



Senate Bill 386

County Boards of Education - Student Members - Voting Rights and Participation in Executive Sessions

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Committee

Date: February 7, 2024

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 386. This bill would extend broad voting rights to all student members of local boards of education, essentially overturning the tradition of local autonomy in education decision-making.

Historically, the State has empowered local boards of education to shape the local school system and make decisions that only those at the local level could have the necessary local experience and insight to make. This includes whether to have a student member of the board, and if so, which roles and responsibilities of the local board to extend to the student member, including voting rights.

SB 386 turns this process upside down and extends voting rights to all student members, regardless of the wishes of the local community and local governing bodies. Counties oppose this repeal of local autonomy and decision-making.

Local boards of education have critically important responsibilities. They shape our local education systems, make critical budget and financial choices, and guide the community's approach to schooling. Unequivocally, counties believe that student members have enhanced their local boards of education and have provided important perspectives.

However, county governments have serious concerns about extending voting powers on budget decisions to students. Budgeting in any context – but especially for school funding – is often difficult and complex and requires a certain level of maturity and experience to balance all of the factors, needs, and priorities involved. Maryland is among only a handful of states that fund education through county governments. School funding is by far the largest expenditure for its county governments, and counties take the responsibility very seriously.

Counties have significant and well-founded concerns about the prospect set forth in SB 386 of high school students – who are potentially underage and unable to even vote in Maryland elections – having voting power over the largest portion of a county's operating budget. For these reasons, MACo **OPPOSES** SB 386 and urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report.