

**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)