

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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**Testimony of the
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners
In Opposition of Senate Bill 920 –
Baltimore City Public School System –
School Named for Walter P. Carter**

February 18, 2020

The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners knows the history of the great civil rights activist Walter P. Carter. Walter P. Carter was an activist and central figure in Baltimore during the Civil Rights Movement. He earned that designation by organizing demonstrations against discrimination throughout the State of Maryland. His importance and legacy still echo throughout Baltimore City as we work to provide students and families of all races and backgrounds with equitable learning opportunities and facilities.

The Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School has been a staple in the Wilson Park community of Baltimore City since it was named after the Civil Rights Leader in 1976. In January of 2021, the 21st Century School Buildings Program plans to merge Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School with Guilford Elementary/Middle School and Lois T. Murray Elementary School (for those students with severe cognitive disabilities) because of underutilization of the facilities.

Guilford Elementary/Middle and Lois T. Murray also have deep rooted legacies and admiration from their respective communities as well. There are many identities also tethered to both Guilford and Lois T. Murray schools and the impact on these communities must be considered as Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School plans to absorb both schools.

Baltimore City School's policy on *Naming/Renaming a School Program or Facility*; states that, "A merger of schools is when two separate school programs are combined into one school program. Under this scenario, the new program will serve the combined student population, receive key programmatic elements of one or both schools, and will be located in one of the original school facilities of the merged schools" (FFA II A). This policy requires that a new name for the merged school be considered within the first year of the school program operating (FFA III G.1.).

Additionally, on May 29, 2018, City Schools CEO Sonja Santelises and School Board Commissioner Johnette Richardson held a meeting at Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle School to discuss the 21st Century School Buildings project and the co-location of the schools. Another community meeting to learn of the construction schedule is set for is scheduled for February 19, 2020.

Senate Bill 920 proposed by Senator Carter would require the district to violate its own policy standard as the district would be required to maintain the Walter P. Carter name without adequate consideration of a new name for the merged school. Maintaining the Walter P. Carter name without adequate input

from the communities impacted by the merger would not be serving both communities; all voices should be heard.

Senate Bill 920 violates Baltimore City School's policy regarding Naming/Renaming a School Facility which states that, "Neighborhood community groups and organizations, students, teachers, elected officials and other interested citizens should be afforded an opportunity to suggest names for the school facility or school program. At least one community forum for the purpose of seeking comments and input from the school community must be held" (FFA-RA D.1.).

The policy also requires that if a school is closed and the school had a historically significant name, a legacy plaque bearing information about the prior school facility name may be permanently affixed to the building in a central location. And, the legacy plaque shall not preclude the reuse of the historic name for a future school facility. In fact, retired names shall be added to the list of previously used names maintained by the CEO for future use.

Additionally, Senate Bill 920 would require the district to rename another school Walter P. Carter immediately. The district would have to violate its own policy and force this name on a school regardless of the desire of the school leader or the school community. Baltimore City School District's policy on *Naming/Renaming a School Program or Facility*; also states that, "Although the Board will consider carefully community recommendations for school facility names, the final responsibility for officially naming a school facility or school program rests with the Board" (FFA III A.4.E), after receiving a recommendation from the CEO. Senate Bill 920 weakens the Baltimore City School Board's authority for naming and renaming schools and could establish a precedent that usurps its authority.

For the foregoing reasons, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners opposes Senate Bill 920, but is willing to listen and work with the Senator to determine how she and her family can be made comfortable to know that her father's legacy remains prevalent.

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