



House Bill 456
County Boards of Education - Student Members -
Voting Rights and Participation in Executive Sessions
February 7, 2024

Support

Good afternoon Chair, Vice-Chair, and members of the Committee.

Advance Maryland supports HB456, which allows student members of boards of education to attend executive or special sessions in certain circumstances. At Advance Maryland, we work towards a Maryland with thriving, healthy and inclusive communities where all Marylanders have access to opportunity, including safe and affordable housing; economic prosperity; quality healthcare; reliable transportation; a restorative justice system; and a livable future. AMD supports HB456 because it would increase student voice in appropriate decisions, allowing local school systems to build a better, more equitable, learning environment.

One of the unique components of Maryland's education system is the establishment of "student members" on Boards of Education. This can be traced back to Anne Arundel County, in 1975, when in a bipartisan bill, the student member was given full voting rights, including access to executive sessions. The spread of the practice has followed, but not the rights. Even though student members are prevalent in almost every county in Maryland, only a handful of school systems allow them to enter executive sessions. It's time we give students a voice in all conversations, including those behind closed doors.

Executive sessions are often where the most complicated issues of the school system are discussed. It's important that student members are not decoration for adults to point to, but real people whose opinions are considered, especially decisions affecting them. Student members are often incredibly well-educated on the real atmosphere of schools, can acutely identify issues, and are the most determined to accomplish their goals in their short (usually one year), timespan. They are composed, well-read, and eager students who understand the nuance of issues, in no way dissimilar to adult board members. They interact more with students, teachers, administrators, and all school staff more than every one of their fellow board members. They deserve a voice.

This bill brings the student members' rights closer to adult board members and allows Maryland to build a better school system. Advance Maryland strongly urges the committee to issue a favorable report.

Testimony written by Tanish Gupta, Advance Maryland Intern