

Dear Members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

As a white grandmother and great grandmother of biracial children, I want to voice my support for future generations learning early in life that they matter and that their voices should be respected and given equal weight. I have lived in Maryland most of my 71 years and I get disheartened that students in primarily Black schools are still treated like second class citizens. **I am testifying in support of HB433.** It is a step in the right direction.

HB433 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 any Maryland student 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.

My bolded sentences highlight that this is an equity issue for Marylanders. I may not live in Baltimore, but I will support Baltimoreans to have the same rights, privileges and access that other Marylanders enjoy. To deny that is essentially undemocratic and unjust. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to **vote in support of HB433.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Linda K. Girdner  
941 Fall Ridge Way  
Gambrills, MD 21054  
(District 21)