

Dear Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, 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 also working in collaboration with Organizing Black. I am a resident of MD District. I am a resident of District 43. **I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 157.**



SB157 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. Additionally, it enacts the Task Force to Study Compensation for the Baltimore City School Board of Commissioners.

Giving students less of a vote than adults, as is current policy, tells students that their voices do not matter. That is not the message our students should be receiving from their school board. Student commissioners must 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 isn't 'tokenized' and given the impossible task of accurately representing the multitude of student voices in Baltimore City.

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, given that the workload required to be a commissioner is comparable to working an unpaid, part-time job. Additionally, 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.

Why should Baltimore City have less democracy in governance of its schools than other jurisdictions? The current way we do things is not working for Baltimore City. This is just one step, although an important one, in another way of doing things, restoring democratic control to Baltimore City.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to **vote in support of Senate Bill 157**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Rochkind
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