

**Testimony from Ivan Roberts, Baltimore City Schools Alumni and Organizer with
the Baltimore Algebra Project**

SB157 - Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners – Alterations

Before the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

1/19/22

Position: FAVORABLE

Ivan Roberts, youth organizer with the Baltimore Algebra Project and alumni of Baltimore City Public Schools.

I support SB157, which will employ two student members with full voting rights and create a compensation commission to make recommendations for all acting commissioners on the BCPSS board.

Currently, BCPSS board is appointed by the Mayor. Most commissioners have no investment in Baltimore. Few have ever lived in the inner city. Meaning themselves or children have never attended BCPSS. They do not share the same physical experience and social understanding as my peers or youth currently enrolled. Over the years, BCPSS has attempted to and made decisions that negatively impacted students nor reflect the values of our city. An example is the attempted arming and enforcement of School Resource Officers. More recently, the reopening of our schools without proper safety measures despite rising positive Covid cases. Each time community stakeholders; students, parents, grassroots organizations and teachers have fought against or to appeal the district's decision. It is clear that as a community, we do not share the same priorities as BCPSS. The policies in place by the district have reflected a lack of care for students' academics and wellbeing. The district continuously chooses to invest in unsafe covid-19 protocols, policing and overall undeserving our young people.

Currently, students have no role governing their educational experience. BCPSS has a tokenized youth seat on the board. This seat is elected from a small group of student government associations without broad participation from City Schools students. Despite having the most knowledge and experience on what Baltimore City Public School needs, youth members aren't allowed to vote on the most important issues that affect education like funding. In other words, this youth representative is not selected by their peers and is given little ability to be an impactful member.

Expanding to two youth members with full voting rights would be the starting point for a generation of Baltimore's young people to become decision makers in their communities. Students will be given the right to nominate, vote, and elect their own youth representative to sit on the board. Those elected are able to use their experiences to advocate and address the needs of themselves and peers to combat the racial and institutional injustices in our education system. This is a step to remove the barriers that limit the opportunities and resources which we have access to. Youth commissioners have the power to address issues that directly impact their schools. Folks say young people need to take responsibility for their education. Much like the National Student Bill of Rights, this bill is a great example of that. Both documents move youth as the key constitutions in education to prioritize ownership and hold society accountable to acknowledge and meet their needs. Students could change curriculum standards to be culturally relevant, hire/train teachers, etc. Students would literally be living the experiences that they create.

With SB157, Students would impact the much larger community and themselves. Students that nominate their peers and commissioners that will eventually take seats, will see the effect that their voice and votes hold systematically. For these reasons I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 157.

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