



Young Democrats of Maryland

**HB 456 - County Boards of Education - Student Members - Voting Rights and
Participation in Executive Sessions
House Ways and Means Committee - February 7th, 2024
FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and committee members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in favor of HB 456, a bill which provides Student Members of the Board (SMOB) of Education with expanded voting rights on the Board of Education of each jurisdiction, excluding personnel decisions. The Young Democrats of Maryland represent the next generation of Marylanders and seek to advance policies which allow Maryland youth to thrive. This bill represents one of our top education priorities and we support it for two reasons: it increases youth voice on the Board of Education, and it promotes broader youth civic engagement.

The role of the Student Member of the Board of Education is simple — students are the largest stakeholders in K-12 education systems yet their voices are often underrepresented within the policy-making process. Currently of the 22 Maryland jurisdictions with student board members, only Baltimore County, Anne Arundel County, and Montgomery County grant their elected SMOBs full voting rights on the Board of Education. Only these three jurisdictions allow for the student member to have a direct say in the decisions that impact their own learning environment and experience. By providing broader voting rights to all student members of county boards of education, this bill gives students a voice in decisions related to their school districts' policy.

Expanding SMOB voting rights also strengthens student civic engagement. By having the opportunity to elect and engage with a SMOB with expanded voting rights, students are able to practice exercising civic duties like voting and holding their student leaders accountable, building civic muscle.

Some argue that the existing limited power SMOBs in many Maryland jurisdictions —partial, non-binding voting power on non-budget issues— already achieves the goal of this legislation. We strongly disagree; simply having a voice in the room where decisions are made is not the same as having a vote at the decision-making table. For these reasons, we respectfully ask for your support for HB 456 and strongly urge a favorable committee report.

Melissa Bender
YDM Vice President for Political Affairs
Chair, YDM Legislative and Policy Committee

Karson Kamenetz
YDM Legislative and Policy Committee