

**Testimony from Lydell Hills, Founder & Program Director of Truth to Power and
Member of Organizing Black and Baltimore City resident
SB157 - Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners – Alterations**

Before the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

[1/19 at 1:00 p.m]

Position: FAVORABLE

Good morning/afternoon members of the [Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs],

My name is Lydell Hills and I'm a resident of Baltimore City's 40th Legislative District. 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.

It is important that the school board expands the ability for youth to represent themselves on the School Board. As a young adult who has experienced the benefits of learning how to work within a student government association, and working with Baltimore's current young leaders, I am certain that the opportunity for youth to lead their peers in expressing the views of their peers in the School Board would be beneficial. Doing this work I also understand the toll that can take and the need for 2 members to share that responsibility and expand the potential perspective the board gets from Baltimore City's youth. When our youth disengage because we don't create space for them to use their voice, then our system fails. Our youth are most impacted by those failures. Furthermore it is important to create opportunities for low-income residents to serve on the board with compensation as finances should not be a barrier. The very people the system has and is failing should be put in a position to address the issues while being compensated to ensure they are compensated to have their basic needs met. If we give young people more voice and remove barriers to running for school board then we can have better representation to prevent a system that fails our future generation.

I am supporting this bill because it expands the positions that youth can serve to two which expands the opportunity for youth with different perspectives to serve and collaborate. The support from alternative 3rd & 4th positions can be important as students have many responsibilities like their adult counterparts on the board and may need to take leave. Finally this bill is mindful of financial barriers to community representation and aims to build a democratic school board. This would hopefully better represent ultimately what will aid our youth but to do this we must continue to expand student representation on the board.

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

Sincerely,

Lydell Hills

Founder & Program Director of Truth to Power and Member of Organizing Black and Resident of the 40th Legislative District.

LYDELL@ORGANIZINGBLACK.ORG

410-497-7299