

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)

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