

Ashley Esposito (written and oral testimony)

**SB157:** Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners - Student Members and Task Force to Study Compensation

Position: Favorable

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

My name is Ashley Esposito I am a resident of Baltimore City and I live in the 40<sup>th</sup>. 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.

I strongly believe having a student at the table where decisions are made is valuable. Currently the Baltimore City School Board Student Commissioner does not have voting rights. Their voice and opinions should carry the same weight as any other commissioner on the Baltimore City School Board of Commissioners.

Institutions like the University System of Maryland Student Commissioner, Maryland Higher Education Commission Student Commissioner, as well as the student members on other county boards in Maryland have student representatives with voting rights. Baltimore City should be no different. They are the subject matter experts of our current education system and know how decisions affect the student population in real-time. The Student Commissioner having voting rights ensures that they will be a part of conversations leading up to vote. A voice without being able to exercise a vote makes their opinion optional.

University System of Maryland has a similar model with one student with voting rights, and one without. Having an additional student member means they will have someone to discuss policy with someone who also has a student perspective. This bill ensures that they have autonomy to represent the student body at large. I have watched board meetings and seen that the student member takes their responsibility very seriously. I fully trust they can take in the same information as every other commissioner and vote.

The bill solidifies that we truly respect the time and voice of the student member and trust them to make important decisions on behalf of students. They are already putting their time and energy into civic engagement, and we can empower them with voting rights. It is vital that we allow them to go on the record with their opinion by a vote. While we are fighting for voting rights in this country, we should create a pathway for students to exercise their vote on decisions that impact their futures.

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

Sincerely,

Ashley Esposito