

Testimony from Timothy Nathan Ferrell, Baltimore City Public Schools Teacher

District 44A

SB206 - Education - Collective Bargaining - Certificated Employees - Class Size

Before the Senate Finance Committee

2/9/23

Position: FAVORABLE

Good afternoon members of the committee.

My name is Nathan Ferrell and I'm a Baltimore city public school Teacher and district 44A resident. I'm writing to give my full support of SB206 for the purpose of repealing the prohibition on a public school employer negotiating the maximum number of students assigned to a class; and generally relating to collective bargaining for public school employees.

I taught for 8 years in Howard County Public schools where my class sizes were almost always over 30 students. As an AP Spanish Language teacher I would spend hours after the school day grading, revising and offering individual feedback to my AP students. The same for my introductory and intermediate Spanish classes. My student class load averaged over 150 students a year in HCPSS. Transitioning to Baltimore City Public Schools, my class sizes fluctuated wildly. One summer I had 67 students assigned to one section of a Spanish summer credit recovery course. Another summer I had over 40 students per class on my rosters for original credit Spanish courses that are a graduation requirement.

This bill removes the illegality of discussions around class size between teacher unions and school districts. Currently, it cannot be discussed as part of negotiations. Teachers unions need the ability to bring the demands from the community to the bargaining table in order to address the issues our students and families face.

Class sizes impact whether students have meaningful connections with educators and receive quality personalized instruction. Being able to discuss class sizes during negotiations could also allow for smaller caseloads for our special educators which would improve retention. It affects school counselors, social workers, nurses and psychologists by improving our retention and recruitment of those key positions and addressing the mental health crisis facing our schools.

Members of this committee may be wondering why can't these common sense issues about staffing and instruction and even components of the blueprint be discussed during negotiations. As a member of a bargaining team for the Baltimore Teachers Union I have to emphasize that district bargaining teams shut down any aspect of a conversation if it involves class size. Even the most basic common sense conversations that support common goals between LEA's and

Teacher Unions are shut down by district negotiations teams simply because they can. Because it is illegal to bring up anything related to class size at the bargaining table.

I understand the concerns that this bill will lead to hard class size caps and increased school construction requests. I want to emphasize that **this bill is a working conditions issue** and a way to give workers more of a voice.

After talking with affiliates in other states who can negotiate class size, they say many times it leads to additional support staff in a classroom if a class hits a certain number, or additional pay for the teacher, like a special educator with a huge caseload who will leave the district if the working conditions do not improve or unless the pay improves commensurate with the workload.

This bill would not make class size a mandatory subject for bargaining. There are so many other outcomes that could come from being able to bargain class size that aren't hard caps. They include common sense discussions around blueprint implementation, creative ways to handle the pre-k expansion, retention strategies for job titles with high turnover like special educators and it could address our mental health crisis in schools by hiring and staffing related service providers adequately.

Finally I'd like to emphasize as a member of the Baltimore AROS (**Alliance To Reclaim Our Schools**) coalition, this bill is a significant compromise. In 2020, a coalition of students, parents and teachers formed the Baltimore City chapter of the Alliance to Reclaim our Schools (AROS). Our first project was to ensure that decision-makers understand the concerns of those most affected by education policy decisions. We conducted 11 listening sessions with over 300 students, educators and families. People shared their thoughts about what is most needed to improve Baltimore City Schools. The outcomes from those conversations were organized into a draft platform of 14 items. Then 1194 stakeholders voted on these items at our mobile voting station pop ups at schools and community venues. As a result of this voting process class sizes of no more than 20 students and more counselors and mental health providers in school was one of the top 5 priorities of Baltimore city students and families. Although this bill does not accomplish what our community has prioritized, it is a step in the right direction.**

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB206.

Sincerely,

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