

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