

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF FREDERICK COUNTY

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Karen Yoho
Member

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Bill: House Bill 883

Title: Frederick County Board of Education – Student Member

Position: SUPPORT

Date: February 19, 2020

Committee: Ways & Means Committee

Contact: Karen Yoho, Member, Frederick County Board of Education

The Board of Education of Frederick County, which governs a school system with more than 44,000 students and 6000 employees, supports House Bill 883.

We welcome the opportunity that the bill provides in giving partial voting rights to our Student Member of the Board. Currently, we rely on our Student Member to provide insight and input on behalf of the student body, communicate with the student body regarding the work of the Board, and to come prepared to fully and actively participate in our regular meetings and work sessions. Our Student Member does cast votes, which are recorded in our minutes even though they do not count towards a decision.

Our Board has long been committed to providing a role and vehicle for the student voice in our deliberations and decision-making process. This commitment aligns with our desire to engage all stakeholders in meaningful ways and to gather all perspectives to inform our governance. This bill would give greater meaning and weight to our Student Member's positions yet protect the integrity of Board of Education decisions that should remain squarely within the responsibility of adult, elected, full-voting members.

There are positive effects on teaching and learning when schools and school systems meaningfully engage the student voice. First, when students have a more active role in making decisions regarding their education, there is increased engagement, not just at the policy-making level, but in the classroom. Also, because the decisions made by Boards of Education directly affect students daily, including them in those decisions can assist with smoother implementation of policies. Lastly and in general, incorporating a diversity of perspectives ensures balanced deliberation that results in stronger governance.

The limitations of the student vote outlined in the bill provide protection to the student from having to take positions on what may be contentious or politicized issues. The bill ensures that students will not have a vote on personnel matters, contractual and budgetary issues. Further, the limitations give the Board tools to ensure the Student Member is prepared to cast educated votes and will carry out his/her duties responsibly. We note that, in comparison to the partial voting rights currently provided on seven Maryland school boards, the specific language in HB 883 is the most restrictive with regards to the Student Member's role.

Finally, this bill would result in tangible benefits to our Student Member and to our student body. Their enhanced participation and voice lend themselves to real-world experience in the complexities of the democratic and political process. It develops leadership, not just for the Student Member, but also for the members of our Frederick County Association of Student Councils and Student Government, with whom our Student Member works closely. All of these benefits lend themselves to developing our students for career and college readiness.

For these reasons, the Board of Education of Frederick County respectfully requests that the committee issue a favorable report on House Bill 883.