



**HB 629**  
Feb. 5, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Ways & Means Committee  
**FROM:** VOTES [Voices Toward an Elected School Board] Coalition  
**RE:** House Bill 629 – County Boards of Education – Student Member – Voting

**POSITION:** **Oppose**

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, We are the organizers of the **Voices Toward an Elected School Board (VOTES) Coalition Baltimore City** and we are writing in **opposition to House Bill 629.**

Because HB0629 limits the voting rights of young people, this is a disincentive to engage in political discourse, especially when an issue or policy is divisive or requires personal risk to be on the Right Side Of History. This will have outwardly rippling effects not dissimilar to removing civics education in public school.

At a time when civic education and political engagement manifests as “we must start listening to our youth!” 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: school governance.

As members of the committee **should** understand intrinsically, elected representatives without a vote on key issues are not equipped to represent their constituents, at all.

As residents of a District where SMOBs have **extraordinarily limited** voting rights, Baltimore City Schools already tells students that they are only allowed to be advocates. Why should we create a ceiling for the very rights and democratization that we’re organizing for in Baltimore?

The “discomfort” of being confronted by young people who actually **do know** how to impactfully advocate for themselves and their peers can be frightening. We shouldn’t insist that students be **seen and not heard**, and instead, we should be supporting students’ development and listening to what they have to say.

We ask you to consider the times when you **were** right, when adults **were incorrect, but they refused to see it or acknowledge it, just because they had the Comfort of Authority.** If a decision for the future of young people in Maryland is not one we feel like they are smart enough to make, that’s a failing on our part, not on the part of students.

For the reasons stated above, We urge the committee to issue an **unfavorable report** on House Bill 629.

Regards,

**Voices Toward an Elected School Board [VOTES] Coalition – Baltimore City**