

Sample Testimony on Class Size

Testimony from LaToya Nettles, AROS Parent Organizer, TDP, Communities United, VOTES
SB206 - Education - Collective Bargaining - Certificated Employees - Class Size

Before the Senate Finance Committee
February 9, 2023
Position: FAVORABLE

Hello members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is LaToya Nettles and I'm a District 41 resident. I want to express my full support of SB206. I am an educator, a minister and an active community member. I have witnessed how having an overload of students in a classroom can affect both the students and teachers overall morale, concentration and their ability to retain information given. Safety cannot be guaranteed when we leave our houses, at least we should do our best to ensure safety in our school buildings. Teachers have difficulty gaining the attention of their students due to the current student to teacher ratios. Teachers cannot possibly learn each student's weaknesses and strengths, which is important for a successful educator to be able to provide an equitable education. Students are less likely to ask for or accept help in an over packed classroom. Students are less likely to answer questions which leads to them not understanding, retaining or being able to synthesize the new information. Teachers are teaching "to the bell" so they can get through the day and not for our students' understanding. We are also losing our staff because they are underpaid, misinformed, and mistreated on a regular basis. Teachers are treated like "the help" and like babysitters, when they should be appreciated and honored for the service they provide to their communities.

The level of safety is compromised in classrooms with a lot of students and not enough staff. When I worked as a paraeducator in Baltimore City, I often substituted for absent staff. A staff member was injured and out for the week and while providing aid to the classroom I was punched in the face by a 17 year old young man. We were involved in circle time and singing songs when the incident occurred. At the time I was a staff member in a school for children with special needs and this was a regular occurrence for them. No one was shocked or concerned. This cannot be our culture moving forward. It should not be normal for staff to be injured on the job and replaced by another staff who could be injured in the same manner.

It is also easier for our students to miss classes and school when the classrooms are overcrowded. It is hard to establish a working environment when you can't remember your students' names. Education must be personal because we all do not learn the same way. Teachers are forced to teach for the test instead of teaching to retain the knowledge.

Maryland is one of only **nine states in the country** that does not allow teachers to have a say in class size and caseload. In other states where unions can negotiate class size, the result is not just smaller classes, but more support staff in large classes. Our schools need more staff to

support our students academically and emotionally. Removing the ban on negotiating this is an important step in addressing varied student needs.

Research shows smaller classes lead to better outcomes for all kids – especially those who need help the most. Class size reduction has been shown to result in higher test scores, better grades, more engaged students, fewer disciplinary referrals, and less teacher turnover.

The quality of the classroom matters. We know the Blueprint funding will pay teachers more and give them more planning time but this is not enough.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB206.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Minister L.J. Nettles
AROS Parent Organizer, District 41

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