

Dear Delegates,

I am an elected member of the the Harford County Board of Education, and I’m writing to strongly **oppose** HB0603 and similar. As an elected board member, I appreciate our appointed members. I like having a larger school board. And, I would be happy to discuss the merits of a hybrid versus fully elected board. But today, 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.

Some of you may want to support HB0603 because of a general belief that school boards should be fully elected. I request that you 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 – the whole board. To be clear, the Harford county school board has been very unified in our support of Covid measures and of our superintendent. The mud-slinging is entirely from the outside.

The sponsor of this bill has referred to the Harford Board of Education as being hypocritical (November 17th, 2021; February 10th, 2022). Other members of the Delegation have complained about the “indoctrination of our children” (Jan 20th, 2022) and stated that they don’t believe the board reflects the values of the community (Aug 16th/17th, 2022).

The unity of the board against these attacks is probably why the sponsor hasn’t attempted to work with the board members 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.

This non-cooperation is not new. In September of 2020, the Baltimore Sun reported this bill’s sponsor said he wanted to work with the Harford BoE concerning in-person learning opportunities. He did not do so. He did publish an unworkable plan in July of 2020 as an opinion piece, and invited the BoE to comment on it, post-release.

The sponsor of this bill may bring up a public input meeting that was held on Sept 22, 2021. At that meeting, only four members of the public spoke against the current structure of the Board of Education, while six members spoke in favor of the current structure.

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

Sincerely,
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(References on next page)

References:

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

“‘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.’”

Baltimore Sun, “An alternate plan for Harford school reopening, with more, but not all, students in the classroom | COMMENTARY”, Jul 27, 2020.

Baltimore Sun, “Harford’s parents, legislators voice concerns and opposition to virtual learning plan”, Sep 3, 2020.

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.”

Harford Delegation Meeting, February 10, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAfgwn-jOW4>
Timestamp 37:42

Del. Griffith: “[To] be very frank, the hypocrisy [of the Harford BoE] that their teachers don’t have a choice whether or not to be in person right now.”

Harford County Delegation Pre-Session Legislative Meeting, November 17th, 2021.

Harford County Delegation Meeting, “Summary”, September 22, 2021, Abingdon Public Library.