

SB0150

Baltimore County Board of Education – Election of Officers
Favorable

Dear Members of the Committee:

I testify in support of SB 150 as the former vice chair of the Baltimore County Board of Education, an expert in corporate governance and a supporter of the principal of “majority will.”

As you know, this bill would do two things: Add a new member to the board and clarify that the board chair and vice chair should be elected by a majority of the members then-serving, rather than a majority of the seats that exist. Let me take each one in turn.

Adding a New Board Member

The reason to add a new member to the board is very simple. The Baltimore County Board of Education currently has an even number of board members, twelve. It is poor practice to have any board, be it profit or non-profit, be served by an even number of board members. This leads to deadlocks and inefficiencies, with the same motions being brought time and again to see if the tie can be broken. We saw this over and over again during my time on the board.

Further, this new board member would help improve the representation on the board, which is currently comprised of members that are either elected by the voters or appointed by the governor. It only makes sense that the county executive should have at least one appointee, given that the education is the biggest priority and line item in the county. Finally, this may well improve the coordination between the county government and school system, which is sorely needed.

Clarifying the Chair/Vice-Chair Voting Standard

Regarding the standard to elect the chair and vice chair, experience once again proves why this is necessary. For 2019, the board of education elected Kathleen Causey to serve as its chair. For 2020, the board of education voted 6-5 in favor of someone else to serve as its chair (the last member of the board had passed away and his seat was vacant at the time).

Because 6 votes was not a majority of the seats on the board, only a majority of those then-serving, Ms. Causey was able to retain her position and serve as chair with just 5 votes as a “holdover chair.”

This is wrong. This is undemocratic. And it is unfair to the hundreds of thousands of stakeholders in our system. We need this common-sense change so this never happens again, which it very well could.

The chair and vice chair wield enormous power over the board and system, and should be duly elected. Furthermore, to do otherwise arguably violates the law, for Section 3-2B-09 of the Education Article requires the board to “elect” a chair and vice chair each year.

For the reasons stated above, I respectfully request that you support SB 150.

Sincerely,

Nicholas C. Stewart, Former Vice-Chair of the Baltimore County Board of Education