



## AFT Washington 2022 Candidate Questionnaire

### About AFT Washington

AFT Washington represents approximately 6,500 education professionals working in community and technical colleges, regional universities, early learning, and K-12. Our members work with all ages of students, from young children in pre-K education settings to adults in higher education, as well as all facets of education. Our members are bus drivers, maintenance workers, faculty, paraeducators, food service workers, custodians, success coaches, grounds crew members, and more.

Together, with our members and national organization, we advocate and fight for:

- Safe, welcoming, and thriving neighborhood schools for every student, and high-quality, affordable post-high school opportunities to fulfill our paramount duty to help *all* students succeed, at every level;
- Economic and advancement opportunities for everyone;
- Affordable, high-quality healthcare for everyone;
- Democracy, pluralism, and voting rights by involving the voices of students, parents, and the community, side-by-side with educational employees and elected officials;
- Racial, social, financial, and civic equity, and fighting back against discrimination, hatred, and bigotry.

We hope you will take this opportunity to complete the questionnaire below and allow us to better understand your candidacy. Completing the questionnaire is required for consideration of endorsement or possible campaign contributions. If our Committee on Political Education (COPE) decides they would like further information, we may ask you to participate in an interview.

To be considered, return your completed questionnaire via email, by close of business, on March 25<sup>th</sup> to [aftwashington@aftwa.org](mailto:aftwashington@aftwa.org). If you have questions, please leave a message at 206-242-4777.

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### Candidate Biographical Information

**Name:** Julio Cortes

**Candidate for which office:** State House of Representatives, 35th Legislative District

**Party affiliation:** Democrat

**Political background** (*offices held or currently hold, offices ran for, party positions, etc.*): This will be my first time running for public office.

**Community or organizational memberships (past and present):** I was a Homeless Youth Advocate at the Cocoon House for 5 years.

**Current occupation:** Director of Communication for the City of Everett

**Current employer:** City of Everett

**Are you currently a member of a labor organization?** I am not a current member; however, I hold the utmost respect and appreciation for labor unions.

**If yes, which labor organization, and how long have you been a member?** N/A

**If not currently a member of a labor organization, have you ever been?** I have never been a member

**If yes, which labor organization, when, and for how long?** N/A

### *General*

#### **1. Why are you running for this elective office?**

My professional career and community involvement has always been community focused. Since my work with the Cocoon House, a nonprofit that serves at-risk and homeless youth and their families, I've had a passion for helping people find ways to better themselves. After two years of direct service at Cocoon House, my focus shifted to telling the story of the youth and families we served to our community and seeking support for the important work the organization did. I also had the opportunity to do legislative work for Cocoon House, advocating for or against initiatives that had an impact on the population we worked with. My work with the homeless youth and their families, coupled with my lived experiences as an Mexican American, I know I can bring a unique perspective and innovative solutions to our most pressing and complex issues.

#### **2. What qualities distinguish you from other candidates for this office?**

Being involved in community and regional groups has educated me about issues that bring challenges to our community members. Our BIPOC community, our business owners, our residents who are traveling to work in other parts of our region and I'd like the opportunity to support the work that is being done and see if I can bring new ideas or strategies to the table to help meet challenges faced by our community. I also look forward to developing connections with our labor unions in order to continue to bridge the gap between labor and politics. I also recognize that there are topics that I am not well versed in; however, I will leverage the knowledge and experience subject matter experts have to continue to build a labor bench in Olympia.

## Revenue and Education

1. For decades Washington State has had the most regressive tax system in the country, contributing to underfunding of public education and many other investments in the public good. **The pandemic has highlighted the numerous gaps in education funding that persist, for example in the form of the digital divide, the need for wrap-around services, stagnant wages, etc. When new funding is allocated, it is often for specific populations of students or specific programs and in relatively small sums. How will you approach finding new sources of revenue to both invest in Washingtonians and create a more progressive revenue system?**

Do you support...

	Yes	No
Capital Gains Tax?	X	
Wealth Tax?	X	
Estate Tax?	X	
Elimination of cap on Workforce Education Investment Account tax?	X	

2. During the pandemic, many Washingtonians have lost their jobs and been evicted from their homes. The poverty rate has increased during the pandemic, particularly for BIPOC Americans. In the 2022 legislative session, a bill was introduced that would have given cash assistance to those below the poverty line with a stipend, also known as Universal Basic Income or Guaranteed Basic Income. **What is your position on this policy? Do you believe it can help address the racial wealth gap?**

So many members of our community are facing financial insecurity, just 1-2 paychecks away from homelessness. And for so many, an additional income would be enough to keep a roof over their heads and food in their refrigerator. I fully support any legislation that aims to address the financial disparities many are facing, and that includes Universal Basic Income. That bill will help in the short term but we have to do more to address the root of the problem, this is not the silver bullet to address the racial wage gap. To address it we need to look at our wrap around services and do more to invest into workforce development and housing affordability. Everyone deserves the opportunity to create generational wealth through the purchase of property, in Washington that just seems like a dream. To address racial wage gap we have to look at the long term impact and generational repercussions.

3. Public education, from K-12 through Post-High School has seen state disinvestment for several decades. **What will you do to increase the funding of community and technical colleges in order to invest in the workforce? Do you support pay equity for part-time faculty?**

To increase the funding of community and technical colleges I will support and propose legislation that directly funds these programs. I, myself, attended a community college prior to transferring to a 4 year program, so I understand the need to increase funding. As a community, our economic viability is directly tied to our ability to train our workforce, and to do that we need to fully fund programs that are accessible and affordable to those who need it the most. Part-time faculty are still faculty, they still dedicate their life to provide education, they deserve equitable pay for the thankless work they do.

4. Pre-K 12 employees work with students dealing with a wide range of issues outside of school, e.g. trauma, behavioral challenges, developmental disabilities, health issues and more. This can pose safety issues, for example for paraeducators who are often hit, bitten, shoved or in other ways harmed because of student behavior. Many factors contribute to this phenomenon, which translates to a range of potential solutions. **How would you approach problem solving if a group of workers sought your support in addressing this issue?**

This is a very complex issue that intersects with many different aspects, ie. racial or socioeconomic disparities, it's important to understand that context when trying to address the problem. I firmly believe that so many educators and paraeducators face these issues in part because they don't have the resources to handle them appropriately. I will champion and support legislation that increases the amount of resources schools have available, to include more behavioral health specialists, school nurses, and additional teachers. We have to fund public schools fully and provide them the resources they need in order to educate our students to a level in which they are proud.

5. In recent years public officials have attempted to solve budget problems through privatization of public services. This diversion of public funds has led to a poor quality of services, reduced accountability, and a loss of good jobs, while failing to realize the promise of saving money. **What is your position on privatization in the education arena? Please explain.**

I do not support the privatization of public schools because it does not work. We have seen, over the course of history, the privatization of public goods and services, and time and time again we have found that it categorically does not work. The money being diverted away from public schools does not help us address the very real issues public schools have. Many of those issues are steeped in a lack of resources. You cannot solve a resource shortage by moving resources away. Public Schools will always and have always served a purpose, that is to educate our children from an array of backgrounds. I stand firmly in my support of public education.

Do you support...

	Yes	No
<b>Public tax dollars funding private charter schools?</b>		X
<b>Privatization of school and college resources (i.e. counseling, childcare, student services)?</b>		X
<b>Public Capital Funds for projects at private colleges and universities?</b>		X

1. Many Washingtonians recognize the value of union representation and are organizing at their workplace, such as legislative aides in Olympia, workers at Starbucks, etc. **Do you support every worker's right to collectively bargain for better working conditions, and their right to join a union? Please explain.**

Yes, everyone should be able to collectively bargain, no matter the job. Too often corporations and even the government, put their bottom line above the needs and voices of the workers. I grew up in Wapato, Wa, a small farming community, where I saw and felt the impact of not having union representation; I will work tirelessly to ensure that no one else has to go through that. Workers deserve a seat at the table that they built, and they deserve to advocate for contracts that are beneficial to them above the benefits of the corporation.

2. We see ongoing attempts to weaken unions and diminish working conditions here in Washington State and at the federal level. **What policies can support unions and workers' rights and how will you work to enact such policies?**

We must uplift our workers by providing them with the protections they need in order to amplify their voices. I will fully support legislation such as SB 5090 to increase workers protections, as well as supporting future initiatives that protect unions and workers rights.

1. What do you see as **your role** as a state official in addressing racial, social, and economic inequities in our educational system? **Please specifically address each issue.**

**Racial Equity:**

As an elected official, it is my responsibility to ensure that our policies and bills that are set forth reflect the needs and voices are reflected. As an immigrant from Mexico, moving to Washington when I was 5 years old, I know firsthand what racial inequality feels like and its long term impact. It is our job as elected officials to ensure representation at all levels of government because representation matters. To promote and achieve racial equity, we need to ensure our schools and workplaces represent the communities they serve, which is why I will support any additional funding to recruit, train, and maintain a more diverse workforce in our public schools.

**Social equity:**

We need to fix our upside-down tax system and fund all our schools so that they don't perpetuate inequality. All of our students come from a diverse background from a number of socioeconomic backgrounds, and we have to understand to best serve them. Social equity can only be achieved when we ensure equal access to quality education, we cannot continue to siphon funds from the public school system to charter schools. Every child deserves a quality education no matter where they are from or live, our tax code has to represent what we want to see by moving away from regression and into progress.

**Economic equity:**

We need to ensure that our schools are an economically equitable, safe, and welcoming place for our most vulnerable kids. Kids can't learn when they are hungry or undergoing trauma. In the legislature, I will support aggressive investments in combating child poverty, hunger, and homelessness.

2. We are faced with numerous threats to social justice, including ongoing threats to our immigrant communities, the housing affordability and student debt crises, police accountability, and more. **Where have you shown leadership and acted on issues of social justice in the past? What will your social justice priorities be if you win your election?**

I have worked directly with homeless youth and their families for a number of years. During that time I was charged with the responsibility of ensuring the safety of the youth who used our services. That experience really opened my eyes to the realities of the homelessness crisis we are facing in Washington, and how easy it is for so many people to fall victim to circumstance. I stand firmly in my belief of attacking the problem at the root and using my experiences working with homeless youth to drive legislation. If I win my election, I will increase funding to programs that meet our community where they are, programs that are grounded in access and equity.

3. Several bills were passed in the 2021 legislative session designed to reduce police violence and hold police accountable; in the 2022 session attempts were made to dilute the definition of excessive force and minimize the role of de-escalation. **What is your position on these issues?**

Everyone needs to be held accountable for their actions, and that includes the police. There is no way to feel safe in your community if you don't have faith in those who have the responsibility to protect and serve. We have to stand firm in how we address these very real issues that impact our communities all across the country, and we need to do so with synergy and cooperation with the police and the

community. We have made some strides but we still have a ton of work to do and I am willing to do the work.

4. Hate crimes have risen 25 percent nationally since 2015. But the number of hate crimes in Washington state increased by 97 percent. There were 542 hate-crime incidents reported statewide.  
**How do you plan on addressing the increase in hate crimes in Washington state?**

Hate has no place in our communities and we have to continue to do what we can to eradicate and punish those who believe their beliefs are above the safety, respect, and dignity of others. If elected, I will work to address this serious problem by addressing the root causes of hate, education. I will put an emphasis on funding educational problems that address racism, sexism, transphobia, etc.. We have to work to find the balance between prosecution of these crimes as a means of punishment and prosecution as a means of deterrent. It's a complex issue that requires an array of solutions that need to be rooted in diversity, inclusion, equity, and respect.

## Campaign Information

### **Are there any additional comments you would like to provide that you believe are necessary in understanding your candidacy?**

My career began over a decade ago working with homeless youth and their families. It opened my eyes to the realities of poverty that many people in our community face every day and inspired me to make public service the focus of my career. Over the last four and a half years as a City of Everett employee, transparency and open communication with our community along with supporting economic vitality and growth efforts has been a priority for me.

As your Representative, I will work tirelessly to ensure our community has the tools and resources needed to overcome barriers and increase our quality of life through economic expansion, workforce development, and affordable housing.

### **What is your overall campaign budget?**

\$125,000, and I am on my way there and with the support of allies like you, I know I can make it!

### **How many volunteers are currently working on your campaign? What is your goal for volunteers working on your campaign?**

I currently have 1 full time volunteer working on my campaign, with an overall goal of 7-10 committed volunteers.

### **To date, how much money have you raised and obtained pledges for?**

I have raised just under \$8,000 so far, with \$1,000 in pledges, well on my way to my first milestone of \$10,000 and I am on track to get there by April.

### **Please provide any endorsements you have received:**

Mike Sells, State Representative 38th LD

Emily Wicks, State Representative 38th LD  
Mayor Cassie Franklin, Everett

Deputy Mayor Nick Harper, Everett

Dave Somers, County Executive

Terry Ryan, Former Snohomish County Concilmember



Ray Stephanson, Former Mayor, Everett

Jeff Moore, Former Councilmember

Gary Clark, President/CEO of EASC

The Action Fund, WHAAF

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