

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