

**Testimony from Corey Witherspoon, Baltimore Teachers Union Vice President,
District 43A 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 Corey Witherspoon and I am a Baltimore native and currently serve as Wholeness Specialist for Baltimore City School's Pimlico Elementary Middle School. I am a recipient of The Campaign for Black Male Achievement Rumble Award in 2018 for my Service in Baltimore's Communities. In 2019 I was awarded the Maryland Mentor of the Year. In 2020 I received the Fox 45 Champion of Courage Award for my work in Baltimore City's Schools. In 2021 I was appointed to the Mayor's Trauma Informed Care Taskforce. And in 2022 awarded the Out For Justice Mentor of the Year.

Are student voices really truly cared about in Baltimore, or is it just a catchy mantra? I believe that student voice matters in Baltimore and that my work record reflects that. Student voices advocate for schools to have Social Emotional Learning and Restorative Practice in all schools Led by Healing Youth Alliance. Youth As Resources and other youth in Baltimore advocate against School Police having guns in schools. Baltimore city leaders listened and as a result Baltimore's School police do not bring guns in schools. Regretfully the School shootings at Douglas in 2019 inspired the School's students along with Zeke Cohen to rally and create the Trauma-Responsive Care Act, then renamed the Elijah Cummings Healing City Act. When Renaissance Academy was about to get shut down in 2016. It was the students' testimony about how the staff at Renaissance Academy cared for them to help them heal from their communal traumas that impacted district leaders to decide to keep Renaissance Academy open. Every year, surveys are filled out by school staff because Baltimore City Public Schools respects youth voices. That's why I am compelled to believe that this legislative body will fully support student's voting rights being expanded and that they should have the ability to participate in executive/closed sessions and special meetings of the board. This legislation will ensure those rights.

More mature School Board Commissioners can learn a great deal from Student School Board Commissioner especially when it comes to student disciplinary matters and its effects on students. School Board Commissioners can learn how to render consequences in a way so they are not punitive but enable a student to learn from their maladaptive behavior. Other Counties around Baltimore have already given full voting powers to Students on their School Boards. Are we sending out the message that the Baltimore Student is not intelligent and poised enough to vote for a measure that would impact students? I hope that we are not because I believe that student voice matters in Baltimore and their voting powers should be expanded in Baltimore's school board.

Finally I'd like to emphasize this bill is already a significant compromise. After meeting with members of the school board and the mayor's office over multiple years in good faith discussions and after pulling the bill two sessions ago that would have more dramatically

restructured the school board Senate Bill 31 is the result. Their concerns and ideas were incorporated into this legislation to ensure that we can move towards a more democratic, transparent, youth centric and effective board.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB31. Thank you.

Corey Witherspoon

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