

Hello everyone,

My name is Sami Saeed. I am a student at Richard Montgomery High School, and the Student Member of the Board for Montgomery County Public Schools.

Today, I will be speaking on behalf of the Montgomery County Board of Education on House Bill 456, which aims to grant Student Members of Boards of Education in Maryland the right to vote on a number of important issues; expanding voting rights for some student members and establishing voting rights for Student Board members in Counties that either do not have a student member or currently have a student member with no voting authority.

I want to start off by telling my story.

In Middle School, I had never even heard of the Student Member of the Board, let alone Student Leadership in general. But following the COVID-19 pandemic, I decided to embark on a new journey of pursuing advocacy and fighting for change. I soon became the president of my school and a member of multiple leadership organizations, both locally and state-wide.

After joining countless advocacy groups, speaking on countless issues affecting my local community, and most importantly, speaking with students themselves, I learned one thing: students were some of the strongest leaders I have ever encountered. From giving testimonies, to participating in protests, to even lobbying to key decision-makers and much more, I realized that students were a driving force in pushing for progressive change at every level.

Oftentimes, students are the most direct and honest with the changes they want to fight for and the goals they set to achieve. Being young and full of hope leads to students having some of the most innovative and ambitious goals of any advocate. They consistently push the needle forward on key issues that affect both them and their local community, ensuring that change is not only promised but put into action.

When it comes to education in particular, students truly demonstrate their extensive knowledge and leadership abilities. Being the “customers” of the school system allows students to have first-hand knowledge about issues impacting them, and gives them the unique ability to understand the impact of the decisions Boards of Education must make.

That is why it is *essential* that Student Board Members are given the right to vote on their County’s Board of Education. Because *only* students see the inside of a school building almost everyday. Because students have some of the most innovative, ambitious and important goals for our schools and communities. And most importantly, because students are the *sole* customers of our school system, and are the only Board members who, along with their fellow students, feel the impact of the Board of Education’s decisions daily.

Given the importance of the Student Member’s right to vote, Montgomery County Board of Education is supporting this bill with an amendment that would remove from the bill the counties that already have voting rights more expansive than what the bill proposes. Montgomery County Board of Education, being one, along with Anne Arundel, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Prince George’s County Boards of Education.

Thank you.