

Good Afternoon. My name is Jessica Nichols and I am a resident of Howard County, Maryland. I am a local public school teacher who has a great deal of interest in expanding the ability for a diverse population of people to run for our Board of Education. One of the largest barriers for people running for Board of Education is finding the financial resources to run a large down ballot race county or district wide. I believe that by passing this bill, the financial gap between those who want to serve and those who have the financial means to serve will be narrowed. This will benefit diverse communities as they will have the ability to have representatives who can run competitive races due to the equalizing playing field of equal funding.

In our last county-wide Board of Education race, several candidates spent well over \$30,000 running for their positions. Raising money for this race was difficult for so many people that it was a deterrent for many good candidates. Unfortunately this leaves space for many people with outside agendas and money who are able to heft the weight of running for office. The result is that our public school boards may not reflect the communities that they serve. This can be catastrophic for our students of color and those who are in the LGBTQ+ community.

Ultimately, our students deserve to have well qualified people who love public education as candidates for office. Our communities deserve to be represented by people who have their best interests at heart. Our educators deserve people who are committed to ensuring the viability of our public schools. Removing barriers to running for this necessary office should be something that we all do in order to ensure the long term viability of our public schools. Please pass this bill so we can remove these barriers for our students, educators and schools.