

**Testimony from LaToya Nettles, AROS Parent Organizer, District 41
Resident
SB31- Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners –
Alterations Before the Education, Energy, and the Environment
Committee
1/24/23
Position: FAVORABLE**

Good morning members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee.

My name is LaToya Nettles and I'm a District 41 resident. I am currently serving as the AROS (The Alliance to Reclaim our Schools) parent organizer, member of TDP (Teacher's Democracy project) and a member of Communities United. I am also a minister in my community, a special needs and family advocate and a Baltimore City educator. I'm writing to give my full support of SB31 to give student members of the board expanded voting rights, the ability to participate in closed/executive sessions, to alter the process by which those students are chosen to be more democratic, and to establish a commission to research and make recommendations on board member compensation and adding a second student member of the board.

I have personally spoken with our youth about their concerns in our city's education system. The students often, if not always, have the same concerns that the staff and parents have. During my time as an educator and now as an advocate, I have learned that their concerns include but are not limited to safety in schools, understaffed schools, resources for underserved communities, and mental health awareness. Are these not concerns that are discussed everyday across our country? We are always boasting about our students, how special they are, how bright they are, and how excited we are for this new generation of leaders. It is due time for our youth to have voting privileges and access to the decisions that affect them. Their insight into their education is monumental for our future success.

I recently attended the CPD (The Center for Popular Democracy) conference, where I witnessed a youth-led organization train adults and other youth on youth activism. Their subject was how to be safe when youth are involved during protests and how to manage social networks safely. I was in awe of their maturity and knowledge of the subject. The youth will lead the way to a brighter future and we should be honored to be witness.

Serving on the school board is a demanding position that is unpaid. This limits the candidate pool to individuals who can afford their time to meetings that are often during the working day, people who have flexible work schedules, daily child care

and more resources. Unfortunately these resources are not always available to families of our students. The opportunity to serve should be accessible to our parents and guardians of City Schools students. This bill establishes a task force to study what compensation makes the most sense and to submit recommendations. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB31. Thank you.

Sincerely,

LaToya Nettles

AROS Parent Organizer

District 8

latoyanettles@communitiesunite.org

917-474-8162