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**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland House Ways and Means Committee
HB 153 – Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners –
Student Members and Task Force to Study Compensation and Student Members
February 1, 2023**

SUPPORT

Good afternoon, Chair Atterbeary and members of the House Ways and Means Committee. On behalf of the more than 20,000 members of the American Federation of Teachers – Maryland (AFT-Maryland), including the Baltimore Teachers’ Union (BTU), we ask for a favorable report on HB 153, a bill that would give a student representative more voting rights; alter the process for selecting student members; and establish a task force to study compensation for members of the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners.

This bill would bring Baltimore City Public Schools governance structures in line with other school systems across the state by granting the students the authority to vote on matters before the board such as school closures and zoning issues. By giving the student body a meaningful, legitimate voice on the board that determines local school system policy, this bill demonstrates to the students of Baltimore that their input and voice is valuable and that students should take an active, participatory role in their education.

This legislation would also bring the Baltimore City Public School System in line with other local boards in the state by leading it closer to compensating members for their work. Currently, Baltimore City is one of only two jurisdictions in the state that does not at least partially compensate school board members—Harford County being the other. Board members are expected to attend the weekly board and subcommittee meetings, and to be responsive to parents, staff, and community members. Unfortunately, the lack of compensation proves to be a financial barrier for far too many residents who do not have the time or resources to work for free. As a result, the board is too often populated by only by members who can financially afford to volunteer their time. Compensating board members will increase the likelihood that there will be a more representative pool of candidates for vacancies on the school board when they arise.

For these reasons we ask for a favorable report for HB 153. Thank you.