

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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**Testimony of the
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners
Support with Amendment
Senate Bill 310 – Baltimore City – Elections –
Early Voting Centers**

February 6, 2020

The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners (the school board) understands the desire to have an additional voting site in the City of Baltimore and would like to support the sponsor's efforts. The Board appreciates the importance of ensuring residents have every opportunity to vote and recognizes the positive impact of the flexibility provided by early voting locations. **Senate Bill 310 – Baltimore City – Elections – Early Voting Centers** requires Baltimore City to have eight early voting centers; and requiring one of the early voting centers in Baltimore City to be at Frederick Douglass High School. Frederick Douglass High School would be the only school in the State to be used for early voting. Schools in Baltimore City used for the special election in February of this year are being closed for that one day to avoid some of the logistical challenges that we must raise in our testimony.

The challenges that are discussed below are not insurmountable. The Board wants to work with the sponsor, but we must first ensure that the adults entering for early voting do not have any interaction with the students entering and leaving the school building. In speaking with the Principal at the school and the School Police Chief, the school board is advised that neither has an issue with early voting at the school, with certain parameters.

The Principal indicated that the Board of Elections must only use the auditorium because this area that can be shut off to avoid entrance to other parts of the school building. The current Principal and the school board are both comfortable that arrangements can be made so that the auditorium is not needed during this time.

The bigger concern for the school board is the interaction between students and adults coming to vote. Frederick Douglass High School uses the auditorium as one of the entrances for the approximately 750 students. All students (and visitors) must go through metal detectors and there cannot be any impediment in the auditorium for the students to enter through the metal detectors. Therefore, the school board is requesting that the early voting not begin until 10 am when the majority of the students have arrived. While 10 am is currently the start time for early voting, in the future, the time could change and any sooner could potentially be problematic for the school.

The school board would also need to deploy more school police during the hours of early voting, during the day and in the evening when students are discharged from class and after school hours when early voting is still taking place. We would also hope that we can have cooperation from the Baltimore City Police Department during the evening hours for coverage, if needed, as there are costs associated with having school police watch over the school building from 10 am to 8 pm, for 8 days.

The other issue that the school board must raise is parking. Should the Board of Elections require parking on site for early voting this would not be possible at this school. The sponsor has indicated to the school board that he may be able to arrange parking off site, but near the school.

It should also be noted, if the “Built to Learn Act” SB1/HB1 pass this year, Frederick Douglass has been designated as one of the schools for a major renovation, which may cause the school to be closed for a long period of time, possibly 12-18 months depending on the type of renovation that a feasibility study will reveal. Some or all of the building may not be accessible during the renovation.

Based on the above, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners offers the following amendments:

1. An assurance in the legislation that the voting cannot begin before 10 am to ensure that there is no student contact in the morning; and
2. An assurance in the legislation that the early voting must occur in a location in the school building designated by the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners; and
3. An assurance in the legislation that parking is not required at the school, but the Board of Elections will provide a pre-determined parking area off site.

Again, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners would like to work out the logistics and supports with amendments, Senate Bill 310 and urges a favorable report with the amendments offered.

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