



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*

February 3, 2021

The Honorable Anne R. Kaiser  
Ways and Means Committee  
Room 131  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: HB 629**  
**Position: Oppose**

Dear Chairwoman Kaiser:

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.

HB 629 restricts the voting rights of all Student Members of the county Boards of Education in Maryland. The council strongly opposes this proposal. Student Members of Boards of Education in Maryland possess an extensive history of advocacy, involvement, and execution of civic responsibility. Furthermore, Student Members have long provided valuable insights into school functions and actions that are unique to the student experience. The restriction of the Student Member's voting rights is a dismissal of their experience, their voice, their power, and undermines the democratic principles of this state and country.

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. Creating positions of power and decision-making for students shows the increased trust in youth to make informed decisions and taking on the responsibility of serving their communities. Young leaders across the state of Maryland have accepted this responsibility with open arms and continue to display incredible maturity working alongside adults on matters of importance. 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, unique perspective in policy making. The Student Member of the Boards 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. Dismissal of the value of Student Members and their expertise is a gross miscalculation of their merit.

Students have proven that they are more than capable of making informed decisions and acting appropriately in professional settings, and thus they should be given the same voting rights as their adult counterparts

Our 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 find often in our advocacy for youth leadership, that by serving as a bridge between youth and policymakers. 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.

Furthermore, not only does the inclusion of the youth voice benefit policy, but it also empowers youth to be productive and civically engaged citizens. Importantly, when adult stakeholders invest in structures and processes that meaningfully involve youth in organizations and systems, such as the Student Member of the Board position, individual young people can accrue relational and developmental benefits from participation itself, in ways that promote both youth and community well-being (e.g., Akiva, Cortina, & Smith, 2014; Larson, Walker & Pearce, 2005; Zeldin, 2004). The Student Member of Board position helps develop and support strong, empowered, and civically engaged young leaders that can then empower their peers to take action in school and their communities.

Moreover, in any form of government, the closer the decision-makers are to the people they represent, the greater likelihood those policies will be effective. This idea that often strikes at the core of what our representative democracy was founded on is no different than with the inclusion of the youth voice. 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.

For these reasons, the Council opposes HB 629 and respectfully requests an unfavorable report from the committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ian Herd".

Ian Herd, Chair  
Maryland Youth Advisory Council