



**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House of Delegates,
Ways and Means Committee
March 3, 2022**

**Board of Education
of Howard County**

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**HB0793: UNFAVORABLE
County Boards of Education - Community Ombudsman – Established**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **HB0793 County Boards of Education - Community Ombudsman – Established** as contrary to local board control.

Under HB0793, each county board of education must establish a Community Ombudsman as an existing employee or hire one. Each year the Ombudsman must report to the county board on services provided, which may not identify the individuals bringing forward concerns/questions. Communications of the Ombudsman must remain confidential unless otherwise required by law.

In Howard County, the duties described are similar to those performed by the Board Ombudsman. These include requirements for the Ombudsman to: research applicable school system information including county board policies and procedures, refer individuals to the appropriate school system department or personnel or other community resources, assist individuals with any established local processes for resolving issues, facilitate communication and discussion between parties, and perform other services that align with the purpose of the Ombudsman.

As a legislative platform, however, the Board opposes legislation which limits local board decision-making authority. The mandate for a specific position takes away flexibility in future oversight of school system operations. Additionally, local boards are intimately familiar with their own budgets and how to best implement needed positions based on available resources.

For these reasons, we urge a UNFAVORABLE report of HB0793 from this Committee.