

## **HB629\_Oppose (1).pdf**

Uploaded by: Brown, Pamela

Position: UNF



*Maryland Association of*

**LOCAL MANAGEMENT BOARDS**

**February 1, 2021**

**HB 629 County Boards of Education – Student Member Voting – OPPOSE**

Dear Chair Kaiser and members of the House Ways & Means Committee,

The Maryland Association of Local Management Boards is comprised of 24 local organizations, the core purpose of which is to improve outcomes for Maryland's children, youth and families. Every Local Management Board (LMB) provides a unique set of outcomes-focused programs to meet the needs of the communities they serve. We work to end hunger, support early childhood initiatives, divert juveniles from the criminal justice system and keep children in school. At the core of what we do is to uphold the voices of the very populations we serve, including youth voice.

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Local Management Boards, we **strongly oppose HB 629: County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting, which prohibits the youth member of county Board's of Education to be the deciding vote. This bill would severely limit the voice of youth on local Board's of Education.**

This bill seeks to remove student voice from local education decision making processes that have been in place in the state of Maryland nearly fifty years. Since 1974, Maryland has recognized the importance of student voice and agency in their own education by first creating the student position on the local Board of Education in Anne Arundel County and many jurisdictions followed shortly thereafter. Moreover, Maryland's State Board of Education has had a student voting member since 1985, who has the power to vote on nearly every issue that comes before the State Board of Education. Prohibiting the student member to cast a deciding vote essentially strips the youth position of any power tokenizing the youth position to one of show rather than meaningful action. This bill silences young people and strips them of any agency they have in their education. For these reasons, the Maryland Association of Local Management Boards strongly opposes HB 629.

Sincerely,

**Pamela M. Brown, Ph.D.**  
Association Chair  
Executive Director  
A.A. Co. Partnership for Children, Youth & Families  
1 Harry S. Truman Parkway, Suite 103  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Nancy Shockley**  
Association Vice-Chair  
Director  
Dorchester Community Partnership for Children & Families  
501 Court Lane, Room 103  
Cambridge, MD 21613

# **House Bill 629 Written Testimony - Google Docs**

Uploaded by: Bui, Eliani

Position: UNF

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.

# **Sunrise Howard County Statement .pdf**

Uploaded by: Bush, Emma

Position: UNF

February 3, 2021

**Testimony in OPPOSITION of HB 0629 – *County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting***

**Dear Chairman Kaiser and Members of the Committee,**  
Sunrise Movement Howard County opposes HB0629.

As a youth-led activist group, Sunrise Movement Howard County has strived to amplify student voices and spearhead initiatives for change. Starting from the 2018 Nancy Pelosi sit-in, the Sunrise Movement has made a statement: youth voices cannot be ignored.

The Student Member of the Board (SMOB) has been elected by students like us and has served as an avenue for student voices for over a decade. Removing the SMOB's ability to vote will silence the voices of thousands of students in Howard County.

This bill constitutes the second attempt to remove our Howard County SMOB's right to vote in matters regarding our education; the first being a lawsuit filed earlier this year in an attempt to break the Board of Education's tie on whether students should return to schools in-person. Revoking the Student Member's ability to vote simply because of differences in opinion is unacceptable. Students deserve to have a say in the matters that concern themselves and their education.

Removing the SMOB's right to cast a deciding vote effectively removes any voting power the SMOB holds. To remove this ability at a time when the Howard County SMOB has posed an opposition to returning to in-person learning sends a clear message: student voices are only valued when they align with parents' agendas. This bill and the lawsuit against the Howard County SMOB last year both share the intention of sending students back into school buildings during a pandemic, ultimately at the cost of our SMOB's voting rights.

This bill clearly devalues student voices. Each decision the Board of Education makes affects our everyday lives. We are the students, and we demand that the SMOB's right to hold power over the decisions that heavily influence us and our peers be protected.

Signed,  
Emma, Oliver, Lindsey, and Defne  
Sunrise Movement Howard County  
sunrisehoco@gmail.com

# **testimony1 - Google Docs.pdf**

Uploaded by: Bush, Emma

Position: UNF



February 3, 2021

**Testimony in OPPOSITION of HB 0629 – *County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting***

**Dear Chairman Kaiser and Members of the Committee,**

I oppose HB0629.

Removing the Student Member of the Board's (SMOB) ability to vote will silence the voices of thousands of students in Howard County. The Student Member has been elected by students like us and has served as an avenue for student voices for over a decade.

This bill constitutes the second attempt to remove our Howard County SMOB's right to vote in matters regarding our education; the first being a lawsuit filed earlier this year in an attempt to break the Board of Education's tie on whether students should return to schools in-person. Revoking the Student Member's ability to vote simply because of differences in opinion is unacceptable. Students deserve to have a say in the matters that concern themselves and their education.

Removing the SMOB's right to cast a deciding vote effectively removes any voting power the SMOB holds. The power to vote on behalf of students was given to our Student Member of the Board over a decade ago and to remove that ability at a time when the Howard County SMOB has posed an opposition to returning to in-person learning sends a clear message. This bill and the lawsuit against the Howard County SMOB last year both share the intention of pushing the agenda of sending students back into school buildings during a pandemic, at the cost of our SMOB's voting rights.

Personally, I have experienced firsthand the impact of having a student representing me to the board. My SMOB was able to connect with students and understand our opinions on returning to in-person schooling. He voted against returning to the building as a lot of my peers and I did not think it was safe to return this winter especially given the rise in cases in my county.

This bill clearly devalues student voices. Each decision the Board of Education makes, affects our everyday lives. As a student, I implore that the SMOB's right to hold power over the decisions that heavily influence me and my peers be protected.

Signed,  
Emma  
District 9

# **House Bill 629 Written Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Chernoff, Samuel

Position: UNF

February 5th, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates

**FROM:** Samuel Chernoff, [chernoffsam932@gmail.com](mailto:chernoffsam932@gmail.com), 240-532-1614, 103 Discovery Court La Plata, MD

**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 Charles County in opposition of House Bill 629.

If passed, this bill would be a dangerous threat to the voices of student leaders throughout Maryland. Through the Student Member of the Board position, students in all of Maryland's 23 counties and Baltimore City are able to receive valuable experiences in civic engagement. In the case of some SMOBs this experience comes with a crucial responsibility, the power to vote. Through their vote on a school board, a SMOB is able to successfully advocate for the needs of the education system's largest group of constituents, the students. Infringing upon this process will cause severe consequences. SMOBs may not be able to vote on issues that directly impact the students, will have a harmful image of being seen as inferior to adult leaders, not be able to put the civic engagement education they received into action, and most importantly having the student voice be silenced when it is needed the most. When a legislator in the General Assembly needs to cast a difficult tie breaking vote, it is seen as a vital part of their job. The SMOBs of Maryland must be treated in the same regard to successfully represent the student voice.

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

# **BaltimoreCounty\_UNF\_HB0629.pdf**

Uploaded by: Conner, Charles

Position: UNF



JOHN A. OLSZEWSKI, JR.  
*County Executive*

CHARLES R. CONNER III, ESQ.  
*Director of Government Affairs*

JOEL N. BELLER  
*Deputy Director of Government Affairs*

**BILL NO.:**            **HB 629**

**TITLE:**             County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting

**SPONSOR:**        Delegate Novotny

**COMMITTEE:**    Ways and Means

**POSITION:**       **UNFAVORABLE**

**DATE:**             February 5, 2021

Baltimore County **OPPOSES** House Bill 629 – County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting. This bill would prohibit student members of a county board of education from casting deciding votes on issues before the county board.

Student members of county boards of education are valued for their insights into the students’ perspective and their representation of student values. Decisions made by county boards of education do not solely effect the staff and faculty of a school, but also impact the lives’ of children that attend these institutions. Students have a real stake in the decisions that are made and deserve to have representation on the deliberative bodies that make them.

County Executive Olszewski was one such member of the board. The lessons he learned serving his classmates informed his experience as an educator, a Delegate, and as County Executive. By removing the ability of student board members to vote on issues critical to the students, this legislation effectively eliminates the input from some of the school’s most valuable voices. The experience student members receive and the role they play in board decisions provides unequalled experience for the important choices to be made in adulthood.

Accordingly, Baltimore County requests an **UNFAVORABLE** report on HB 629. For more information, please contact Chuck Conner, Director of Government Affairs, at [cconner@baltimorecountymd.gov](mailto:cconner@baltimorecountymd.gov).

## **Duan Testimony .pdf**

Uploaded by: DiPietro, Jonathon

Position: UNF

Feb. 5, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Ways & Means Committee  
**FROM:** Anthony Duan, Centennial High School  
**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 current high school student in **opposition to House Bill 629**.

If you can't break a tie that means you can only vote when the matter is already decided. Therefore, you have no power. So why should SMOBs have power? Well, students are the most directly affected by any school board decision, and "virtual representation" through those member their parents elected is, well... essentially why the United States rebelled against Britain. Having others speak for you, no matter how closely those who choose them are connected to you, counts for nothing unless they are accountable to YOU. That is why we have a student representative: to offer OUR perspectives.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to issue an **unfavorable report** on House Bill 629.

## **Espiritu Testimony .pdf**

Uploaded by: DiPietro, Jonathon

Position: UNF



Feb. 5, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Ways & Means Committee  
**FROM:** Stephen Espiritu - Hammond High School  
**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 current high school student in **opposition to House Bill 629**.

SMOBs are a representation of the entire Howard County student body. Taking away their vote in the county BOE renders them useless among the other board members. If you take away their vote, you might as well take away their position in the county since ALL board members are supposed to vote on how education is supposed to be run in HoCo.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to issue an **unfavorable report** on House Bill 629.

## **LAC Note.pdf**

Uploaded by: DiPietro, Jonathon

Position: UNF

## STATEMENT REGARDING THE SMOB POSITION

**This statement was issued on behalf of the Legislative Affairs Committee of the Howard County Association of Student Councils, the only officially recognized student coalition and advocacy organization in Howard County. This statement was released following filed litigation against the voting rights of the Student Member of the Howard County Board of Education.**

### **Dated This:**

Saturday, December 19, 2020

*Howard County, Maryland*

*"When we vote, we take back our power to choose, to speak up, and to stand with those who support us and each other." - Loung Ung, American-Cambodian Human Rights Activist.*

Howard County has had a Student Member of the Board ("SMOB") since 1988, and a vote on the Board of Education since 2007. The SMOB serves in the unique role of representing the interests of the largest stakeholder in education, the students. I have been honored and privileged to work with several Student Members of the Board of Education throughout my secondary school career. Throughout their tenure, the Student Members have served with dignity and responsibility to faithfully discharge the duties of their office. Along with being a full-time Board Member, they must simultaneously juggle academics, and manage personal and extracurricular activities. Howard County is continuously growing and with the changing dynamics in education, student representation is even more important. Students are the motivation behind all educational decisions, and their voices must be taken seriously throughout the policy making process.

As such, the Student Member of the Board must be able to provide input from the student voice and have a binding vote to ensure the school system continues to be responsive to the needs and opinions of county students. The SMOB's vote solidifies the Board's responsibility to act in the interests of the students, those directly affected by Board decisions. In a joint statement released by the Students of Maryland's Boards of Education, they state, "For a Student Member's voting rights to be in jeopardy based on how they vote is not only an insult to the students that elected them and the character of the student under attack, but also to the principle of democracy itself."

The Howard County Student Member of the Board is democratically elected through a fair and open process, by students across Howard County's thirty-five middle and high schools, representing roughly sixty-thousand students. The roles of the Howard County Association of Student Councils ("HCASC") and the SMOB's position are separate yet co-dependent. The SMOB, an ex-officio member of the Officer Team, utilizes HCASC as a forum to hear from

various students across the county and to educate the student body on actions taken by the Board. At HCASC, we fundamentally believe in every student's power to advocate for the things they are most passionate about. Together, we have held forums to advocate for mental health and school safety and have introduced substantive legislation that affects students across the state of Maryland, among many other initiatives led by the Student Member of the Board.

The Legislative Affairs Committee ("LAC") of the Howard County Association of Student Councils stands with the Student Member of the Board of Education and will continue to advocate for the voting rights of the SMOB. We will continue to support the SMOB through advocacy and encourage all Howard County students to express their support for our *(we the students)* vote on the Board of Education.

As Chair of the Legislative Affairs Committee, I submit the attached stance and resolution to be voted on by the HCASC General Assembly. **\*UPDATE: Both the stance and resolution were passed by the HCASC General Assembly by near unanimous consent.**

**Signed,**

**Mr. Jonathon T. DiPietro**

*Chairperson*, Legislative Affairs Committee  
Howard County Association of Student Councils

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A RESOLUTION OF THE HOWARD COUNTY  
ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT COUNCILS REGARDING:

**The Howard County Student Member of the Board of Education**

**Sponsor:** Mr. Jonathon DiPieto

**Second:** Mr. Alexander Horn

**WHEREAS:** The Howard County Association of Student Councils is an organization committed to lifting up student voices and fighting for student rights; and

**WHEREAS:** The Howard County Public School System is committed to “Student-Centered Practices” and that “Students are at the forefront of every strategy and decision. The values, opinions, beliefs, and perspectives of individual and groups of students are actively pursued to inform instructional approaches and enhance the school environment.”; and

**WHEREAS:** The Student Member of the Board of Education is an essential pillar of student advocacy in the Howard County Public School System; and

**WHEREAS:** There is an increased conversation around the importance of the Student Member of the Board of Education; be it therefore

**RESOLVED:** That the Howard County Association of Students Councils supports the preservation of the voting rights of the Student Member of the Howard County Board of Education; be it further

**RESOLVED:** That the General Assembly of the Howard County Association of Student Councils mandates the Legislative Affairs Committee to advocate for the preservation of the voting rights of the Student Member of the Board of Education.

***This resolution has been voted on by the General Assembly of the Howard County Association of Student Councils and approved with unanimous consent.***

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A STANCE OF THE  
HOWARD COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT COUNCILS REGARDING:

**The Howard County Student Member of the Board of Education**

Article XI, Section 5 of the Constitution of the Howard County Association of Student Councils states that “The Legislative Affairs Committee shall provide the General Assembly stances on HCPSS Policy or Legislative Matters, in writing, and the General Assembly, by majority vote, will have the ability to vote to uphold or deny that stance”; and

The Legislative Affairs Committee has provided a stance regarding a “legislative matter”, in writing, that has been approved by the Howard County Association of Student Councils General Assembly; therefore

*The following stance is issued by the Howard County Association of Student Councils:*

The Howard County Association of Student Councils is in favor of voting rights for the Student Member of the Howard County Board of Education; and

The Howard County Association of Student Councils is in favor of advancing the principles outlined in the resolution submitted with this stance proposal (“A Resolution of the Howard County Association of Student Councils Regarding The Howard County Student Member of the Board of Education”) and will advocate on behalf of these proposed principles.

**SPONSORED**

Mr. Jonathon DiPietro, *Chair*

**PASSED**

Sunday, January 17, 2021

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# **LAC Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: DiPietro, Jonathon

Position: UNF

Feb. 5, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Ways & Means Committee  
**FROM:** Jonathon DiPietro, Chair (Legislative Affairs Committee, HCASC); and  
Peter Banyas, Vice-Chair (Legislative Affairs Committee, HCASC);  
*On Behalf of the Howard County Association of Student Councils.*  
**RE:** House Bill 629 – County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting  
**POSITION:** **Oppose**

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, we are writing as current high school students, and as the Chairs of the Legislative Affairs Committee of the Howard County Association of Student Councils, in **opposition to House Bill 629**.

House Bill 629 bars the student members of all boards of education across the state from casting the deciding vote on any matter before the board. The bill will have a chilling effect on the voice and impact of students across the state, by ensuring their votes do not matter on closely contested issues – in effect, their votes will only “count” if they agree with the majority of adults on the board. By that logic, their vote on the board is discarded. This entirely undermines the role and responsibility of the student member and entirely demeans the voice of the students that they represent.

At a time when civic engagement and listening to our youth is more critically important than at any point in our nation’s history, this bill denies real influence for students and discourages engagement in the part of our state and local government that most impacts their day-to-day lives: their school systems. An elected representative without a vote on key issues can not effectively represent their constituents.

For these reasons, on behalf of the Howard County Association of Student Councils’ Legislative Affairs Committee, we urge the committee to issue an **unfavorable report** on House Bill 629.



# **HB 629--SMOBE Voting--UNF--FINAL.pdf**

Uploaded by: Dove, Tina

Position: UNF

**Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 629  
County Boards of Education—Student Member—Voting**

**House Ways and Means Committee  
February 5, 2021  
1:30 pm**

**Tina N. Dove, M.Ed.  
Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association opposes House Bill 629, legislation that would prohibit student members of a county board of education from casting a deciding vote on issues before the county board.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

According to survey data from the PRRI/The Atlantic Civic Engagement Survey detailed in a 2018 report from PRRI<sup>1</sup>, children who engage in civic and political activities when they are young are more likely to engage in civic activities later in life. Their survey found that,

Americans who say they went to a rally or demonstration with their parents are almost three times as likely as those who did not to score highly on the Civic and Political Engagement Scale, meaning participating in at least four different activities within the last 12 months (50% vs. 18%). Attending a community meeting, such as a school board or city council meeting, as a child

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<sup>1</sup> *American Democracy In Crisis: Civic Engagement, Young Adult Activism, and the 2018 Midterm Elections*. Accessed online at <https://www.prri.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Civic-Engagement-NovB.pdf> (February 3, 2021)

is also strongly associated with higher rates of civic engagement later in life. Americans who had that experience are about twice as likely as those who did not to report a high level of engagement in the last year (36% vs. 17%).

This same survey found that Americans who were influenced to become active by their teachers were more than twice as likely to be civically engaged and involved than those who said they were not influenced by their teachers (46 percent to 19 percent respectively).<sup>2</sup>

Educators take very seriously our responsibility to prepare all of our students for college, career, and citizenship. We are alarmed when we see that only 24 percent of our students scored at or above proficient in civics on the 2018 NAEP<sup>3</sup> civics achievement assessment. An even greater cause for alarm: this score has not significantly changed when compared to score from both the 2014 and 1998 NAEP assessment.

Our democracy doesn't work if our body politic is uninformed and unengaged. The data is clear. We must teach our young people the importance of civic involvement and encourage them to actively engage at an early age. We can see no better way to engage our older students in the issues most impacting them and their communities than by directly involving them in local government. Furthermore, the only way to teach them that every voice and every vote matters is to ensure that their voices and their votes matter. We can think of no better way to bring the content we teach to life in a real and relevant way than to support our young scholars in their efforts to wholly engage in their educations as members of their local school boards.

If we learn nothing else from the 2020 election it should be that any attempt at disenfranchising historically marginalized votes is undemocratic. Our students deserve agency and a voice in their educations. **Therefore, we urge the committee to issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 629.**

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/civics/2018/> (Accessed on February 3, 2021)



## **HB629\_Testimony\_Drooff.pdf**

Uploaded by: Drooff, Else

Position: UNF

**HB 629**

Feb. 5, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Ways & Means Committee  
**FROM:** Else Drooff  
**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 former Student Member of the Board of Education for Anne Arundel County in **opposition to House Bill 629**

Since 1975, the Anne Arundel County Student Member of the Board (“SMOB”) has been the only student in the nation to maintain full voting rights on a local board of education. When I served as AACo “SMOB” 2013-2014, I took my position and privileges very seriously. I thoroughly studied and considered the annual budget proposal and collective bargaining agreements. I served on the Policy Subcommittee and attended education leadership conferences across the country. I helped select our Interim Superintendent, Mamie Perkins, and current AACo Superintendent, George Arlotto. If you contacted any former or current AACo Board Member, I am confident he/she/they would reaffirm the positive impact the “SMOB” has had on Anne Arundel County for the last 45 years. So, I am deeply disappointed that a freshman delegate to the Maryland General Assembly wishes to begin his legislature tenure by stripping away a student’s hard-earned rights to meaningfully contribute to his/her/their school system.

House Bill 629 bars the student member for all boards of education across the state from casting the deciding vote on any matter before the board. The bill will have a chilling effect on the voice and impact of students across the state, by ensuring their votes do not matter on closely contested issues – in effect, their votes will only “count” if they agree with the majority of adults on the board.

At a time when civic engagement and listening to our youth is more critically important than any point in our nation’s history, this bill removes the incentive for students to engage in the part of our state and local government that most impacts their day-to-day lives. As members of the committee understand intuitively as elected leaders, an elected representative without a vote on key issues is not an elected representative positioned to effectively represent their constituents.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue an **unfavorable report** on House Bill 629.

Sincerely,  
Else Drooff

Student Member of the Anne Arundel County Board of Education (2013-2014)

# **Legislative Testimony 629.pdf**

Uploaded by: Elliott, Richard DeShay

Position: UNF

Legislative Testimony:  
HB629

I strongly oppose House Bill 629, as it will further remove voting rights for the Student Member of the Board. Howard County and all jurisdictions should follow Anne Arundel County's lead in allowing SMOBs to vote.



By Authority: Rich Elliott For Maryland Keanuu Smith-Brown, Campaign Chair Christian Hillian, Treasurer



## **HB 629 student voting school boards oppose PSSAM.p**

Uploaded by: Fannon, Mary Pat

Position: UNF



Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director

BILL:	House Bill 629
TITLE:	County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting
DATE:	February 5, 2021
POSITION:	Oppose
COMMITTEE:	Ways and Means
CONTACT:	Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

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This bill prohibits student members of a county board of education from casting a deciding vote on issues before a board.

The Public Schools Superintendents’ Association of Maryland (PSSAM), representing all twenty-four local school superintendents, **opposes HB 629**.

State law provides that “educational matters that affect the counties shall be under the control of a county board of education” and that local boards “determine, with the advice of the county superintendent, the educational policies of the county school system.” While Maryland law governs the roles and responsibilities for local boards of education, boards are generally in control of educational matters and are most responsive to the individual needs of their communities, as well as the available resources to fund local education priorities. If passed, this bill would undermine the governance authority of local boards of education. PSSAM continues to be supportive of state decisions that allow local school boards their self-governance.

For these reasons, PSSAM **opposes HB 629** and requests an **unfavorable** committee report.

*One Voice, One Vision for Maryland’s Students*

P. O. Box 12040, Baltimore, MD 21281

[www.pssam.org](http://www.pssam.org); [marypat.fannon@pssam.org](mailto:marypat.fannon@pssam.org); 410-935-7281

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# **HB0629-Student Board Member\_20210203.pdf**

Uploaded by: Griffiths, Brian

Position: UNF

# BRIAN GRIFFITHS

February 3, 2021

The Honorable Anne Kaiser  
Chair, House Ways & Means Committee  
House Office Building, 6 Bladen St.  
Annapolis, MD 21041

Dear Madam Chair and members of the Committee,

I write to you today in **opposition to House Bill 629**, County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting. House Bill 629 would strip the ability of Student Members of County Boards of Education from casting a decisive vote on issues before the Board.

Comically, the sponsor has referred to his bill as the “School Board Gridlock Reduction Act.” Bluntly, what this bill is actually little more than an insult to Student Members of County Boards of Education and insulting to the students they represent. This bill takes what is ultimately a local concern related to one County Board of Education and blows it out of proportion to impact School Boards across the entire state.

Student board members in many counties across the state are integral parts of their local Boards of Education. They provide a student perspective that older, elected Board Members may not totally grasp. Suggesting that a Student Member cannot be the deciding vote on an issue basically neuters the ability of the Student Member to do anything to influence policy.

The proposal in this bill is worse than removing the vote from Student Members altogether. Instead of eliminating the member entirely, the bill suggests that the opinion of Student Members should only count when their opinion does not mean anything.

This bill is ultimately pointless and does not address the underlying concerns of the sponsor. I urge you all to **vote no on House Bill 629**.

Respectfully

A handwritten signature in brown ink, appearing to read 'Brian Griffiths', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Brian Griffiths

# **Guerci HB 629 Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Guerci, Eric

Position: UNF

Feb. 5, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Ways & Means Committee  
**FROM:** Eric Guerci  
**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 former Student Member of the Board of Education (SMOB) for Montgomery County in **opposition to House Bill 629**.

During my first term as SMOB, I successfully worked with Chair Kaiser to pass expanded voting rights legislation in the Maryland General Assembly, which I took advantage of during my second term in the next year. The legislation enabled me to vote on operating and capital budgets, negotiations, and boundaries. In comparison with my first year when I could not vote on these matters, there was a very real change in the dynamics of the discussion around the Board table with the contributions of a fully enfranchised student. My voice—and, in turn, the student perspective—was taken more seriously as the Board worked to allocate resources, assign teachers duties, and form school communities. These were often the areas that had the most impact on students' experiences, and with expanded voting rights, I was able to better elevate my peers' concerns at the Board table as we combed through these matters. Stripping SMOBs of voting rights would be an enormous step backwards in Maryland educational policymaking by stripping students of their full representation in the Board room—in turn removing students' hope that their voice truly matters and that their aspirations are being actively advanced at the Board table. Just as students would be harmed, so too would communities, for voting rights are a strategy for optimizing overall educational policymaking strategies.

House Bill 629 bars the student member for all boards of education across the state from casting the deciding vote on any matter before the board. The bill will have a chilling effect on the voice and impact of students across the state, by ensuring their votes do not matter on closely contested issues – in effect, their votes will only “count” if they agree with the majority of adults on the board.

At a time when civic engagement and listening to our youth is more critically important than any point in our nation's history, this bill removes the incentive for students to engage in the part of our state and local government that most impacts their day-to-day lives. As members of the committee understand intuitively as elected leaders, an elected representative without a vote on key issues is not an elected representative positioned to effectively represent their constituents.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue an **unfavorable report** on House Bill 629.

Sincerely,

Eric Guerci

Student Member of the Montgomery County Board of Education (2015-2017)

4627 Hunt Ave.

Chevy Chase, MD 20815

301-547-5700

# **HB629 CRSD SMOB Voting OPPOSED.pdf**

Uploaded by: Hall, Michele

Position: UNF



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# MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

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## WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE HOUSE BILL 629: COUNTY BOARDS OF EDUCATION – STUDENT MEMBER – VOTING

February 5, 2021

### POSITION: Oppose

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland’s public school systems. We are committed to making discipline responsive to students’ behavioral needs, fair, appropriate to the infraction, and designed to keep youth on track to graduate. **CRSD strongly opposes House Bill 629, which would limit the voting rights of student members of county Boards of Education.**

It is imperative that students have a voice in their educational experience. Maryland has long been a leader in supporting student voice and participation in shaping school policies on the local and statewide level. In 1974, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 476, which created the student member position on the Anne Arundel County Board of Education. This was the first such position in our state. The very next year, a bipartisan bill was introduced to grant the student member voting rights equal to those of the other members of the Board. Other jurisdictions across the state followed Anne Arundel County’s lead, and the General Assembly continued to uplift student voices in Maryland public education. In 1985, the General Assembly added a student member position on the Maryland State Board of Education; that student member is able to vote on the majority of matters that come before the State Board. Maryland is one of few states to allow student members voting rights, and this is surely part of what sets Maryland’s public education system apart.

This bill seeks to strip student voice from the education process in a way that is arbitrary and regressive. By limiting the ability of student members of the County Boards of Education to cast the “deciding vote,” this bill silences student voice perhaps when it is most necessary: when the adults in the room are at an impasse. It is at this moment when the student member’s voice is perhaps most essential, because they will make a vote that will directly impact themselves and their constituents, the students throughout the school system. Whether it is related to issues of school discipline and pushout, virtual learning, extended schools years, or any other myriad of issues that come before the Board of Education, the impact on students must be centered in that decision making. This bill sidelines one student’s voice at the expense of all other students in the County. This reactionary bill is the first step in removing student agency from their school experience; the General Assembly should not take it.

**For these reasons, CRSD opposes House Bill 629.**

For more information contact:

Michele Hall  
Attorney, Office of the Public Defender  
410-929-6616  
Michele.hall@maryland.gov

**CRSD Members**

ACLU Maryland  
The Arc Maryland  
Attendance Works  
Disability Rights Maryland  
Bmore Awesome, Inc.  
The Choice Program at UMBC  
Community Law in Action  
Family League of Baltimore  
NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland  
Office of the Public Defender  
Open Society Institute  
Project HEAL at Kennedy Krieger Institute  
Public Justice Center  
Restorative Counseling Services  
Schools Not Jails  
Youth, Education and Justice Clinic at University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law  
Lindsay Gavin  
Shannon McFadden  
Kelsie Reed  
Aarti Sidhu  
Gail Sunderman

# **HB 0629 TESTIMONY VOTES COALITION.pdf**

Uploaded by: Heilker, David

Position: UNF



**HB 629**  
Feb. 5, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Ways & Means Committee  
**FROM:** VOTES [Voices Toward an Elected School Board] Coalition  
**RE:** House Bill 629 – County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting

**POSITION:** Oppose

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, We are the organizers of the **Voices Toward an Elected School Board (VOTES) Coalition Baltimore City** and we are writing in **opposition to House Bill 629.**

Because HB0629 limits the voting rights of young people, this is a disincentive to engage in political discourse, especially when an issue or policy is divisive or requires personal risk to be on the Right Side Of History. This will have outwardly rippling effects not dissimilar to removing civics education in public school.

At a time when civic education and political engagement manifests as “we must start listening to our youth!” this bill removes the incentive for students to engage in the part of our state and local government that most impacts their day-to-day lives: school governance.

As members of the committee **should** understand intrinsically, elected representatives without a vote on key issues are not equipped to represent their constituents, at all.

As residents of a District where SMOBs have **extraordinarily limited** voting rights, Baltimore City Schools already tells students that they are only allowed to be advocates. Why should we create a ceiling for the very rights and democratization that we’re organizing for in Baltimore?

The “discomfort” of being confronted by young people who actually **do know** how to impactfully advocate for themselves and their peers can be frightening. We shouldn’t insist that students be **seen and not heard**, and instead, we should be supporting students’ development and listening to what they have to say.

We ask you to consider the times when you **were** right, when adults **were incorrect, but they refused to see it or acknowledge it, just because they had the Comfort of Authority.** If a decision for the future of young people in Maryland is not one we feel like they are smart enough to make, that’s a failing on our part, not on the part of students.

For the reasons stated above, We urge the committee to issue an **unfavorable report** on House Bill 629.

Regards,

**Voices Toward an Elected School Board [VOTES] Coalition – Baltimore City**

# **HB0629 - Oppose - MD Youth Advisory Council.pdf**

Uploaded by: Herd, Ian

Position: UNF



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, reading "Ian Herd".

Ian Herd, Chair  
Maryland Youth Advisory Council

# **Students of Maryland's Boards of Education HB0629**

Uploaded by: Jackson, Ninah

Position: UNF



Wednesday, February 2, 2021

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

RE: Opposition to HB0629 Sponsored by Delegate Reid Novotny

## **The Students of Maryland's Boards of Education**

Dear Honorable Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

We, the students of Maryland's Boards of Education, are opposed to HB0629, and it is with great disappointment that we even have to submit this testimony. Our commitment to student voice and advocacy led us to run for our positions, but HB0629 seeks to erode those very tenets.

Most Student Board Members in Maryland have a limited amount of issues they can vote on regardless. Further limiting that ability to vote puts the student member at the bottom-most level of legitimacy on the board, therefore diminishing the student opinion to the least measure of importance. By nullifying the vote of the Student Board Member in the event of a tie, the vote of the student member will never matter; you toss aside the experiences, time, and voices of the students; you tell the students that their hopes and yearnings are subject to the convenience of those in power.

We know that, like us, you take every vote with your constituents' best interest in mind. Imagine that you made a vote, then someone wants to take your right to vote away because they disagreed with the vote. How would you feel? We ask that before you take this vote, you ask yourself: "Is disenfranchisement acceptable?"

By stripping away the student member's voting rights, we are effectively delegitimizing this essential position and setting an egregious precedent for the student voice across Maryland. We are taught in school each year to become civically engaged, to know the names of our representatives, to vote in every election after we turn 18, to be the change we want to see in the world, and more; so how come when we are engaged and making real change on our local Boards of Education our voice is threatened? When did civic engagement exclude educational policy?

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." So we urge you all to heed the words of Dr. King and stand in opposition to this bill because a threat to our vote is a threat to everyone's vote.

Signed in solidarity,

Mitchell Septoff  
Student Member  
Allegany County Board of Education

Drake Smith  
Student Member  
Anne Arundel County Board of Education

Kyree' M. Sykes  
Student Commissioner  
Baltimore City Board of School  
Commissioners

Joshua Muhumuza  
Student Member  
Baltimore County Board of Education

Abigail Setzfand  
Student Member  
Calvert County Board of Education

Devanshi Mistry  
Student Representative  
Carroll County Board of Education

Ian Herd  
Student Member  
Charles County Board of Education

Mia Martinez  
Student Member  
Frederick County Board of Education

Jarrett M. Miller  
Student Member  
Garrett County Board of Education

Phoebe Bailey  
Student Member  
Harford County Board of Education

Zachary Kounig  
Student Member  
Howard County Board of Education

Rachel Jones  
Student Member  
Kent County Board of Education

Jason T. Wu  
Student Member  
Maryland State Board of Education

Nick Asante  
Student Member  
Montgomery County Board of Education

Ninah Jackson  
Student Member  
Prince George's County Board of Education

Kevin Bokoum  
Student Member  
Washington County Board of Education

**Disclaimer:**

The views expressed in this letter are the personal views of the signatories and do not necessarily reflect those of any of our respective organizations or Boards of Education.

# **Testimony In Opposition To HB 629.pdf**

Uploaded by: Kramer, Brian

Position: UNF

## **Testimony In Opposition To HB 629: Brian Kramer**

Thank you Chairwoman Kaiser and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Brian Kramer and I am submitting written testimony in very strong opposition to HB 629 and the message it sends to student leadership throughout Maryland.

I'll be very blunt: it is deeply wrong to target the student voice and the already limited vote student board members have because of the outcome of a particular vote on a school board. This bill would not even be filed if a student listened to adults filing lawsuits in court to take away his right to vote rather than to his own intuition and the voices of his fellow students.

I've been a passionate advocate in favor of helping student board members get expanded voting rights since I was a junior in high school. I've seen how powerful their voice can be, even when I disagree with them on a particular issue. The voice of a student on the school board is a unique thing Maryland has in most counties and changing that is not the direction we should be going in at all. Instead of telling students we can't trust them to select a representative to speak on their behalf and bring up issues they care about, we should do the exact opposite.

Only two counties have a student board member with full voting rights: Anne Arundel and Montgomery. That number should grow, alongside expanding the compensation we give to student board members and giving them the ability to chair board committees. This committee would send a much better message to students if they expanded their voice and gave them more opportunities for civic engagement. Doing the opposite would be detrimental for the needs of students and would arbitrarily limit the already limited voice students have on school boards. To illustrate this, I have attached a map I created showing how limited student board members already are in Maryland, including the county that this dispute originated from.

I urge the members of the Ways and Means committee to reject this legislation and consider future legislation to strengthen student board member voting rights statewide. Please feel free to send me any questions or comments you may have about student board member voting rights and my experiences working with these amazing student leaders.

Kind regards,

Brian Kramer

bk3234a@student.american.edu

# **Written Testimony - HB0629 Revised.pdf**

Uploaded by: Le, Olivia

Position: UNF



## **HB0629 County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting**

*Friday, February 5, 2021*

### **WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE**

### **OPPOSE**

Our names are Olivia Le, Zachary McGrath, and Florence Tian and we are students of Anne Arundel County and part of the Chesapeake Regional Association of Student Councils. We are writing in opposition of House Bill 629, County Boards of Education - Student Member - Voting, that would prohibit student members of a county board of education from casting a deciding vote on issues before the county board.

Student voices are important and should be taken into consideration when making important decisions that will affect students. We feel that this bill will limit the students' ability to have a voice when those decisions are being made.

If passed, this bill will limit Student Members of the Board of Education in Garrett County, Worcester County, and every county in between. Student Members of the Board of Education would not be able to cast tie-breaking votes greatly inhibiting their ability to advocate for student concerns when their vote would not count in close votes.

This year students are facing many issues and difficulties that they have opinions on. It would be unfair to these students who have gracefully gone through this pandemic to take away one of their few representatives in decision-making.

Per the *Chesapeake Regional Association of Students Councils* Platform, we support:

- Full voting rights for all Student Members on Boards of Education;
- Opportunities for students to voice opinions on issues that directly affect students; and
- Student participation in decision-making processes.

For the reasons stated above, CRASC strongly urges this committee to vote **UNFAVORABLY** on House Bill 629, County Board of Education - Student Member - Voting.

Respectfully Submitted,

Olivia Le, Secretary of Legislation, [oliviathomsonle@gmail.com](mailto:oliviathomsonle@gmail.com)  
Zachary McGrath, Legislative Liaison, [zachary.m.mcgrath@gmail.com](mailto:zachary.m.mcgrath@gmail.com)  
Florence Tian, Legislative Liaison, [florencet107@gmail.com](mailto:florencet107@gmail.com)

## **HB 629 Testimony Jamie.pdf**

Uploaded by: Martin, Jamie

Position: UNF

Feb. 5, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Ways & Means Committee  
**FROM:** Jamie Martin  
**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 former Student Member of the Board of Education for Howard County in **opposition to House Bill 629**

- As the Student Member, I had rare insight into the effectiveness of programs such as in-school suspension. I had the ability to interact with the students and the social workers implementing the program; yet, my opinion vote did not hold the same weight as the other members. The other members in a situation like this, were looking at the proposition from a theoretical lens colored by their own biases; whereas, I was able to see first-hand the positive and negative results of the policies real time. This happens all the time on the school board; unfortunately, without the weight behind the vote the student voice is easily dismissed.
- The unique problem with Boards of Education is the true stakeholders, the students, do not have any means of representation to have someone that can empathize with their situation make informed decisions on their behalf. Adult members are more likely to empathize with other parents, business members, contractors, and educators. Even with the best of intentions they are too detached from the group to provide this perspective.

House Bill 629 bars the student member for all boards of education across the state from casting the deciding vote on any matter before the board. The bill will have a chilling effect on the voice and impact of students across the state, by ensuring their votes do not matter on closely contested issues – in effect, their votes will only “count” if they agree with the majority of adults on the board.

Additionally, we are sending our children a message that despite their sacrifices this year, they will have to sacrifice their hard-earned gains for adult community members when their voice is no longer convenient. I beg the committee members to consider how this narrative will play out for future students when they wonder why the SMOB has diminished rights on a local School Board. If we are honest, we have to inform them that during a year where young people put their social lives on hold and remained quarantined for the benefit of the community, adult’s singled out the voice of highly-qualified, hard-working students as an opportunity to manipulate local boards into giving into their demands. The fact that this action is being considered at our state legislature is a testament to what little respect these groups have for student voices and why it is



imperative that SMOBs continue to have their voice and that we do not allow that voice to be limited based on political whims.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue an **unfavorable report** on House Bill 629.

Sincerely,

Jamie Martin

Howard County SMOB 2003-2004

Mother of a 4<sup>th</sup> grader at Catonsville Elementary School – Balancing virtual school and work from home like so many others

## **Letter to House on Bill 629.pdf**

Uploaded by: Meiser, Henry

Position: UNF

February 5th, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Ways and Means Committee; Maryland House of Delegates

**FROM:** Henry Meiser, [henry.meiser@gmail.com](mailto:henry.meiser@gmail.com), 240-925-0600,  
P.O. Box 651 Solomons, Maryland 20688

**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 and Leader from Calvert County, in opposition of House Bill 629.

In 1988, Maryland established a position on their Educational Board to be filled by a student. Since then, nearly every county in the State of Maryland has followed the state's lead, making a position for the student voice to be heard across Maryland. Today, House Bill 629 puts our voice in jeopardy. This bill directly undermines a student's ability to be civically engaged with decisions regarding their own education. If passed, this bill will take away the Student Member of the Board's say in their constituent's education. In addition, this bill impresses that the student voice is inferior to that of adults, which goes against the principles of the Student Member's position on county and state Educational Boards. Students must be able to cast their vote on issues that heavily affect them. This bill also enforces hypocrisy, as The State of Maryland cannot, in good faith, mandate civic engagement education across all local school systems, while enforcing a law that directly inhibits the student's ability to act upon what they have learned.

As a student leader, involved in various organizations in the State of Maryland, I have worked with county and state Student Members, and their devotion, professionalism, and enthusiasm is equivalent to their counterparts. During the 2019-2020 school year, I had the pleasure of working with Ms. Naggena Ohri, the Student Member of the St. Mary's County Board of Education. During Ms. Ohri's tenure, she was able to successfully organize a fundraiser for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, not only raising more than \$450,000, but also highlighting the efforts of a Maryland Student. This is only one out of the numerous positive experiences that I have had with both county and state SMOBS, and to take away these dedicated student's voices would be to put a damper on the fire of student leadership in Maryland.

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

Signed, most respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Henry Meiser". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "H" and "M".

Henry Meiser

# **Testimony Student Member Voting.pdf**

Uploaded by: Mohan, Jyoti

Position: UNF

Chair and Committee Members  
The Ways and Means Committee  
Md House of Delegates.

February 2, 2021

Dear Madam Chair, and respected Committee Members,

Subj: Mohan- HB 0629-County Boards of Education- Student Member- Voting-  
Unfavorable.

I am a Higher Education Professor as well as a parent. I have noticed that my students are well informed about current issues, in fact, often better informed than many older people. They are polite and articulate about their opinions and are able to justify their positions with evidence. A large part of my job involves teaching students the difference between opinion and evidence and a socially acceptable manner to discuss one's opinions and disagreements.

I have followed the paths of several students who have been appointed as the Student Members of local Boards of Education, particularly the Baltimore County and Howard County Boards of Education. Student members have performed admirably in their task in representing the interests of their fellow students. Sometimes, they have done a better job in representing their fellow students than parents and other appointees to the Board of Education.

A Student Member for the Board of Education is appointed in a rigorous refereed process, which is considerably more competitive and supervised than any other Board of Education member. In addition, their youth makes them subject to dismissal from their fellow board members, and they often have to demonstrate superior maturity and comprehension of the issues just in order to be accepted. I cannot accept, under these circumstances, that the Student Member can be given any less privileges than the other members of the Board. A vote is the ultimate way of making one's voice heard in a democracy- Student Members of the Boards have repeatedly proved that they are more than worthy of exercising this privilege.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Jyoti Mohan



# **HB629-OPPOSE-LMorrow.pdf**

Uploaded by: Morrow, Lori

Position: UNF



## **Testimony in OPPOSITION to House Bill 629**

**Prepared for the House Ways and Means Committee Hearing, 2/5/2021, 1:30 PM**

Good afternoon Delegate Kaiser and members of the committee,

I am providing this testimony as an individual, and not as a representative of any board or organization in which I am a member.

I OPPOSE House Bill 629, County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting.

This bill would serve no purpose other than to diminish the role of the county Student Members of Boards of Education across our state. I have followed the work of many Student Members of the Board, both as a public education advocate in Prince George's County and this past year on the State Board of Education. I see their passion and dedication at a time of increased political polarization that challenges us all to do better. Student voice is an important part of the collaboration that will help us move Maryland forward. We should be encouraging this civic engagement in our young leaders rather than weakening it.

No action in our Boards of Education is decided solely by one member, and a student member's vote should not be valued less than others. I urge you to maintain the right of Student Members to vote without this additional stipulation.

Thank you for your consideration,

Lori Morrow  
Prince George's County, District 23A

# **AACPS HB629 SMOB Voting OPP 2.5.21.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ortiz, Jeanette

Position: UNF



## HB629 COUNTY BOARDS OF EDUCATION – STUDENT MEMBER – VOTING

February 5, 2021

WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

### OPPOSE

Jeanette Ortiz, Esq., Legislative & Policy Counsel (410.703.5352)

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **HB629 County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting**. This bill prohibits student members of a county board of education from casting a deciding vote on issues before the county board.

AACPS strongly opposes any efforts to diminish the voting rights of the Student Member of the Board of Education. Anne Arundel County has a rich and proud history of outstanding student service to our Board of Education and, quite frankly, our county as a whole. Our student Board member is believed to be the only one in the nation on a local Board to have full voting rights. That is a distinction we wear as a badge of honor, and one which has contributed greatly to innumerable Board conversations and initiatives over the years.

AACPS student members of the board, at times, have been the necessary voices of reason and clarity in multifaceted and complex discussions and decisions. They are bright, articulate, responsible, and passionate individuals who are preparing to be brilliant caretakers and leaders of our future. AACPS is the gold standard in this area and we have set the example for others to follow, and we urge you to reject any attempts to change the student member's role.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on HB629.

# **Testimony for SMOB .pdf**

Uploaded by: Song, Oliver

Position: UNF

BILL: HB0629  
TITLE: County Boards of Education- Student Member- Voting  
POSITION: AGAINST  
HEARING DATE: 2/05, 1:30 pm  
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means  
SPONSOR: Delegate Novotny

Hello everyone, my name is Oliver Song, and I am a sophomore at a local high school in Howard County. I am here to testify against the County Boards of Education- Student Member- Voting Bill.

I cannot even fathom what the people who introduced this bill were thinking. The school system is what raises the nation's children- what educates them on the basics of democracy- what should be filled with fun and joy. Instead, these parents are trying to pry away the only thing that gives them representation.

What is democracy if the constituents do not have a voice in it? The single vote on the board is what represents all of the county's students. Democracy gives everyone a voice- regardless of age. If this vote is removed, then it would be giving in to the tyranny of the older generation.

I can bet the parents are only concerned about this issue as the Student Member voted a way they did not like. Isn't that a little childish? You see something you don't like and you try to remove it.

Don't pull the "Oh I'm just thinking about my poor children". Students are represented by a Student Member. There is no need for you to put your hands in and churn the pot. All opinions are hence your own and not the students. If students truly cared about the issue at hand, they would organize and push for that specific policy- there is again no need for parents to be involved.

Are you concerned that not enough students care about the specific topic you are referring to that the Student Member will take action on? That is again something to ponder. The addition of new Student Board Members would address this issue. There are too many students for one board member to represent- and hence some student's opinions are squeezed out.

For the sake of our democracy, please vote against this bill. More student members would solve the issue that parents are concerned about- not one less.

And yes, removing the vote of the student member is essentially not having one at all.

For these reasons and more, I, Oliver Song, urge a NEGATIVE report on HB0629

Respectfully submitted(reminder that respect is mutual),  
Oliver Song



# **HB 629.Student Board Member Voting.pdf**

Uploaded by: Woolums, John

Position: UNF

**BILL:** House Bill 629  
**TITLE:** County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting  
**DATE:** February 5, 2021  
**POSITION:** OPPOSE  
**COMMITTEE:** Ways and Means  
**CONTACT:** John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 629, a bill to prohibit a student member of a local board of education from casting a deciding vote.

The composition, compensation, and other provisions governing the operation of each of Maryland's 24 local boards of education are contained in the Education Article. As with other inherently local matters, proposed amendments to these laws are appropriately considered by the General Assembly in a manner that confers local courtesy on the jurisdiction requesting or subject to the proposed legislation. In this context, MABE strongly opposed this legislation which would impose a uniform restriction on the status of a student board members' vote on their respective local board. Again, MABE firmly believes that these matters should remain within the purview of each local board.

Student members of local boards provide valuable insights and perspectives on school board policy matters and enjoy a range of voting rights across the 24 jurisdictions. MABE believes the successful development and implementation of state laws, including the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Act, relies on the governance role of local boards in advancing equity and excellence for all students through locally adopted educational policies and budgets allocating limited resources. To the extent that a student board member has voting rights as described in the Education Article, MABE opposes unduly limiting or restricting their voting rights as proposed in this legislation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the mettle of each of Maryland's 24 local boards by imposing unforeseeable hardships on students, families, teachers, and communities. Local boards are at the helm with their local superintendents making funding and policy decisions that are aligned with available state health and educational recovery standards and informed by ongoing community engagement. Again, to the extent that local provisions of state law already empower students with voting rights, now is not the time to impose a limitation on the value of the student member's voice or vote.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 629.