

March 4, 2020

Ways and Means Committee Hearing

House Bill 1422 Public Schools - Redistricting - Community Advisory Committees for Student Assignment

Testimony from Lu Shan (8714 Liberty Lane. Potomac, MD)

Dear committee members,

I would like to submit my testimony regarding House Bill 1422. As a resident of Montgomery County and parent of two children attending Montgomery County Public Schools, I would like to express my concerns for this bill.

For the first time in 30 years, MCPS and its BOE are conducting a district-wide school boundary analysis. I support this long-overdue effort and am grateful that Delegates Qi and Fraser-Hidalgo also welcome this effort in principle. I have been close observers of the latest vocal oppositions fueled by massive disinformation and fear-mongering effort headed by individuals with a large social media presence on the web and on messaging platforms such as Facebook and WeChat. My own community, first-generation Chinese immigrants, is also strongly impacted by a lot of the disinformation. In many discussions on these social media platforms, there have been both subtle and non-subtle racially disparaging remarks and fears of the socioeconomically disadvantaged students coming to affluent schools. As a result, MCPS face-to-face community forums we attended were flooded with disproportionate numbers of parents who do not represent the diversity of MCPS's student population and are afraid of the results of the boundary analysis. Despite frequent communications from the school district, the opposition to the boundary analysis effort has sowed seeds of mistrust and accused the school district of lack of transparency. This has created huge barriers for the work of the school district in the area of equity to help closing achievement gaps.

While I am encouraged by the bridge-building work Delegates Qi and Fraser-Hidalgo champion in this bill, I am not sure if this bill to establish a community advisory committee would be helpful to the work of any school districts serious about bringing about improvement in the quality of education for all students. First, we already have an elected body, the Board of Education, to represent the county and the community. In Montgomery County, we are fortunate to live in one of the most diverse communities in the nation, where immigrant families like mine can flourish. I am also aware of the socioeconomic disparities within the county, and the need to address achievement gaps in our school district. I am encouraged that the BOE has listened to this need, and approved of the boundary analysis, even though it felt short of asking for a recommendation. For MCPS to thrive with our growing diversity demographics, we need leadership from MCPS educational experts that apply their education and experience in curriculum and instruction, cultural education, research-based strategies to close achievement gaps, and communications across community groups. We don't need another community advisory consisting of parents who do not necessarily have the

neutral and best interest for the whole school district, nor the expertise to carry out educational reform.

Second, I am concerned that this bill will feed the narratives of disinformation campaigns from parent groups who do not understand the educational values of added racial and socioeconomic diversity to our students' classrooms. It may even justify their attack on the communications process as a guise for denying better access to resources for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Instead of having an additional layer of community body, we urge you to consider policies that promote the acceptance of cultural differences and to view diversity in social situations as a positive characteristic. To that point, a recent Harvard University study suggests that, *"policymakers should capitalize on changing racial attitudes in the US, particularly among the younger generations, to promote and stabilize diverse communities and public schools. Everything from student assignment policies to support and incentives for curriculum and teaching approaches that tap into the educational benefits of diversity in classrooms can and should be attempted"*.^[1] Our state is in the midst of increasing immigration and changing demographics, we should provide opportunities in which community members learn the benefits of having multicultural and diverse schools from their younger neighbors.

Thank you for accepting my testimony. Again, I am proud of my state, my county, and my delegates for actively contributing policy ideas and encouraging cross-cultural conversations in the hard work among our community.

Respectfully submitted,

Lu Shan

[1] Wells, Fox, Cordova-Cobo, Ready "A Shared Future: Addressing the Patterns of Resegregation in Urban and Suburban Contexts.", Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, April 2017, <https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/research-areas/working-papers/shared-future-addressing-patterns-resegregation-urban-and-suburban>. Accessed 3 Mar. 2020.