



AFT-Maryland Candidate Questionnaire for Baltimore City Races

410-764-3030.

2016 Candidate Questionnaire—BALTIMORE CITY RACES

AFT-Maryland

Candidate for **Baltimore City Council, 14th District** _____

Candidate's name **Mary Pat Clarke** _____

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Occupation **Fulltime Baltimore City Councilmember** Who is your employer? **Baltimore City** _____

May we make your answers to our questionnaire public? **Yes** _____

Party affiliation (circle one):

Democrat **X** Republican Independent Other (please specify) _____

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

For this 2016 election year, endorsed by CASA in Action

Have you ever held elected office? When?

1975-1983: Baltimore City Councilmember for former 2nd Council District;

1987-1995: President of the Baltimore City Council; and,

2004-present: Baltimore City Councilmember for 14th Council District.

General

1. The AFT-Maryland is a federation of numerous employee unions, including Baltimore City teachers and paraprofessional and school-related personnel (BTU); Baltimore City employees (CUB); as well county and state employees; public health professionals; and higher education workers. Why should we support your campaign?

I am a high school English teacher by education, experience, and profession; the mother of 4 former Baltimore City Public School students, now grown; and, the Bubby of 3 current students of Baltimore City College and Mt. Washington ES/MS. I have lived with our school system for 2 generations from a family perspective --- and, for all the ups and downs, our family is grateful that our public schools have been there for our children and grandchildren.

As a 14th District representative, I helped lead last year's successful opposition to closing Abbottston Elementary School, a wonderful and caring environment in which CHM neighborhood children and their families thrive. I also helped lead the successful effort to provide a new school building for Waverly ES/MS. In 2004, the School Board promised Waverly and Ednor Gardens a comparable middle school facility when their middle school children were transferred out of Roland Park Middle School and sent home to the then-abandoned Venable School building to "make do." It took years, but we fought and won the new building and the high-achievement curriculum families were promised.

As longtime chair of City Council's Education & Youth Committee, I fought against last year's layoff of 57 key school-based personnel as the "unintended consequence" of layoffs forecast as limited to the central administration. In 2014, I helped lead the successful City Council effort to add \$4 million to the Mayor's community school/after school budget. Most recently, I am involved with students, the school system, and Councilman Brandon Scott in trying to extend the hours (without increasing the cost) of the MTA One Card on which our students --- including my City College grandson --- depend.

2. Have you ever been a member of a union? If yes, please give the union name, local number, and date. No

Worker Rights

3. Should Baltimore City librarians be granted the right to engage in collective bargaining? Should employees of the Baltimore Convention Center? If you are elected to office, will you work to expand collective bargaining rights to public employees who currently do not have that right?

Yes. I support the right and the need for Baltimore City librarians, Baltimore Convention Center employees, and all non-administrative public employees to engage in collective bargaining and to be permitted the union membership and representation to do so.

4. Many cities nationwide have passed ordinances that raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour. Would you be in favor of Baltimore raising its minimum wage to \$15 per hour? Why or why not?

Yes, I am in favor of legislation to raise Baltimore's minimum wage to \$15 by 2020. Wealth inequity has reached crisis proportions in our nation. Only giant leaps can begin to restore balance and provide Baltimore City's families and neighborhoods with the earning power to break the cycle of poverty and create the One Baltimore we need for success and even survival.

5. Retirement for city workers: defined benefit versus defined contribution. The city of Baltimore has been discussing moving from a defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan (401K) for its employees' retirement. Do you support such a plan? Why or why not?

I support defined benefit plans and strongly object to any efforts to replace them with defined contribution plans. Quite simply, defined benefits are backed by the public sector as secure compensation for the traditionally low salaries of teachers and associated education personnel whose work is so crucial to the future of our nation. One secure future for another.

The Role of Public Education in Baltimore City

6. What do you think are some of the biggest problems facing Baltimore City public schools today? If elected, how would you help solve these problems?

problems

Our school system is chronically, tragically, and woefully underfunded.

Through the 1997 City/State agreement, the City surrendered direct control of our children's public education in exchange for additional State funding of limited duration. Almost a decade later, we still lack the local wealth we lacked in 1997 to adequately fund our schools, as required by the State Constitution. Although dismissed upon duration, the extra funding did coincidentally make a positive difference in elementary reading achievement, although not so as to be continued.

Experiment concluded, however, we continue to lack the City's former agency control of the local school system budget. Likewise, still lacking board appointment vetting and approval, we have a school board structure accountable to itself and constituted to autonomously determine expenditures and policies affecting our children, families, and the City's future.

In that pre-ordained context, the city and school system have experienced one abrupt fiscal crisis after another, each of immediate and dire fiscal consequences, rooted in the past, and presented in tribute to the transparency of current fact-finders.

Meanwhile perched upon a mound of surplus, the State hierarchy looks down as we cut-and paste our way through a second General Assembly session in which our citizens and City delegation are reduced to appealing for what we had instead of the adequate support we require for our children's future and our City's.

How help solve

To begin to raise morale and promote accountability, the City and State need to agree to a plan for restoring some meaningful measure of school board selection and school budget authority to Baltimore City. These are our children. We need the State to work with us in a respectful partnership, embracing Baltimore's children as Maryland's as well. We are all truly responsible.

The current arrangement has outlived its usefulness, and the system we devised in partnership requires a 21st century revision which helps us become effective guardians of our own children and respected partners of the State in achieving the adequate education required by law. I pledge to diligently assist in such an endeavor in whatever ways I can be useful.

7. Community Schools: Beginning in August 2015, Baltimore City will have 51 of its public schools serving as designated community schools. A community school is a public school that partners with some entity (UM-Baltimore or the Baltimore YMCA, just to name a few examples) to provide either after-school academic or social services to both students and members of the community. Would you be in favor of expanding the Community School Strategy in Baltimore by working to make more Baltimore City public schools community schools? If so, why? If not, why not?

Yes. As chair of City Council's Education and Youth Committee, I partnered with Councilman Bill Henry as lead sponsor of the City Council Resolution (unanimously approved) which resulted in the Mayor's addition of \$4 million to the current city budget's community schools/after school/out of school line items. Currently, our struggle is to retain that \$4 million as the baseline on which to add more funding in these categories for the fiscal year 2017 city budget. (City Finance advisors currently seek to label the \$4 million as "one time only" and eradicate that \$4 million increase as the baseline for any fiscal year 2017 increases.) This is hardly the year to go backwards on City-funded gains already secured.

I have supported community schools since Dr. Thelma Cox's pioneer model at Dunbar High School in the 1970's and since the re-emergence of community schools as a 21st century initiative. Community schools involve families and neighborhoods in the education of our children and youth, opening the schoolhouse door to embrace that "entire village" it takes to best raise our children.

8. Public Charter Schools: There are just over 40 public charter schools in the state of Maryland, and the vast majority of them reside in Baltimore City. The large, out-of-state charter operators would like to weaken state law to make teachers and staff employees of the charter board, rather than employees of Baltimore City Public Schools. This would remove all protections that teachers and staff have under the collective bargaining agreement between the teachers union and the school board. This would also limit oversight of these privately run public schools by taking them out from under the purview of BCPS, as well as giving these charters 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 and staff should best remain employees of the local school board. Public and local school board oversight is essential. These schools are publicly funded and should remain as accountable to the public as traditional public schools. Given financial and curriculum complexities, it is difficult enough to hold our public schools accountable through a single local school board. Extending the accountability and access beyond that single focal point is impractical.

9. Charter School funding. There has been a long-running dispute between certain charter school operators and Baltimore Public Schools over appropriate funding. As a feature of being a public charter school in Baltimore, the charters are largely given cash—calculated on a per-pupil basis—from the district, in lieu of the services that the central administration provides neighborhood schools. Most recently, the system presented a per pupil funding formula that mandated funds intended for students living in poverty or who are English language learners actually receive those funds. Some charter operators have countered with a lawsuit, arguing that those special funds for high-poverty students or ESOL be distributed to every student equally, regardless of need. How do you think BCPS should calculate its charter school per pupil funding model?

The issue is not how BCPS should calculate its charter school per pupil funding model. That proposal is “off the table,” according to my understanding of the situation. The current issue seems to be how Charter schools and BCPS negotiate to a calculation based on State charter formulas and the ability of BCPS to maintain full fair student funding for all our traditional schools.

The Baltimore City Public Schools is woefully short of the funding mandated for a merely adequate education. I support fair student funding for all of our public schools, both charter and traditional. I presume and hope that the charter school lawsuit and related negotiations will protect the interests of all of our Baltimore City public schools. At the core of such formula debates is the urgent and unmet need for the State to honor its obligations to all of our schools and students.

10. School vouchers: should government give out vouchers (either a tax credit, or even a tax rebate) to parents who want to send their children to a private school? Please explain your answer.

No. This nation’s public schools have been and remain the guaranteed pathway to an education for poor and immigrant students who lack alternatives for opportunity and success --- and for generations of middle-income students as well. Vouchers and tax credits reduce and redirect the tax resources better invested to improve and update public school systems so they continue to attract and serve the majority of our city’s children of all financial strata.

11. Education funding: This past year, lawmakers in Annapolis severely cut education to Baltimore City schools. Some in Annapolis have argued that the city should be contributing more to public schools, as property values (especially in and around the Inner Harbor area) have rapidly increased. Do you agree with this assessment?

Average assessments in Baltimore City have increased at a higher rate than the average increase in Maryland as a whole (10% versus 4%). That discrepancy affects the State's calculation of our wealth and negatively affects the State formula for City education funding. Unfortunately, many of the most expensive residential and business properties constructed in Baltimore have received tax relief incentives from Baltimore City. So the City's general fund property tax receipts do not reflect the full tax potential of many of these discounted properties. The City is "cash poor" in comparison to the value of its most expensive real estate.

That being said: Especially with this session's budget projections from Annapolis, including the major impact of costly reductions in student enrollment, the City of Baltimore does have an obligation to provide adequately for our public school children. At the same time, the Mayor & City Council have a related obligation to seek the restoration of more direct control of the public school system's budget than exercised since the State/City agreement of 1997, in which the Baltimore City Public Schools became basically autonomous in its fiscal decision-making. The two issues go hand-in-hand.

12. Some current members of the Baltimore City Council have proposed a city charter amendment that would guarantee 3% of the city's budget for youth programs in the city, like recreation programs, youth mentorship, and afterschool programs. Would you be in favor of such a charter amendment? Why or why not?

I co-sponsored, voted for, and support this charter amendment. I have pledged my vote to override a veto should that occur (for which we need 12 votes out of the Council's 15). This initiative will provide the kind of jump-start required to transform Baltimore City's budgeting priorities, providing a positive baseline for annual increases until a "whole child" balance is finally and fiscally achieved.

13. Due to the limited number of certified nurses in Baltimore City Public Schools, administrators and/or staff are forced to administer medication to students, share nurses between multiple school locations, and utilize part-time nurses. How would you help solve this issue?

I understand how important this health function is to students and their families. I also recall how difficult it has been, when the City controlled the BCPS budget, to fund fulltime health centers in city schools. We could barely scratch the surface of the need. I would be happy to work with BCPS and the City Health Department to see if this new era of the Affordable Care Act might better accommodate the placement of hospital outpatient centers in some of our schools, to include mental health, dentistry, and a whole range of health services for students, families, and community, with Medicaid and private insurance billing to help support the cost. Sounds like a perfect community school project to research and attempt to implement. Happy to assist.

14. Currently, all seats on the Baltimore City School Board are appointed. Legislation is introduced almost every year to allow for at least a partially elected school board. Would you be in favor of such legislation?

YES!

15. Violence in the city schools. What do you think is the best strategy to assure that our school buildings are safe and welcoming environments for children, teachers, and other education professionals in Baltimore City?

The strategy we lack and need includes sufficient school-based safety officers, social workers, mental health professionals; a safe, clean and functioning in-house environment extending to the surrounding neighborhood; inclusive weekend and after school sports and activities; and, teaching assignments which afford the time for individual attention to and follow-up with students. Teaching professionals especially require the support of the school and school system when finding themselves the victims of violence in the classroom. Too often, they are blamed for disruptions instead of cared-for as victims themselves in need of support.

Vision for Baltimore City

16. The city has begun shutting the water off for accounts that are delinquent by more than \$250. It has started to turn off the water for both individual accounts and business accounts. Do you agree with this plan? Why or why not?

This is the first time I remember that Baltimore City has seriously threatened businesses with shut-offs for delinquent water bills. It's about time, and the response has been a couple business shut-offs but mainly large overdue payments. All of us in City Council have worked with residents unable to pay, helping to arrange their enrollment in discount programs and payment plans, if possible.

I favor a higher cut off delinquency level and have helped negotiate against tax sale foreclosures based on specific overdue water bill circumstances (eg, chronically unread meters). I agree with this plan when residents have a chance to access discounts or payment plans or some kind of practical help --- and are not at risk because they cannot afford to fix leaky plumbing or find themselves unable to connect with timely City information on where and how to avoid these shut-offs.

17. Privatization. Many rumors have been circulating that the city has been looking into privatizing water services. When, if ever, do you feel it is appropriate to privatize public services or to sell off or privatize city-owned resources?

NEVER, and I will vehemently oppose any such efforts.

18. There are at least two competing strategies to help the city raise funds for recreation centers: one calls on the city to sell off a number of public parking garages downtown; another calls for the Downtown Hilton to be sold. Do you prefer one plan over the other? Or a different plan to

raise revenues for more rec centers? Do you think raising more funds for recreation centers should be a priority for city leaders? Why or why not?

Capital funding for recreation centers should be a budget priority, whether new or renovated centers. We need both the regional and the walk-to centers to meet the diverse needs of our neighborhoods and the extended age range of neighborhood children.

About what to sell to raise the \$40 million for new and rehabbed recreation centers citywide, I prefer selling the Hilton Hotel to selling the parking garages.

Parking garages produce annual general operating funds through Baltimore City's parking tax. That annual income is used for a wide range of City activities. The Hilton Hotel uses the hotel taxes it generates as back-up to its own budget --- and has first call on hotel taxes from other hotels in the case of a Hilton deficit or default. By selling the hotel, the City would receive a private new owner's hotel taxes and would free-up other hotel taxes from their possible diversion to Hilton defaults instead of general fund activities.

19. The City is entertaining proposals to build a trash incinerator near Curtis Bay, located less than one mile away from Benjamin Franklin High School and Curtis Bay Elementary school. Supporters claim this incinerator will create much-needed jobs for the community. Opponents argue that incinerators pollute even more than coal-burning power plants, and should not be constructed so close to public schools. What is your position on the construction of a trash incinerator in Curtis Bay?

OPPOSED!

20. According to some statistics, there are approximately 16,000 vacant buildings and 14,000 vacant lots in Baltimore. Combined they total 30,000 vacant properties within the city limits, and play a large role in contributing to crime and other problems facing the city. More than 75% of all vacant property in Baltimore city is privately owned. How can we fix this problem and make sure land is being used effectively and efficiently in Baltimore?

Create land banking development sites for affordable homeownership pilot projects by demolishing blighted blocks in which a majority of structures are too far gone for rehabilitation. In the interim between site selection and approval, city foreclosures and title transfers, resident relocation, site demolition, community land bank organizing, and development proposals, --- establish community gardens and green recreation space.

My thanks to AFT-Maryland, the Baltimore Teachers Union, and the City Union of Baltimore for the opportunity to answer this questionnaire and seek your endorsement for my re-election to the Baltimore City Council, District 14. Mary Pat Clarek