

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
Allegheny 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 Koung
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.