

**Testimony in OPPOSITION to House Bill 603
Harford County Board of Education – Appointment of Members - Alterations**

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

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Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association strongly opposes House Bill 603 as amended, which would change the appointment process for the appointed members of the Harford County Board of Education. MSEA stands together with the Maryland Association of Boards of Education in opposition to this bill out of concern with the new precedent this bill would set.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

As per MSEA's Resolutions, which have been affirmed many times over by the MSEA Representative Assembly dating back to 1994, MSEA supports elected school boards.

“MSEA believes in elected local boards of education with boards elected by the jurisdictions they serve... MSEA further believes boards of education must be responsive to the concerns of the citizens they represent and must be held accountable for their actions....”

While we understand the goal of this legislation and the goal of some members of the Harford Delegation, MSEA is concerned about the precedent-setting nature of this bill. This bill would give the Harford County Executive outsized power in the school system, and particularly in the budget process. House Bill 603 sets up a process in which the County Executive is able to appoint members to the Board which creates the budget request for Harford County Public Schools, and then the County Executive also has the power to set the actual budget and decide what gets funded in the school system. This allows the County Executive to have two bites of the apple, and MSEA and its affiliates have opposed this concept in other jurisdictions. We believe there should be proper checks and balances in place, especially in regard to budgeting.



Further, this bill does not set out a process as to how the County Executive and County Council are to appoint these members. A process is needed to determine how to solicit applications, the criteria for how applicants will be evaluated, how long the application window will be open, and whether local stakeholders will be involved in the process. Without the process set up in state legislation granting this power, the appointment of these members to be open to political influence. At a time when our students, staff, and parents need more information and input into their local schools than ever, we are concerned that these stakeholders do not have a defined role in this process.

There are many proposals before the General Assembly to change the composition of local boards of education, and we hope you will consider each with the fidelity needed. This is an important time for education, as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and start the implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

MSEA urges an unfavorable report on House Bill 603.