



**Board of Education
of Howard County**

Mavis Ellis
Chair

Vicky Cutroneo
Vice Chair

Kirsten A. Coombs

Christina Delmont-Small

Jennifer Swickard Mallo

Sabina Taj

Chao Wu, Ph.D.

Allison J. Alston
Student Member

Michael J. Martirano, Ed.D.
*Superintendent
Secretary/Treasurer*

**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House of Delegates
Appropriations Committee
March 10, 2020**

HB1511: UNFAVORABLE

**Howard County – Board of Education – Redetermination of Geographic Attendance
Areas Ho. Co. 01–20**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **HB1511 Howard County – Board of Education – Redetermination of Geographic Attendance Areas Ho. Co. 01–20** as a mandate on the Board's authority to set school boundaries. Legislation which limits local board decision-making may weaken the Board's bond with the local community and adversely impact the community's participation in the governance and operation of the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS).

On January 24, 2019, the Board voted unanimously to initiate a comprehensive boundary review process seeking to balance capacity utilization through student assignment adjustments at all school levels. The process ended in November 2019, with more than 5,400 students expected to attend a new school during the 2020-2021 school year. In addition to overcrowding, the process aimed to advance equity by addressing the distribution of students affected by poverty across schools, and plan ahead for the impact of a new high school, scheduled to open in fall 2023.

Through the ten-month-long process, parents, students, community members and elected officials in Howard County expressed their supports and concerns alike. School assignment changes can be a difficult process where no one solution will satisfy everyone. This should not, however, be a reason to legislate future actions by the Board.

The Board appreciates the Howard County Delegation's intent with HB1511, as well as amendments made in the development of the bill to address concerns raised by the school system related to existing policy of the Board. The Board also appreciates the sponsor's express intent to utilize reporting under the bill to determine how the Delegation can support the Board's future needs in balancing limited capacity.

The requirement to develop a specific "plan to adjust student enrollment to meet target utilization," however – in instances where the Board decides not to initiate redistricting and schools remain outside target utilization – seems to go beyond an informational report. This language, as contained in the version before the Committee today, remains a mandate for definitive action by the Board to adjust school boundaries.

By retaining primary decision-making authority at the local level accountable to its citizenry, local boards of education can best balance educational practices and available resources. As this bill runs afoul of this rudimentary legislative principal adopted by the Board, we urge an unfavorable report of HB1511 from this Committee.