

BILL: Senate Bill 386
TITLE: County Boards of Education - Student Members - Voting Rights and Participation in Executive Sessions
DATE: February 7, 2024
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment
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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes Senate Bill 386, a bill to impose mandated changes in the composition of local boards of education and the roles of student board members.

MABE recognizes that student members of local boards provide valuable insights and perspectives on school board policy matters and enjoy a range of voting rights across the 24 jurisdictions. However, the composition, compensation, and other provisions governing the operation of each of Maryland's 24 local boards of education are contained in separate sections of the Education Article. As with other inherently local matters, proposed amendments to these laws are appropriately considered by the General Assembly in a manner that confers local courtesy on the jurisdiction requesting or subject to the proposed legislation. In this context, MABE strongly opposes this legislation which would impose a comprehensive set of reforms impacting almost every local board.

Specifically, Senate Bill 386 would make dramatic changes to the membership status and voting rights of student board members. Again, MABE firmly believes that the scope of the roles and responsibilities of students, as members or non-members of local boards, should remain within the purview of each local board and subject to local discretion as to the types of reforms to be adopted over time.

Local boards are at the helm with their local superintendents making funding and policy decisions that are aligned with state performance and accountability standards, including the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The role of student voices in informing these decisions is critically important, regardless of the legal status and scope of voting rights of a student member of the local board. In Maryland, this locally driven process has already placed us in the vanguard among all other states regarding the membership and voting privileges provided to many student board members. MABE urges the rejection of the approach taken in Senate Bill 386, in favor of the incremental, locally developed revisions to state law that have resulted in an expanded range of voting rights for student members of local boards of education.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 386.