

The Baltimore Teachers Union



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**Written Testimony from the Baltimore Teachers Union
SB 275 - Education - Community and Local Accountability for Struggling Schools
(CLASS) Act of 2020 - Innovation Schools
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee**

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OPPOSE

Chair Pinsky and members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. On behalf of the 7,000 members of the Baltimore Teachers Union (BTU), we strongly oppose SB 275, and call for an unfavorable report.

BTU opposes this bill for a number of reasons. Firstly, representatives from the BTU, along with dozens of other stakeholders have been engaged for nearly four years with the question of what improvements are needed in our state in order to improve education for our students, including those students who attend under-resourced schools. After much hard work and deliberation, we have come to a consensus with those stakeholders and education policy experts on a set of policy recommendations-known as the recommendations of the Kirwan Commission-that we think will be effective in bringing about the required changes and improvements. Nowhere in our recommendations, which were the product of 4 years of deliberation-- did it list the changes sought after in this bill. Indeed, at the 1/28/20 MSDE Board Meeting, Board member David Steiner, Director of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy and an appointee of the Governor himself noted that similar reforms have been attempted elsewhere in the country with **no evidence that they improved outcomes for children in failing schools.**

Secondly, the bill is a direct challenge to the spirit of collective bargaining that has granted educators working within a school system one collective voice to address and have a democratic say in the conditions that govern their work. In Baltimore, for example, while all educators are employees of the local school board, principals are given much leeway to manage their budgets, programs, and yes, even personnel. This bill calls for any changes to a collective bargaining agreement that the Innovation Plan Committee deems appropriate to be put to a vote by teachers at that one school. This will result instead with dozens, perhaps hundreds, of versions of the collective bargaining agreement occurring at vastly different schools, offering no cohesion to the local school system whatsoever. If a school administrator wishes to make changes to the collective bargaining agreement for educators, they should be able to do so through the normal channels of the collective bargaining process between the school board and the local union certified to represent the given bargaining unit.

Thirdly, Baltimore Teachers Union has concerns that this bill places undue weight on whether a given school is succeeding based on standardized test scores. Regression analysis has shown

that family income and non-school factors account for 60% of the variance in student test scores (Haertel, 2013; Borman and Dowling, 2012; Coleman et. al., 1966). Only 20% of the variance is attributed to work inside of the school building -- and only half of that falls within teachers' control (American Statistical Association, 2014). Put another way, out-of-school factors are six times as powerful an effect on test score results as classroom teaching. The Innovation plan proposed in the language of the bill shall be based on student outcome data, not other factors that originally went into the state's review of that particular school (access to a well-rounded curricula, school climate surveys, etc.), which are often much better measures of school quality. In so doing, the bill once again fails to recognize the key contributing factor in the determination as to whether a school is providing its students with the education they deserve: namely, the fact that far too many of these schools have been under resourced for years. Considering that Baltimore City Public Schools have been dramatically underfunded for decades according to the state's own definition of adequate funding and serves a student body with disproportionately high levels of poverty and special education needs, this bill will target our schools with inadequate solutions instead of research backed reforms with a track record of success.

Finally, the CLASS Act sets up a structure that is redundant with, and inferior to the already existing processes mandated under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Specifically, schools that are deemed low performing are categorized as Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools, and they undergo a rigorous process of root cause analysis with all relevant stakeholders, long range planning proposals and interventions with significant funding sources to implement the reforms chosen in the individual school's plan. To implement a less rigorous intervention plan with less accountability and resource support on top of the already existing CSI plans creates needlessly redundant and confusing layers of bureaucracy without any track record of making a difference for kids.

It is for these reasons that we ask that this committee give an unfavorable report to SB 275- Education - Community and Local Accountability for Struggling Schools Act of 2020 – Innovation Schools.