

Testimony from Timothy Nathan Ferrell, Baltimore City Resident and Baltimore City Public Schools Teacher

SB157 - Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners – Alterations

Before the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

1/19/22

Position: FAVORABLE

Good afternoon members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee and the Baltimore City Senate Delegation, my name is Nathan Ferrell and I'm a Baltimore city Schools Teacher and district 44B resident. I support SB157 to increase the amount of student members of the Baltimore City Schools Board of Commissioners from one to two, to give those student members full voting rights and the ability to participate in closed/executive sessions, to alter the process by which those students are chosen to be more democratic, and to establish a commission to research and make recommendations of board member compensation.

In addition to being a Spanish teacher in Baltimore Public Schools, I also work closely with students to organize around their needs and amplify their voices. I work with the Associated Student Congress of Baltimore City, I have supervised YouthWorks programs under the Mayor's Office of Employment Development and Youth Services, I support the Planned Parenthood of Maryland Peer Educator program and most important and close to my heart is my experience as a perennial summer school educator where I serve Transitional Age Youth working to achieve their high school diplomas before they age out of the public education system.

Too often students who are more affluent or better connected have access to leadership. Adding a 2nd seat can help to ensure marginalized students, such as the Transitional Age Youth that I serve, are able to work with a fellow student member on the board to better represent students who are in non-traditional situations. Having a 2nd seat would allow for students experiencing homelessness, students who are immigrants or ESL, students with disabilities and Transitional Age Youth to have a voice about the issues that affect them and their particular communities. It is telling that the current board structure does not allow student members of the board voting rights or the ability to participate in executive sessions. In order to transition away from a superficial and performative board structure, we must affirm the value of our young people and that of the entire enterprise of public education, and treat student members as full members of the board with all rights and privileges as any other commissioner on the board.

Baltimore City is one of just two jurisdictions, in one of the wealthiest states in the nation, where board members are **not compensated**. Serving on the school board is the equivalent of taking on an unpaid, part-time job. Regular meetings, often during the working day, are challenging for many workers or individuals with young children. The volunteer-like nature of being an

uncompensated school board member limits the candidate pool to those with the unfair advantage of flexible schedules and more resources.

As a Baltimore educator who has spent the last 7 years at a high profile charter school I have seen the revolving door of the School board and our politically connected and well funded charter network. Year after year we see school board commissioner positions filled by the same people rotating through the same positions of power and influence. They are able to do so as they are funded by the same non-profits that would allow for someone to take on the unpaid role of a school board commissioner. In the last 5 years I have witnessed the previous chairperson of the school board become the CEO of my charter school, then a dean of my charter school become the most recently appointed board member of city schools. The unpaid position of the school board commissioner allows for the same financiers of the same nonprofit networks to wield an outsized level of influence and power over the future of Baltimore city public schools by prioritizing the interests of a few and not those of the community at large.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB157.
Thank you.

Sincerely,

T. Nathan Ferrell

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