

February 5th, 2021

TO: Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates
FROM: Elani Bui, lanibear0027@gmail.com, 301-515-0426
RE: House Bill 629: County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting
POSITION: Oppose

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a student from Montgomery County, in opposition of House Bill 629.

The student member of a country board of education has been a symbol of student leadership in our government. This prestigious position ensures student voice and representation when considering bills and actions. Removing their power to cause a deciding vote strips us students of our representation. It undermines students' ability to be civically engaged. By doing so, the board implies that student opinions are inferior to that of adults. Is this the example of leadership and equality that the government wants to set? We, the student body, have feelings, ideas, and opinions. We are not blind to the problems that society faces. In fact, we first-hand experience the effect of bills and actions. Returning back to school is currently a threat to our safety and the safety of our family members. Let's just say that we go back to school and COVID-19 breaks out and infects hundreds and hundreds of Maryland students, not mentioning our family members who have underlying conditions or weak immune systems. At that point, it is too late, and apologies will *never* be enough. I understand the importance of in person learning, but we do not want to go back to school while a virus that infects over one-hundred thousand people a day, in this country alone, is still spreading *and* creating new variants. My voice represents many students with the same belief. We have a right to vote, especially when the discussed issues affect us profoundly above all others. How can Maryland mandate civic engagement education in our school curriculum when they won't let a student participate in discussing real issues in a real environment? What is the point of implementing the Student Government Association, the Maryland Associate of Student Councils, and Regional Student Governments, to name a few, if we can't utilize our learning and leadership? House Bill 629 ceases our ability to act upon what we have learned.

Imagine kids across the city who look at the student members and aspire to be one. Try thinking of your own children, who may be inspired by your work, and strive to follow your footsteps, only to be told their

voice isn't as important and that their vote doesn't matter because they are 'just a kid'. If House Bill 629 is passed, that will be the exact case for all children. Without the student members, we're left to the whim of officials who cannot relate to our problems and whose childhood memories aren't as prominent. The student member of the board, Nick Asante, and those who preceded him are continuously prioritizing the students. Nick would frequently send updates, inform us about ways to participate in the government, and communicate with the community. The hours he spends at assemblies and listening to us cannot go to waste by the reduction of his voice. *Our* voice.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a report in opposition to House Bill 629.