

Dear Delegates,

I am an elected member of the the Harford County Board of Education, and I’m writing to strongly **oppose** HB0336 and similar.

As a board member, I’ve been able to see up close the importance of a good school superintendent. This importance is recognized in state law by the combined education and experience requirements for certification for superintendents. This is recognized by communities by the high salaries commanded by county superintendents in our state: superintendents of large districts earn more than our Governor.

Getting the best superintendent requires a wide pool of candidates, while this bill would greatly limit candidates. Would current superintendents in other districts or states have the time to campaign in Harford against locally-known candidates? Would senior Harford administrators be willing to campaign against each other, and potentially against the current superintendent as well?

Requiring a superintendent to run for election and re-election may also change their decisions for the worse. Superintendents are charged with supporting the entire district, without showing favoritism to areas that may support them politically. Correct decisions are not always popular, especially when the beneficiaries are politically quiet.

I would be happy to further discuss the merits of a hired versus elected superintendent. But today, even more important than the content of these misguided bills is the context.

The context is a small but loud group of people who are angry at the school system. They are primarily angry about Covid safety measures, starting from the original school shutdown in March of 2020, and continuing with the mask mandate and other measures still in place today. To be clear, the objections are to safety measures that have been not just supported by, but sometimes ordered by the state level. For example, after an anti-mask protest in Aug 2020, the Baltimore Sun reported, “*‘People are tired of their kids wearing masks,’ [Delegate] Arian said. ‘The board’s desire to do this does not reflect the values of our community, which is about personal liberties.’*”

Some of these people are angry because right-wing media has told them that schools are indoctrinating our children with critical race theory and Marxism. In the January 20th Harford delegation meeting, around timestamp 35 minutes, 21 seconds, the sponsor of these bills said, “I’m sick and tired of the indoctrination of our children.”

Some of you may want to support HB336 because of a general belief that more elected positions means more democracy. I request that you too reject this bill, because the actual content is less important now than the perception. The passage of these bills would be perceived by many people, both those for and against the bills as a successful attack on the Board of Education, which hires the superintendent. To be clear, the Harford county school board has been very unified in our support of our superintendent and his decisions. The mud-slinging is entirely from the outside.

The unity of the board against these attacks is probably why the sponsor has not attempted to work with the board members nor school administration in creating a bill. Nor were any board members nor other

stakeholders invited to the Harford Delegation meeting where this bill was discussed, in sharp contrast to the many stakeholders invited to discuss the liquor bills in the same time frame.

I would be happy to expand on any or all of these items.

Sincerely,
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References:

Baltimore Sun, “Harford school board dismisses unruly audience from meeting as parents rally against mask mandate”, Aug 17, 2021.

Harford Delegation Meeting, January 20, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5pSM2vW_iE
Timestamp 35:03

Del. Impallaria: “I’m bringing this bill to you now so you have an opportunity to look the bill over prior to having a full hearing on it. So, um, I just think it’s a way that we should go. Would they reject it? They may, because they like having control of our children. I’m sick and tired of the indoctrination of our children.”