

Testimony in Support of

House Bill 456: County Boards of Education - Student Members - Voting Rights and Participation in Executive Sessions

February 7, 2024

Members of the Ways Means Committee, it is my pleasure to come before you and offer testimony in favor of House Bill 456: County Boards of Education - Student Members - Voting Rights and Participation in Executive Sessions. If enacted, this bill would allow the Student Board Members of the State of Maryland to have voting rights that are par with the Student Member on the Maryland Board of Education, as well as participation in closed or executive sessions. With the addition of the proposed amendments we will not infringe upon the already heightened SMOB voting rights in counties such as Montgomery and Anne Arundel.

Student Board Member voting rights ensure the impact of student voice and input in decisions that are affecting education. This vote is imperative to strengthening the student voice. Many members of the community do not see the necessity in it, but the school system has a duty to uphold and part of that duty is utilizing and trusting the student voice and experience. This bill paves the way for enhancement in the student voice and proves that our society realizes both the importance and necessity of the student voice.

Over the past decades we as a state have had the opportunity to be a part of this unique experience. Student Board Members, while present across the country, are not as strong and powerful as the SMOBs of Maryland. Having been a part of this group of students for this past year I have learned just how empowered the students of Maryland are. We have developed a hunger for advocacy and the betterment of our education. This is a hunger shared by many leaders in the school system.

The student voice is something that is required in the improvement of education. The student vote is something that proves the school system values the input of the students it serves. As a student, prior to my term on the Board of Education, I found myself wondering how the adults in my school system knew how to make decisions beneficial to the students. Now, as a student Board member I wonder if the adults in my system truly value the importance of my experience and input. I love serving on the Calvert County Board, I have been nothing but welcomed. However, that does not mean my voice, at times, is overlooked because I am only 17 or because I am only a student.

By allowing my successors a vote on the Board of Education we are allowing students' experience to be valued, input to be accurately represented, and the ones being affected by our education system more than just a seat at the table.

To be direct. The school system serves the students and it is necessary that it hears, appreciates and values the student experience and voice. This vote will guarantee the student input on all matters. Matters that are affecting students across the various Local Education Agencies and the State of Maryland.

I urge a favorable report with amendments on House Bill 456. Thank you.