

**Testimony from Corey Gaber, Baltimore City Schools Teacher, District 40
Resident**

SB157 - Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners – Alterations

Before the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

1/19/22

Position: FAVORABLE with amendments

Good afternoon members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

My name is Corey Gaber and I'm a District 40 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.

As someone who has testified many times to the City School board, it's time we live up to our lofty rhetoric about how amazing our young people are by actually empowering them with the same rights as every other board member. I have personally spoken with the past three student commissioners (Kyree Sykes, Joshua Lynn, Ashley Peña), and all of them felt like second class citizens and at worst tokens in service of other adults' agendas. One of the things that they, and former student commissioner in Anne Arundel County's Drake Smith mentioned was the need to have a peer they could confide in, someone also on the board who saw things from their vantage point. We know that when you are in a space as the only person with a particular identity, it is challenging to have a fully expressed voice. Adding a second seat can both help to ensure students are prepared to vote with guidance from a fellow student member, and leave space for students who are in non-traditional situations such as students experiencing homelessness, students who are immigrants or ESL, and students with disabilities to represent their peers as well. If we truly value our youth, then it's time we empower them to be full participants on the board.

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. People should be fairly compensated for their time and the opportunity to serve should be accessible to all people, especially parents or guardians of City Schools students. This bill establishes a task force to study what compensation makes the most sense and to submit recommendations.

One amendment that would improve this bill is removing the delegate convention intermediary step of the student member of the board election process. Asking schools to hold separate elections just to appoint delegates to a convention to narrow the field of candidates would be logistically complex and create an undue burden on staff whose time is already stretched to the breaking point. By moving straight to the general vote for all eligible candidates we would not only remove this burden but end up with a more democratic that still offers a valuable opportunity for real life civics education and engagement.

Finally I'd like to emphasize as a member of the VOTES (**V**oices **T**owards and **E**lected **S**chool Board) Coalition, this bill is already a significant compromise. We met with members of the school board and the mayor's office over the summer in good faith discussions after pulling last session's bill that would have more dramatically restructured the school board. Their concerns and ideas were incorporated into this legislation to ensure that we can move towards a more democratic, transparent, youth centric and effective board.

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

Sincerely,

Corey Gaber

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