

March 21, 2022

To: The Members of the Maryland Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

We think it is important for you to have some context and insight into the Baltimore County Public School Student Member of the Board of Education (SMOB) selection process in order to make a truly informed decision on how to vote for HB 192-Baltimore County Board of Education-Student Member Voting Rights and Training.

We appreciate that you do not know the intricate details of all 24 public school systems in the state of Maryland.

From 2016 to 2019, the SMOB was elected by a special Baltimore County Student Council (BCSC) convention open to student leaders. Before 2016, a committee of BCPS staff and students convened to choose the SMOB. Starting in 2019, BCPS changed the selection process to a student election for 6th through 12th grade students.

- First year of student election 2020: 8,072 students cast votes
- Second year of student election 2021: 2,914 students cast votes out of 59,000+ MS and HS students, 5% participation rate
- Third year of student election 2022: 13,000 students cast votes out of 58,000+ MS and HS students. 22% participation rate. Much improved but hardly a majority or quorum.

In the 2022 election, students use their Google login account to cast a vote on a google form and identify if they are in grade 6-8 or 9-12. The flaw in this method of vote collection is that any BCPS student with a Google account had access to the form and could have voted, even if they were younger than 6-12th grades. Also, any adult staff member with a Google account had access and were able to vote if they so desired. What is unknown at this time is if BCPS is monitoring the voter process to verify only students in grades 6-12 votes are counted.

Multiple former SMOB candidates and SMOB representatives have commented that while the process to elect the SMOB is improving, there is still work to be done to make it a completely stable and reliable process.

The primary role of the SMOB is to expose the student body to a governing body for a potential career path and to provide student feedback on board issues.

[SMOB Position Description.pdf \(sharpschool.com\)](#)

Reasons Against increasing SMOB rights with HB 192:

- **Age**-People under the age of 18 do not have the right to vote. Also, with advanced age comes life experience that provides more multifaceted insight and wisdom when making decisions.
- **Representation**-the majority of secondary students do not vote in the SMOB election, it is not widely advertised at all schools in the same manner. See the data points above.
- **Influence**-children look up to adults, especially adults in position of power. With experience and maturity, an individual is more likely to be resistant to the influence of others. It is a conflict of interest to have the SMOB vote on issues that directly impact his/her teachers or advisors that the student relies on for grades, letters of recommendation or career experiences.
- **Length of service**-SMOB only serves on the BOE for 1 year and is also a full-time student. Learning the details of a complicated \$2+ billion budget often takes more than 1 full year to completely understand. If you have never listened to a BCPS BOE Budget Committee meeting, I

would recommend it. It is very detailed and complex and no one, regardless of age, would be able to master an understanding in 1 year in order to make a knowledgeable vote regarding a \$2 Billion budget.

We agree that students who are motivated to run for the position of SMOB are highly intelligent and driven individuals.

We agree that the student voice is very important.

We would also like to note that the BCPS Board of Education at their December 21, 2021, meeting voted NOT to include increased SMOB voting rights to the Legislative Priorities 2022. Three of the twelve members were in favor of adding SMOB voting rights to the Legislative Priorities of 2022. We ask you to respect the decision made by the majority of the BCPS Board of Education members.

HB 192 did not receive a unanimous favorable vote from the Baltimore County Delegation despite the sponsorship listed now as such rather than from Delegate Ebersole who originally sponsored the bill.

We appreciate you taking the time to read our comments and are available for further discussion. We encourage you to vote UNFAVORABLE on HB 192 at this time.

Sincerely,
Amy Adams & Mary A. Taylor

openbcps@gmail.com

