

Dear Esteemed Delegates,

My name is Guy Bunyard, and I have been a professor of mathematics for 31 years at Howard Community College, and I am here to express my support for this bill (SB-813) and its amendments. I would like to focus my support specifically on one of the bill's amendments: adding a place for the public to have the opportunity to speak openly at a board meeting. While there is currently a provision allowing the public to speak at these meetings, it is not an open process. Right now, to speak at a board meeting, you must reach out in advance to the Secretary of the board—who is also the college president—expressing your interest in testifying and both the topic you will be speaking about and a copy of your testimonial. This creates a scenario where the President of the college is the gatekeeper of the Board, and can determine on a whim who does and does not deserve an opportunity to speak. This is a large conflict of interest. People should be allowed to speak freely and what they say should not have to be approved. This bill is not about attacking a particular person but about a position and a system that is open for abuse. Imagine if the Board of Ed and County Council meetings and even this body had a gatekeeper that decided if a particular testimony or statement was worthy or not to come before the group. As a public institution I believe the public should have an easier way to access the ultimate authority of the college. We tried to find in the board minutes that last time someone from the public spoke at a Board of Trustees meeting (that was not invited by the administration) and we could not find one.

Our newly formed faculty union wanted to reach out to the board and let them know that our faculty are ready to work collaboratively with them, to move the college's initiatives forward. We wanted to be sure there was no animosity towards us because we formed a union. Per the directions in the BOT By-Laws, I emailed the president of the college and asked to speak at the next meeting to convey this message. I did not hear back from the president, but I heard back from the college's lawyer with a very short answer "your request to speak at the Board of Trustees meeting was forwarded to me. Please note that at this time your request is denied.". This clearly demonstrates a conflict of interest, and allows a President to restrict speech from employees that they don't want to give a platform to.

This amendment will return the freedom of speech to the public and the college's employees, and will allow stakeholders to voice their opinions on the functions and happenings of a massive public institution. I ask you for your support of bill SB-813 and its amendments in helping Howard Community College to have open and transparent processes.

Thank you.