

JACK BAILEY  
Legislative District 29  
Calvert and St. Mary's Counties

Judicial Proceedings Committee



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
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March 18, 2021

**Senate Bill 945 – Calvert County Board of Education – Public Meetings – Public Comment**

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to introduce Senate Bill 945 – Calvert County Board of Education – Public Meetings – Public Comment. This bill would require the Calvert County Board of Education to provide an opportunity for public comment at their meetings. Additionally, it would ensure that a member of the public would be allowed three uninterrupted minutes at public meetings to comment on matters related to education, testing, attendance, school athletics, school transportation, school boundaries, and any other matter relevant to the Board of Education or the administration of the Calvert County Public School System.

This legislation has become necessary due to the Board of Education's policies during their meetings, which are being held virtually because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Under the Board's current policies, the public should be given time to testify at their meetings. However, during these virtual meetings, the Board is only accepting public comment in writing and not giving residents the opportunity to speak before the Board in violation of their own policy.

Public comment is a critical part of representative government. While the conditions of the past year have imposed some difficulty in conducting public meetings, ensuring the ability of the people to be heard by elected officials should be a high priority. Many other branches of government at all levels, including this body, have taken steps so that the public is able to testify on issues even as they cannot be physically present at our hearings. This bill is important not only during this pandemic but going forward as well, as far too often we see that once a precedent such as this is set, it can be used to deny the public the ability to be heard in other situations in the future.

Senate Bill 945 is a local bill that only affects the Calvert County Board of Education. I have requested an amendment to make Senate Bill 945 an emergency bill to ensure that public comment is restored at these meetings as soon as possible.

I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 945 with the amendment to make it an emergency bill. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Bailey", written over a horizontal line.

Senator Jack Bailey  
District 29  
Calvert and St. Mary's Counties