

Dear Members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Organizing Black. I am a resident of District 40. **I am testifying in support of House Bill 433.**

HB 433 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 our students 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.

I've taught in Baltimore City Schools, worked for programs that serve thousands of students annually, and hope to one day enroll my children in BCPS. I want my children to go to a school where their voices will be heard.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to **vote in support of House Bill 433.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Smeton
Baltimore, MD 21211
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

