

Ashley Esposito (written and oral testimony)

HB433: 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 in the 40th district. I support HB433 Which will 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. They are the subject matter experts of our current education system and can articulate how decisions could affect the student population in real-time. I strongly believe having a student as a full voting member at the table where education decisions are made is incredibly valuable to the school board.

The Student Commissioner having full 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”. Having an additional student member means they will have someone to discuss policy who also has a student perspective. This bill ensures that they have autonomy to represent the student body at large. Two positions on the board will prepare Baltimore City Public School leaders to lead on college level councils in the State of Maryland such as University System of Maryland’s and Maryland Higher Education Commissioner’s Student Commissioners. The Baltimore City Student Commissioner having experience exercising full voting rights, like student members in other counties, would also make them an asset on college level boards and councils.

I am also strongly in favor of allowing broader participation in the election process. Student Board member elections in other counties are amazing. These students organize their own mini campaigns using communications and do broad outreach to other students. The process as it exists now, there is no incentive to do that broad outreach and is limited to SGA involvement. I know the school board has testified in the past stating they want time to revive the SGAs and democratize the process. With all due respect, they have already tried, and it is not working. How long would it take them to increase the number of SGAs? Would it be sustainable if it is not student-led? A top-down approach from adults is not what gets students involved or engaged.

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Removing the barriers of participating will revive SGAs. This bill democratizes the process for every Baltimore City Public Schools, not just the ones who have active SGAs.

When you allow more students to run for Student Commissioner, you will have students who are not selected but have already done broad outreach to their school. As an organizer, when you are not selected or come up short you look for a way to stay involved. Those students who were excited and were compelled to run will rebuild SGAs as their way to stay involved. They will also make great point people for the two elected Student Commissioners. I believe that years from now we will also see increased voter turnout in Baltimore City from this newly empowered generation.

We are constantly asking the youth to be more involved. Giving the student commissioner the full voting rights and another student member as an ally is a pathway to quality engagement. It will make it clear that the board values them as more than just a fly on the wall and they are viewed as active participants in the decision-making process.

The bill solidifies that we truly respect the time and voice of the student member and trust them to make important decisions. 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 historical record with their opinion.

As a former student who thoughtfully and impactfully exercised my ability to vote on a board, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB433 with no weakening amendments. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ashley Esposito

District 40 resident