

**Testimony from Ethan Eblaghie on behalf of the Baltimore Student Union
SB0031 - Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners — Student Members and Task
Force to Study Compensation and Student Members**

Before the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

24 January 2023

Position: FAVORABLE

Good afternoon, members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee. My name is Ethan Eblaghie; I'm a resident of West Govans in Legislative District 41, and I'm an 11th grader at the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute. I'm writing on behalf of the Baltimore Student Union, a grassroots collective of City Schools highschoolers across eight schools to give my full support to SB 31, which would grant secondary school students a vote on our Student Commissioner on the Board of Education and that Commissioner the powers to vote in a wider range of Board decisions, including in executive sessions.

Baltimore Student Union was formed last October to organize around November's School Board election, the first of its kind in our city, which has traditionally had a Board that was fully appointed by our Mayor on the recommendation of a community panel. We started as a small group of a dozen students, eager to volunteer on a political campaign and gain real-world experience in engaging with the civic process, but quickly expanded to a network of students across several schools in the City. As we exploded, we realized that the appetite for a group that provided students the opportunity to engage in local democracy was massive, and that our mission, based around the fundamental idea that students, like any class of individuals, deserve to have a say in the decisions that govern our lives, was one shared by a wide coalition of community members of all backgrounds.

That idea must be reflected and emboldened by our Student Commissioner as well. A student Board member who is not elected by students cannot and never will be reflective of the student body or accountable to their needs, and even if they were, being unable to participate fully in the decision-making process of the Board will prevent them from carrying out these duties regardless.

Ten months ago, the Baltimore City delegation in this General Assembly, composed at the time of 22 lawmakers in the State Senate and House of Delegates, agreed with that premise, and unanimously advanced an identical version of this bill to the full Assembly and ultimately, to the Governor's desk. Nearly a year on, the need for students to have a voice in our school system has remained as pressing as ever, and with one vote, this Committee can get us that much closer to making these uncontroversial, consensus-based reforms the state law.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 31.

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