time and resources away from the actual mission of the agencies.

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?

N/A

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 blueprint is a once-in-a-generation opportunity with substantial investments and reforms in our public education system. It recognizes that early childhood education, career, technical programs, and community-based schools require significant investments. Such investment is necessary to build an equitable system that meets all students' needs regardless of zip code. It also recognizes that to attract and maintain a quality teaching and support staff, compensation will need to be competitive with similarly situated professionals who require similar educational and accountability standards. I support the continued need for this financial investment to make sure that we are truly supporting every child and putting every student on the best path for success.

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, with a paraprofessional as part of my key staff, I am acutely aware of the failings of the system towards these necessary staff members and making sure that they are paid a reasonable wage for their services. Not only do we assist the PSRPs this way but we also support teachers who are increasingly expected to do special education alongside their regular teaching duties which not only places stress upon them in how to manage many students with different needs but is also leading to some teachers to leave the profession altogether since they do not feel that they can meet their goals and ethics of the profession. We need to view PSRPs as what they are - part of the teaching staff with all of the benefits associated thereto.

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?

The local school board is in charge of education for the locality and as a public charter school, the charter schools belong under the purview of the school board. The intent at forming these schools was to strengthen the education available to each student so oversight is not only warranted, it is imperative to make sure that the purpose of their creation continues to be met.

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?

The only time a student should receive funds to go to private school is when the public school is unable or unwilling to provide an education to that student (specifically if the child's developmental delays or learning challenges prevent education in the local school). In addition, any such school receiving funds should be void of religion or other political viewpoints to preserve the separation between church and state. Any corporations that support private school scholarships should have their income taxed like any other, if they choose to give scholarships, they can do so for good will, not for any tax benefit.

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?

While we face teaching and other education employment shortfalls, we have to look to alternate means of supplementing those in our building. Those supplements, however, should not be used to circumvent standards or union protection. Should a school find it necessary to look to non-profit organizations, anyone brought in to fill or supplement a position should be required to demonstrate the same qualifications as a direct hire, should be required to meet the same standards (or have the contract revoked/not renewed) and the positions should be covered under the collective bargaining agreements that cover the non-contracted positions with the same job description.

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?

Recruitment and retention are multi-faceted problems and will require a rethinking of how we find individuals that want to teach and have the credentials to meet the ever-demanding desires of the public. It is no secret that Maryland is an importing state. Maryland has never been able to produce sufficient educators to meet its needs. States like Pennsylvania and Ohio have long been producer states because of their original emphasis on teacher colleges that have emerged as statewide university systems. We need to not only expand our teaching programs in university but we need to focus on increasing the support for programs in HBCUs and other institutions with a demonstrated history of recruiting diverse candidates as well as those diverse candidates in other institutions. As the spouse of a Hispanic male teaching candidate currently at the University of Maryland-College Park, I've seen first hand how more support for students who want to become teachers is needed. We are lucky that the GI Bill is covering his cost of education because otherwise starting a second career as a teacher would not be economically feasible. We need to continue to implement legislation that makes teaching an attractive career that does not break the bank.

Further, Maryland has high standards for obtaining and maintaining a certificate and a higher cost of living than many other states. Large class sizes do not help the situation. Teachers go into the profession because of their passion and we need to support that passion instead of dampening it. Thus, reducing class size and limiting the amount of testing imposed should be a specific focus of the legislature as well as local governments and school boards. We also have to demonstrate how valued teachers are – whether through bonuses, travel opportunities, or greater resources. When school systems provide a better work environment for teachers and staff, they also enhance students' learning environment. We must have more counselors and social services to assist educators in identifying individual student needs and taking some of the burden off of teachers, placing it onto other professionals with the time and skill to tackle the issue presented. The legislature must provide the necessary resources for these improvements. Still, it must also elevate the profession by recognizing the teacher as the primary voice in a student's education, providing family services where necessary, and prioritizing teacher input in the same manner as administrators and other academics.

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

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

Standardized tests are but one metric at viewing student success and should not be used as the only metric nor should in class time be used for preparation; education must be pursued much more holistically. The tests should measure what is already being taught in the classroom so that no teacher need feel that they should spend time teaching to the test. In addition, no teacher should be penalized based on how their students do on the test since so much more education occurs other than what appears on a test screen (either due to test anxiety, differences in student abilities, or other factors).

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?

Here in Howard County, we see very few opportunities for public transportation. When I worked in DC, I took the MARC train to commute, but now that I work in Baltimore, there is no such option because the MARC train does not connect to any reasonable public transportation system that would transport me from the MARC station to my office near Broadway market. The buses have proven not to be as reliable and have contributed to congestion on our roads, leading to extended commuting times. We need a comprehensive, rail based public transportation system throughout the state especially as we attempt to mitigate climate change and reduce the state's overall environmental impact.

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?

Only those who currently take advantage of tax loopholes favor extending or retaining such loopholes. Any ordinarily employed person believes that each person and corporation should contribute its fair share to the infrastructure (funded by taxes) that we all use and derive benefits. Taxes are the price of belonging to a community and society so those who do not want to pay their share contribute no benefit to our community and State and we should not worry so much about offending them by requiring their participation. Closing the tax loopholes allow us to extend benefits to more people in need or may even result in us reducing the overall tax burden for all.

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?

Outside contracting can be useful and necessary for specialized products or projects, such as the initial set up of a new computer system, but should not be used for day-to-day operations or fundamental aspects of State business. More often than not, those contracts are directly used and intended to circumvent labor unions and collective bargaining and we need to close the space that allows the State to do so. In those discreet instances where contracting is appropriate, the nonprofit or private company should be held to the same standards as the State employees with the compensation paid directly tied to successful performance under the standards in existence for those residents and the State as a whole.

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?

When faced with outdated buildings with infrastructure challenges, the answer is not to dump patients in facilities far from their homes or in private facilities (assuming enough beds exist especially for our neediest of patients), but instead to renovate the existing building or build a new modern facility. The staff have coped with these infrastructure deficiencies but should not have to. If we truly value each human life, we should refrain from continued deference of maintenance and should provide for facilities that not only meet current needs but can grow and modify with changing patient needs in the future.

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 have made mental health a main focus of mine for the past decade after losing a friend to suicide . We need to make sure that Maryland has coverage available from students in school to adults. Maryland currently only has about 20% of the necessary hospital beds with a similar dearth of out patient services especially for teens. We also lack support for families supporting those going through mental health challenges. Currently, although health insurance companies offer mental health coverage, mental health providers have found the insurance system so onerous that they have stopped taking insurance which results in mental health coverage being out of reach for lower income people. We need to make sure that we are attracting new practitioners and make sure that practitioners receive fair pay without having to jump through hoops to accept insurance, broadening services to more people. Mental health, like physical health, should be available to all Marylanders regardless of ability to pay or any demographic factor including geographic location. It is the State's duty to insure quality care is available to every Marylander.

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?

Vaccines should be readily available to all who want them and we must use both a carrot and stick approach to making sure that our entire population is vaccinated. My workplace does require the vaccine to stay employed (or be hired) or in the case of religious exemption, the employee must undergo weekly testing and wear appropriate PPE. If Catholic Charities can make such a requirement (especially based on many religious objections involving the claim of fetal tissue being used in the manufacture of development of the vaccine, a practice that the Church actively opposes), the State should be able to institute similar requirements. The State has mobile testing and vaccination vehicles that can go to each State location to offer services to those who have not otherwise been able to find appropriate locations for the vaccine, but at this point, the issue rests more in convincing people to actually get the vaccine. Education and combatting misinformation must be a part of any vaccine mandate.

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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