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District 8

Testimony in Support of Bill SB0157, Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners - Student Members and Task Force to Study Compensation

To: Chair Pinsky and members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
From: Arielle Juberg

My name is Arielle Juberg. I am a resident of Baltimore County in District 8. I belong to Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) in Baltimore. SURJ is a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. We are working in collaboration with Out for Justice. **I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 157, Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners - Student Members and Task Force to Study Compensation.**

As elected representatives, I hope you can see your younger selves in the current and future student members of the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners. Like you, they are choosing to devote their time to important public issues. *As fellow public servants, I hope you would want their voices and vote to be respected.*

SB0157 makes changes to policies on student members of the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners, adding an additional student member, removing restrictions on what matters the student member(s) can vote on and what meetings student member(s) can attend, and further democratizes the method by which student member(s) of the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners are chosen.

Young people can provide astute and thoughtful analyses on complicated issues. Student commissioners should have equitable voting power, as students themselves are the ones most impacted by decisions made by the Board. *In other Maryland jurisdictions, student Board members have equal voting rights.* Enfranchising all Baltimore City's students to pick their representatives through direct democracy will ensure the selected student commissioners best represent student interests. In addition to granting students full voting power, another student seat should be added to the board to avoid one student being 'tokenized' and given the impossible task of accurately representing the multitude of student voices.

SB0157 also enacts the Task Force to Study Compensation for the Baltimore City School Board of Commissioners. *Baltimore City is one of only two jurisdictions that does not compensate school board commissioners.* Lack of compensation fuels inequity, because all too often, only commissioners with flexible schedules and higher incomes can participate - the workload required to be a commissioner is comparable to working an unpaid, part-time job. Lack of compensation puts low-income students at an unfair disadvantage. Limiting board membership to folks who can afford to volunteer for the position, creates a School Board of Commissioners that cannot accurately reflect the city it represents. Economic status should not be a determining factor for participation on the School Board of Commissioners.

SB0157 makes important improvements to the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners. As someone who works and volunteers in Baltimore City, I believe this bill will help our school system and young people. **It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote in support of SB0157.** Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.