



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony of Senator Jill P. Carter  
In Favor of SB31  
Before the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
On January 24, 2023**

**Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Esteemed Members of the  
Committee:**

Representation is the bedrock of democracy. From the school board to the presidency, our country was founded on the principles of inclusive governance. Yet, for centuries, membership on the Baltimore City School Board has been limited to those of affluence and exclusive of the student's voice.

Senate Bill 31 aims to instill representative democracy on the Board by expanding the voting power of the Student Members and forming a task force to study possible compensation for school board members.

This bill passed unanimously through both chambers last session but was vetoed by the former Governor, claiming that increased student voice would "jeopardize the board's fiduciary responsibility." I am hopeful that the bill will enjoy a more favorable reaction under our new Governor.

Delegate Melissa Wells, the House sponsor, and I have introduced the third-reader version of the 2022 bill, encompassing delegation compromises. Under the compromise, student members will be granted the authority to vote on operating and capital budgets, school closings, and student discipline. Further, they will be permitted into executive sessions. However, they will not be given allowed to vote on personnel matters, including collective bargaining agreements or board appeals. Finally, all middle and high school students will have a vote in this position's election rather than just a subset of the population involved with student government.

Often, through policy, students are implicitly told that they are less trusted to make decisions on a range of educational issues that directly affect them – that somehow, they have greater conflicts of interest than the adults that serve on the Board. This perspective is myopic and can translate into poor educational outcomes.

Senate Bill 31 also seeks to address another issue that affects Board responsiveness to the educational needs of our public-school students: Member Compensation. Of the 24 jurisdictions across the state, Baltimore City is only one (1) of two (2) jurisdictions that offers no compensation to its school board members. Our members dedicate, on average, more than 20 hours per week on board matters. Their time commitments include meeting preparation, hosting community town halls and school-based events, and attending biweekly school board meetings that generally last from three (3) to seven (7) hours. This uncompensated time commitment makes it impractical for individuals that need to work multiple jobs to serve, thus limiting the pool to persons with substantial income or that don't need to earn an income.

Without compensation, it is nearly impossible for most residents of Baltimore to serve on the school board. Under the current scheme, the voices and perspectives of the wealthy will continue to supersede others and the playing field will remain unlevel.

Current Maryland State Department of Education regulations allow for compensating board members. Adding a line item for Board compensation would equal one-tenth of a percent (0.001) of the district's budget. We must ensure that any eligible and interested Baltimore City resident can serve on the school board without their income being a barrier.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 31. The passage of this bill would bring us one step closer to our collective mission of preparing each student to be successful in this global economy and to be strong contributors to their communities.

Sincerely,



Jill P. Carter, Esq.