



TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION to Senate Bill 0749
Charles County – Board of Education – Membership Alterations
Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
March 3, 2021

To: Senator Paul Pinsky, Chair, and members of the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

From: Linda McLaughlin, Education Association of Charles County (EACC) President

Dear Senator Pinsky, Chair, and members of the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee,

I am writing to you today to rise in opposition to SB 0749, which would 1. alter the way school board members are elected in districts (where they are all at-large positions currently) and 2. Award full voting rights to the Student Member of the Board. As the President of the Education Association of Charles County (EACC), I speak for over 2,000 certificated educators (teachers, librarians, school counselors, vice principals, principals, specialists and more) who would be impacted as the Board of Education makes decisions that affects their livelihood.

I am not against representation or a diverse population being represented by elected leaders from their community. As a local union leader, I am an advocate for people having voice, and that is where my objection lies. What I object to with this part of the legislation is the process that skipped over voices being heard from the very community that the legislation will possibly “improve.” There was not a conversation with either the Board of Education or the County Commissioners about this proposed change. For legislation that would affect local constituents directly, I would have expected : 1. A conversation/open meeting with the Board of Education members, 2. A conversation/open meeting with the County Commissioners, and 3. A public forum to gather feedback from parents and other community stakeholders. None of these 3 things have happened.

Local bills that represent the wishes and needs of the county should definitely be looked upon favorably when they are presented to the committees in the General Assembly. This bill was not discussed locally, requested locally, or informed by local constituent opinion or feedback. Fithermore, the bill suggestes 6 districts and currently there are 4 County Commissioner districts- if this bill is tp streamline processes and representation, and based on the current existing structure, what is the intent and rationale for 6 districts? Had there been a public forum, constituents could have asked questions such as this(I called Senator Ellis’ office with my questions on the bill, but have yet to receive any return cal).

The second piece of SB0749 that I oppose is the full voting rights for the Student Member of the Board. Student voice is important, but full voting rights for the SMOB are not appropriate. Students should not be subjected to the intense scrutiny (and public pressure) that elected adults are as members on the School Board. Students should not be voting on school boundaries, redistricting, personnel issues, for example- those would all be



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completely inappropriate. Students do not have the life experience or maturity to make decisions such as these. Student voice is important and a unique perspective that would be a positive inclusion in system decisions. For example, having a student on each district committee would be a positive implementation of student voice. Full voting rights would create a situation as seen in other counties where students could be “lobbied” by adult groups to fulfill their own self-interests. Though this could also happen to an adult BOE member, students should not be subjected to this type of treatment.

I urge the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee to vote against this bill. Though the intent was good, the improvements in representation might be positive, the process that was implemented seemed overreaching and without public and locally elected input. Transparency is of ultimate importance, especially in today’s climate. Democracy in the dark is not democracy, nor does it engender trust or faith in our elected officials.

Sincerely,

Linda McLaughlin

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