

**Testimony from Jocelyn Providence, Baltimore City Public Schools Teacher,
District 45 Resident
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

1/24/23

Position: FAVORABLE

Good afternoon members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee,

My name is Jocelyn Providence and I'm a District 45th resident. I support SB0031 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. Even in my ninth year of teaching in Baltimore City Public Schools I continue to be motivated and inspired by our students. Our students are some of the most hard working and dedicated individuals I know. They are reflective and constantly re-adjusting to what is going on around them, especially now more than ever. As the people who are learning, growing, and interacting with the systems and policies of Baltimore City Public Schools every day it is only right that they are given equal opportunity and access to full voting rights in the decision-making process.

I have also had the pleasure of supporting a previous Student Commissioner of the Baltimore City School Board and she expressed to me how helpful and supportive it would have been to have more than one student member on the Board. She informed me that it would allow for more collaboration and student perspectives to be shared in discussions and conversations. Anyone who has had a conversation with young people knows that they are great at generating ideas and solutions when they have another young person around.

This would change the burden of one student representing nearly 80,000 students. We need to empower our students and support student leadership and growth. I know there are efforts to increase the participation in ASCBC across the district which is great, but that is only representation from about 10 schools. Every 6-12th grade student deserves the right to vote for who they want to represent them as student commissioner and be able to represent them with full voting rights since they are the most directly impacted by the decisions and policies that are made by School board Commissioners.

If we want to have equitable access to the role of Commissioner to the Baltimore City School Board we must establish a commission to research and make recommendations of Board member compensation. We cannot limit the amazing pool of potential candidates to serve on the School Board to people who have the financial ability to take on this role without compensation. Baltimore City is one of just two jurisdictions, in one of the wealthiest states in the nation, where board members are **not compensated (see graphic below)**. The

commitment and work done by our School Board Commissioners is demanding and honorable and they deserve to be compensated as such. City Schools has a 1.6 billion dollar budget for FY 2023. While we don't know what the compensation commission will recommend, even with an expanded board and above state average compensation this would only cost the district approximately \$200,000 or 0.00013% of their total budget.

Finally I'd like to emphasize as an organizational member of the VOTES (**V**oices **T**owards and **E**lected **S**chool Board) Coalition, this bill is already a significant compromise. We met with members of the school board and the mayor's office over multiple years in good faith discussions after pulling the bill two sessions ago that would have more dramatically restructured the school board. 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 SB0031. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jocelyn Providence
Baltimore City Public Schools Teacher and District 45 Resident
jprovide.jp@gmail.com

