

**Written Testimony from Timothy Nathan Ferrell, Baltimore City Public Schools
Teacher**

District 44A

**HB153 - Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners – Student Members and
Task Force to Study Compensation and Student Members**

Before the Baltimore City House Delegation

1/27/23

Position: FAVORABLE

Good afternoon members of the committee, my name is Nathan Ferrell and I'm a Baltimore city Schools Teacher and district 44A resident. I'm writing to give my full support of HB153 to give student members of the board expanded voting rights, the ability to participate in closed/executive sessions, to alter the process by which those students are chosen to be more democratic, and to establish a commission to research and make recommendations on board member compensation and adding a second student member of the board.

In addition to being a Spanish teacher in Baltimore Public Schools, I also work closely with students to organize around their needs and amplify their voices. I work with the Associated Student Congress of Baltimore City, I have supervised YouthWorks programs under the Mayor's Office of Employment Development and Youth Services, I support the Planned Parenthood of Maryland Peer Educator program and most important and close to my heart is my experience as a perennial summer school educator where I serve Transitional Age Youth working to achieve their high school diplomas before they age out of the public education system.

Too often students who are more affluent or better connected have access to leadership. Adding a 2nd seat can help to ensure marginalized students, such as the Transitional Age Youth that I serve, are able to work with a fellow student member on the board to better represent students who are in non-traditional situations. Having a 2nd seat would allow for students experiencing homelessness, students who are immigrants or ESL, students with disabilities and Transitional Age Youth to have a voice about the issues that affect them and their particular communities. It is telling that the current board structure does not allow student members of the board voting rights or the ability to participate in executive sessions. In order to transition away from a superficial and performative board structure, we must affirm the value of our young people and that of the entire enterprise of public education, and treat student members as full members of the board with all rights and privileges as any other commissioner on the board.

Baltimore City is one of just two jurisdictions, in one of the wealthiest states in the nation, where board members are **not compensated**. Serving on the school board is the equivalent of taking on an unpaid, part-time job. Regular meetings, often during the working day, are challenging for most traditional working parents or individuals with young children in this city.

The question deserves to be asked: When was there last a commissioner who made minimum wage or working class wages?

The volunteer-like nature of being an uncompensated school board member limits the candidate pool to those with the unfair advantage of flexible schedules and more resources.

I have spent the last 8 years at a high profile charter school in Baltimore City and I have seen the revolving door of the School board of commissioners and our politically connected and well funded charter network. Year after year the school board commissioner positions are filled by the same people rotating through the same positions of power and influence. They are able to do so as they are funded by the same non-profits that would allow for someone to take on the unpaid role of a school board commissioner. In the last 5 years I have witnessed the previous chairperson of the school board become the CEO of my charter school, then a dean of my charter school become an appointed school board commissioner. Two of the last three Chairpersons of the schools board of commissioners finished their tenure and left directly from their position as commissioner to work for the same non-profit organization in Baltimore. Currently a Chief within city schools served as a commissioner only a few years ago. The **unpaid** position of school board commissioners allows for financiers of nonprofit networks to wield an outsized level of influence and power over the future of Baltimore city public schools by prioritizing the interests of a few and not those of the community at large.

Finally I'd like to emphasize as an organizational member of the VOTES (**Voices Towards and Elected School Board**) Coalition, this bill is already a significant compromise. We met with members of the school board and the mayor's office over multiple years in good faith discussions after pulling the bill two sessions ago that would have more dramatically restructured the school board. Their concerns and ideas were incorporated into this legislation to ensure that we can move towards a more democratic, transparent, youth centric and effective board. The Baltimore City school board of commissioners, Mayor Scott and BCPSS CEO Dr. Santelises all support the passage of HB153.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB153. Thank you.

Sincerely,

T. Nathan Ferrell

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