



Maryland Youth Advisory Council
c/o Governor's Office of Crime
Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services
100 Community Place,
Crownsville, MD 21032

Ian Herd, *Chair*
Marvin Li, *Vice-Chair*
Maggie Harkins, *Secretary*

March 1, 2021

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB 749

Position: Supports with Amendments

Dear Chairman Pinsky:

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council (the Council) prides itself on being a group of young adults who work to serve as a voice for youth in the state of Maryland. As leaders in our communities and in our State, and as appointees of the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, Maryland Association of Student Councils, Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the University System of Maryland, we take every opportunity to advise legislators and the Governor regarding issues facing youth.

The creation of the Council in 2008 follows a long history of youth leadership in Maryland; beginning with the first Student Member of the Board position in Anne Arundel County and subsequent positions created for student leaders throughout the State. Student Members of Boards of Education in Maryland possess an extensive history of advocacy, involvement, and execution of civic responsibility. Students have demonstrated a consistent dedication and commitment to civic engagement and the betterment of their communities through organized student leadership organizations and positions like the Council and the Student Member of the Board of Education position.

Students provide an important and unique perspective in policy-making. The Student Member of the Board of Education provides unparalleled expertise on the matters before the Board given that he/she is enrolled in the school system, experiencing and witnessing the very matters that the Board discusses and votes upon. Students serve as tremendous assets, often highlighting critical points that might otherwise have been overlooked. Students have proven that they are more than capable of making informed decisions and acting appropriately in professional settings, and thus SB 749's inclusion of Student Member voting rights is more than justified.

The Council is proud to represent Maryland's diverse youth aging from 14 to 22 years old. The Council understands the need to ensure that candidates for the Charles County Board of Education are qualified as well as tenured residents of Charles County. However, the Council believes raising the age to run for office to 21 years of age or requiring candidates to be registered voters of three years, a requirement that cannot be met by a legal adult of 18 years age, is not an effective way to ensure those qualifications. The Council encourages amendments to

ensure candidates are qualified whilst allowing opportunity for legal adults of all ages to have the opportunity to serve on the Charles County Board of Education.

The Council, along with the Student Member of the Board of Education, is a testament to the power, importance, and benefits of the youth voice, and we strongly believe that when the youth voice is included with fidelity, there yields great benefits. Moreover, when adults perceive young people as valuable resources that can inform many of the decisions that impact them, they also see an improvement in the quality of the decisions that are made (Zeldin, 2004; Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, & Calvert, 2000). We provide valuable input, insights, and information regarding the lives of young people and identify where there may be unmet needs in young people's lives, and develop solutions to address those needs.

Our lived experiences provide a perspective that lends itself to effective youth policy, particularly when the lives of youth are ever-changing. The closer policy-makers are in tune with the experiences of youth, the more effective youth policies will be, the more empowered and productive youth citizens will become, and the greater benefit there is to the lives of youth as a whole. The Council is confident that SB 749 will ensure the growth of civic engagement within Charles County for decades to come.

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council commends Senator Ellis for sponsoring SB 749, a testament to the value with which Senator Ellis uplifts the student voice and student representation. Senator Ellis's sponsorship of SB 749 stands both as a symbol of the power of the student voice and a recognition by the Senator and Charles County of its merit.

For these reasons, the Council supports SB 749 with amendments and respectfully requests a favorable report from the committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maya Matava". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Maya Matava, Legislative Committee Chair
Maryland Youth Advisory Council