

2022
American Federation of Teachers
CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

*for Candidates for the U.S. Senate
and U.S. House of Representatives*



A Union of Professionals

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
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American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

Reclaim Our Future: Fighting for the Promise of a Better America

The American Federation of Teachers fights for a better life for all and for the next generation to do even better. We fight for good jobs and the right to a union; for high-quality and well-resourced healthcare, public services, and public schools and colleges; to counter discrimination and division; and to protect the right to vote, the integrity of elections and our imperiled democracy.

The AFT's more than 1.7 million members work every day for this freedom to thrive, and we are on the frontlines of our country's healing and progress.

- Healthcare professionals are carrying us through the deadliest pandemic in a century.
- Public employees are delivering vital services that communities rely on.
- Educators and school staff are working with families to help students catch up and recover—to support students academically, emotionally and socially. Just as they worked to safely return to in-person learning, educators are looking forward: They yearn for post-pandemic normalcy and are working tirelessly to prepare our kids for bright futures.

Our members must be respected and supported, especially now as their work is harder than ever, with increased stress, staff shortages, and political interference and attacks.

As professionals and as a union, we care, we fight, we show up and we vote. We choose hope and aspiration over fear and division. It is time to turn the aspiration that unites everyone in our richly diverse country—the aspiration for a better life for ourselves, our children and our communities—into action.

We have prepared this questionnaire to gauge your views on issues of concern to our members. We hope you will take this opportunity to share your vision for preserving our democracy, protecting our most vulnerable, and strengthening our economy and our communities. A strong democracy allows for disagreement and debate on issues, and we recognize that candidates may not necessarily agree with the AFT 100 percent of the time. ***We encourage you to use the comment section at the end of the questionnaire to share your thoughts or address any issues or concerns you feel the AFT and its affiliates should consider.***

Candidate Information:

Name:	Kesha Ram Hinsdale	State:	Vermont	District:	At-Large
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Please return the completed candidate questionnaire to:

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1. DEMOCRACY AND VOTING RIGHTS

Anti-democratic forces are working to limit voting rights, interfere in vote counting and even manipulate the outcome of elections. This dangerous activity makes clear the need for urgent corrective federal action to protect the right to vote and our democracy.

- *Do you support the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to restore federal preclearance requirements for states with a history of discriminatory laws?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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- *Would you support overarching legislation for federal elections that would supersede restrictions enacted at the state level?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I would oppose.
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- *Would you support a constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I would oppose.
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2. BUILD BACK BETTER PLAN

The Biden administration's Build Back Better plan would be transformational by making investments that would help nearly every working family. Key provisions of BBB would expand accessibility to and affordability of healthcare, prescription drugs and child care; provide for universal pre-K; and invest in recruiting and retaining educators and healthcare workers.

- *Do you support the provisions of the Biden administration's Build Back Better plan, including the provisions lowering the costs of prescription drugs, healthcare and child care, and providing universal pre-K?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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- *Do you support the investments of the Build Back Better plan to help recruit and retain educators and healthcare workers?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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3. HEALTHCARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

While the Affordable Care Act has successfully expanded access to healthcare, we can no longer avoid the rising cost of healthcare coverage, or the inequities of the U.S. healthcare system. More needs to be done, including expanding access and eliminating the excise tax on some employer-provided healthcare plans that penalizes working Americans.

- *Would you support legislation that moves the nation to universal healthcare coverage?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I would oppose.
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- *Do you support lifting the restrictions for Medicare to negotiate drug costs with pharmaceutical companies?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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- *Would you support expanding access to Medicaid coverage for people living at or below the federal poverty line?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I would oppose.
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- *Would you support repealing the excise tax on employer-provided healthcare plans?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I would oppose.
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4. SAFE NURSE STAFFING LEVELS

The AFT is the second largest nurses union in the country. We, and our members, have seen hospitals cut their staffing levels to dangerous levels, creating a staffing crisis that compromises patient care and is causing droves of healthcare workers to leave the profession.

- *Will you support federal action establishing minimum safe-staffing levels for nurses to ensure that patients receive the safe quality care they deserve?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I will support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I will oppose.
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5. HEALTHCARE WORKER SAFETY

Healthcare and social service workers are nearly five times more likely to experience workplace violence injury than workers in any other sector of the economy.

- *Would you support federal legislation or Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards to ensure all hospitals and healthcare facilities have strong and effective violence prevention programs?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I would oppose.
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Due to insufficient safety standards in healthcare facilities, more than 400,000 healthcare workers have been infected with COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic.

- *Would you support a legally enforceable OSHA standard to protect healthcare workers against infectious diseases?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I would oppose.
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The mental strain of healthcare workers during the pandemic is real. Since March 2020, nearly 1 in 5 healthcare workers have quit their jobs. Congress has provided short-term funding to begin to address the crisis, but the moral injury that healthcare workers experience is a long-term problem.

- *Will you support federal funding for the mental health programming and support that our frontline caregivers need?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I will support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I will oppose.
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6. HEALTHCARE WORKER PIPELINE

The COVID-19 pandemic has shattered the nation’s healthcare workforce, with people leaving the sector in record numbers. To rebuild this critical workforce, we need to increase access to training and education programs. One way of doing this is through investing in nursing programs and loan forgiveness.

- *Would you support increased loan forgiveness for students enrolled in healthcare professional training programs?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I would oppose.
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- *Would you support increased funding for the Health Resources and Services Administration’s Title VII and Title VIII healthcare workforce programs?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I would oppose.
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7. SAFE IN-PERSON LEARNING

Educators and parents agree that being in school is essential to children’s mental, social, emotional and academic well-being. Since the earliest days of the pandemic, the AFT has advocated for safe in-person schooling with layered mitigation measures. Through using best practices, we can make sure every public school is a place where parents want to send their children, educators want to work, and students are able to thrive.

- *Do you support in-person learning plans and safety procedures to minimize COVID-19 transmission in schools and provide the resources needed to keep everyone in our schools safe?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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8. INVESTING IN PREK-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION

TITLE I and IDEA

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, particularly Title I, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act help ensure that the school districts serving the most disadvantaged children and communities have the resources necessary for children to learn. These programs provide funding for the hiring and retaining of educators, school nurses and guidance counselors; class-size reduction; and community schools, bilingual education, literacy programs and more.

- *Do you support increasing and ensuring adequate funding for ESEA and IDEA to help ensure that all children receive a fair, equitable and high-quality education?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Community schools are hubs of well-being and support for children, families and communities. By anchoring the schools in the daily life of the community, trust is built and obstacles are removed to get kids and families the support they need and to help take care of the whole child.

- *Do you support federal funding for an accelerated expansion of community schools to reach a nationwide total of 25,000 schools?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Early childhood education and child care programs like Head Start, Early Head Start, preschool programs and full-day kindergarten increase the likelihood that young children, from birth to age 5, will have the language and literacy foundation on which later school success is built.

- *Do you support increasing federal funds to help provide universal access to noncompulsory early childhood education and care programs for children from birth to kindergarten?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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SCHOOL SAFETY

Our collective responsibility is to ensure that our schools are safe and welcoming places for teaching and learning—and that students can focus on learning and not the trauma of violence or avoiding violence. Investing in peer counseling, wellness programs, violence intervention initiatives and other supports is essential.

- *Do you support federal funding for community-based intervention and prevention strategies?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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- *Would you support funding to provide every school with a mental health professional?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I would oppose.
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9. FREEDOM TO TEACH AND EDUCATOR SHORTAGES

Teachers and other school workers are leaving their profession at the highest rate on record. In fact, all 50 states started the school year with teacher shortages. This crisis has two major roots: deep disinvestment in public education, including compensation, and the deprofessionalization of teaching.

- *Will you support federal funding to help recruit and retain educators, including paraprofessionals and school-related personnel, counselors, bus drivers and maintenance workers?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I will support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I will oppose.
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- *Will you support federal policies to help ensure that educators are treated as the professionals they are, with a real voice and agency benefiting their profession?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I will support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I will oppose.
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Parents and educators agree: We want our kids to have an education that imparts honesty about our nation’s history, both the good and the bad. Unfortunately, there are politicians who are stoking fear about our schools and have even passed laws in some states restricting an educator’s professional responsibility to teach honest history.

- *Do you support the teaching of honest history in public schools?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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- *Will you support efforts to give educators the resources to teach history without fear of reprisal?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I will support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I will oppose.
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10. REIMAGINING PUBLIC SCHOOLS

We have an opportunity to rethink accountability and assessment. Let’s change accountability systems so that they serve teaching and learning goals by measuring what matters, incorporating formative assessment led by classroom teachers, connecting meaningfully to standards and curriculum, and providing timely and useful information for students and families.

- *Would you support changing federal accountability and assessment practices to reflect what students know beyond standardized tests, allowing educators and school staff to respond to students’ academic, developmental and social needs?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I would oppose.
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11. “SCHOOL CHOICE” PROPOSALS AND PRIVATIZATION

So-called school choice programs (vouchers, opportunity scholarships, tuition tax credits, education savings accounts) are proven to have an adverse effect on student achievement and drain needed resources away from public schools, which teach 90 percent of our nation’s students.

- *Will you oppose vouchers and/or other proposals that allow taxpayer dollars to be used for private and religious schools at the K-12 level, either as a limited experiment or as a full-scale program?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I will oppose.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I will support.
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Public charter schools have the potential to be incubators for innovation and collaborative labor-management relationships but should not siphon funding away from school districts or be held to different standards than traditional neighborhood public schools.

- *Do you support requiring charter schools to meet the same requirements as neighborhood public schools, including health and safety standards, civil rights requirements, academic accountability and financial transparency?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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12. HIGHER EDUCATION—ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

The AFT believes that higher education is a public good and should be available to all without debt. And we believe federal lawmakers should act to lift the burden of existing student debt from student loan borrowers.

- *Do you support federal incentives for states to increase their investments in higher education and to make public higher education more affordable and available without debt?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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- *Do you support federal action for a full or partial cancellation of existing student loan debt, which is now a \$1.8 trillion drag on the economy, of which 90 percent is owed to the U.S. Department of Education?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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- *Do you support expanding the Pell Grant program to limit college loan indebtedness for low- and middle-income students?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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13. WORKERS' VOICE AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Strong unions are essential for having an economy in which everyone can thrive. All workers, no matter where they are employed, deserve a voice on the job and should have the freedom to join a union and bargain with their employers for better wages and benefits, without harassment or intimidation from management.

- *Do you support the right for all workers to join a union and collectively bargain?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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- *Will you support the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I will support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I will oppose.
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- *Will you support the Protecting the Right to Organize Act?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I will support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I will oppose.
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14. ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND TAX FAIRNESS

A fair and vibrant economy means everyone, from working- and middle-class Americans to big businesses, pays their fair share of taxes. For far too long, the wealthiest Americans and large corporations have not paid their fair share, leaving education, healthcare and infrastructure sorely underfunded and economic inequality skyrocketing. Comprehensive and progressive tax reform is not only the right thing to do, but a necessary step for economic justice.

- *Would you support ensuring that the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes, including reversing the tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations that have increased the deficit and are now threatening cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and other vital programs?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I would oppose.
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- *Would you support eliminating the cap on state and local tax deductions?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I would oppose.
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15. SOCIAL SECURITY AND RETIREMENT SECURITY

Workers should have a right to a secure retirement with the ability to live independent and dignified lives after they retire. However, without a renewed commitment to retirement security, our nation faces a retirement income gap that will force many workers to work longer than they should. A meaningful retirement security plan would preserve and strengthen Social Security while creating a structure for all individuals to have access to a pension-like guaranteed retirement plan.

- *Would you support legislation to strengthen Social Security in a way that does not cut benefits for any current or future retirees?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I would support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I would oppose.
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In approximately 50 percent of the states, public employees (including teachers) take part in state pension systems other than Social Security. This results in many public workers having their Social Security benefit unfairly reduced by the Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset.

- *Will you support expanding Social Security and reforms to the WEP and GPO provision so that retired public servants are not unfairly penalized?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I will support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I will oppose.
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16. IMMIGRATION

Our country's strength has always been built on the simple notion that America is a place where many become one. The AFT supports commonsense, comprehensive and compassionate immigration reform, which is long overdue.

- *Do you support a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers and their families; for the beneficiaries of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, Temporary Protected Status and Deferred Enforced Departure; and for the 11 million undocumented immigrants?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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17. CLIMATE CHANGE AND JOBS

Americans face the dual crises of climate change and increasing economic inequality. For far too long, the forces driving both crises have created a wedge between the need for economic security and a safe living environment.

- *Do you support policies that combine an aggressive emission-reduction strategy with a sound infrastructure, jobs and community resilience strategy?*

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, I support.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I oppose.
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18. Can you give concrete examples where you have been instrumental in helping organized labor and the broader working class in Vermont.

I know that the fight for justice requires far more than checking the right boxes. Vermont has a proud legacy of progressive leadership on social and economic justice. However, not unlike the Democratic leadership in Washington, our state's Democratic leadership also has a history of letting workers' rights and economic justice lag in favor of a broken status quo shaped by corporate interests. Democrats have too often asked rank-and-file policymakers to choose between party loyalty and the needs of organized labor, and we cannot let this continue.

Up until the very end of this legislative session, I have been fighting for workers' rights - from standing with UVM Staff United in their negotiations for livable wages to working closely with Senator Pollina to push for card check union access (even when leadership turned their back on what had been called a "must pass" bill) to working to ensuring faculty and staff have a seat at the table on governance boards in our higher education systems. I also understand the threat of the nursing workforce shortage, especially having done a panel with local nurses on this topic and highlighting the issue for others. I pushed for greater compensation and support going directly to nurses and other health care workers - that's one of the reasons I have the endorsement of Rep. Mari Cordes, Addison-4 State Representative and founding organizer and 2nd president of Vermont Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, AFT local 5221.

Just last year, I stood up against the Democratic establishment, including my party leadership, in the fight to protect public pensions for educators and state employees. I was the only State Senator to take a stand with our labor leaders and our civil servants on the State House steps to protect the pensions they were promised, which were in jeopardy of

rushed unilateral and unjust cuts. I understand the personal impact these policy decisions have on working Vermonters, at a time when they were on the front line of the COVID-19 crisis in our communities, so I fought to include those most impacted by these pension policy discussions. I am not a backroom-dealing politician – I champion inclusive policy making that centers those directly affected.

In 2015, I took on my own Speaker of the House to defend educators’ right to strike. I was one of only two members that took the fight directly to Democratic leadership and put every last bit of my political capital to work to protect teachers’ right to bargain collectively and preserve their right to strike when an amendment was put on the table from our own Democratic leadership to take that right away.

Vermont has a great and growing disparity between the “haves” and “have nots,” a problem mirrored throughout the country. This is why I am building a worker-focused campaign. The largest employment group among my donors is educators, school workers, and higher education employees. We must rebuild a strong middle class so Americans can once again have the dignity, respect, and economic security they deserve from the workplace.



Pensions Protest at the State House in Montpelier, VT (Spring 2021)



UVM Staff United Rally in Burlington, VT (April 2022)

OPTIONAL: ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS

I'm running for Vermont's sole Congressional seat to fight for our state's working families. As our country faces a climate crisis and a growing gap in wealth between those at the top and the rest of us, our state needs an advocate who has lived and breathed the fight for justice. I first won a seat in the Vermont House in 2008 as a 22-year-old renter with no health insurance and no car. I went on to serve for four terms as a State Representative, and it is now my honor to serve as the first woman of color in the State Senate. With 15 years of public service to Vermonters under my belt, I bring to the table a lifelong record of winning for Vermont workers, and never leaving the negotiating table empty-handed.

My years of action have earned our team the support and trust of many workers throughout the state, including rank-and-file school workers, teachers, state and municipal workers, and nurses. We have also earned the endorsement of the Vermont AFL-CIO, Communications Workers of America - District 1 and the National Rural Letter Carriers Association, and the United Food and Commercial Workers local 1459.

The fight for labor rights and working people is not one I am just joining, but the fight of my lifetime. I'd be honored to be a partner to you in Washington and to earn your support.