



**Board of Education
of Howard County**

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**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland Senate,
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 7, 2025**

SB0574: UNFAVORABLE

**Howard County Board of Education - Board Member Terms and Compensation
Commission Ho. Co. 2-25**

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **Howard County Board of Education - Board Member Terms and Compensation Commission Ho. Co. 2-25** as an insufficient measure to address election of and compensation for the Board of Education of Howard County.

SB0574 initially adjusts Board of Education member terms based on four- and six-year terms as well as top vote getting to start with the 2026 election. Currently five Board of Education seats are up for election in one cycle and two seats in the next. The changes outlined in the bill can be summarized as follows:

- 2026 Election
 - Two at large seats up for election
 - One candidate with the highest percentage of votes serves a six-year term
 - This seat is subsequently up for election in 2032 and serves a four-year term
 - One candidate with the second highest percentage of votes serves a four-year term
 - This seat is subsequently up for election in 2030 and serves a four-year term
- 2028 Election
 - Five councilmanic seats up for election
 - Two candidates with the highest percentage of votes serve six-year terms
 - These seats are subsequently up for election in 2034 and serve four-year terms
 - Three candidates with the lowest percentage of votes serve four-year terms
 - These seats are subsequently up for election in 2032 and serve four-year terms

Once all terms return to four-year terms, three seats would be up for election in one cycle and four seats in the next.

The Board opposes this portion of SB0574 because the proposed changes in election cycles are too soon after the prior changes to create councilmanic and at-large seats for the Board of Education. There needs to be additional time for residents and elected officials to see how the current process works out and any lessons learned. Additionally, a six-year term could be onerous for potential candidates.

SB0574 also contains provisions to establish a Howard County Board of Education Compensation Commission. The role of the Commission would be to study the salaries of the members of the Board. By September 1, 2026, the Commission must issue a report regarding recommendations for appropriate compensation for Board of Education members, the Chair, and a scholarship amount for the Student Member of the Board. Reports would subsequently be required every four years.

Once the Council receives the Commission's report, they may recommend changes to the salary, however not more than the recommendation of the Commission. If approved by resolution, the Council would then submit to the Howard County Delegation who have the option to alter the salary of Board members via legislation.

Under Education Article § 3-703, Board of Education of Howard County members are currently paid \$16,000 annually, with the Chair of the Board receiving \$18,000. Additional compensation is provided in the form of reimbursement for travel and other expenses if available in the school system budget, and Board members are able to participate in health insurance and benefit programs. The statute was last updated in 2018, when Board member salaries increased by \$1,000 under HB0340. This compensation is equal to \$7.69/hour for a full-time working individual (2080 hours in a calendar year). This is well below the Howard County minimum wage of \$16/hour as set in CB-82-2021 to establish increases to minimum wage. Further, using the MIT living wage calculator for Howard County, the current compensation is \$0.17 above a poverty wage. The living wage calculator estimates that a living wage in Howard County is \$27.48/hour for a required annual income before taxes of \$57,162.

For other elected officials serving Howard County, such as County Council members, the current set base salary is \$73,663 for the first year of a member's term that begins December 2022, and increases annually up to \$83,256 in the fourth year. The Council Chair receives an additional \$3,500 annually. Like Board of Education members, County Council members are expected to attend multiple meetings per month, set governing policy, and manage a budget of over one billion dollars. While only one portion of the total public services provided to county residents, Board of Education members represent nearly 9,000 employees, 56,000 students, and the Howard County community at large through stewardship of taxpayer revenues.

SB0574 is similar to [HB0150](#) which passed in 2018 as a local bill applicable to Montgomery County's Board of Education. Since establishment, the Montgomery County Board of Education Compensation Commission has [reported once in 2019 and recommended](#) an annual salary of \$60,000 for members, \$70,000 for the Board Chair, as well as a stipend and scholarship for the student member of the Board equal to 20 and 40 percent of the Board's respective salaries. No change in statute, however, has since been made by the Montgomery County Delegation.

While the Board supports the intent of this portion of SB0574 to address the need for a salary increase in Howard County, we recommend this be done without the use of a Compensation Commission which to date has not proven to result in timely changes. Investments in Board salaries that reflect the executive level demands of the position would help attract a diverse pool of candidates and could contribute to longevity on the Board when members are able to financially sustain participation. A stand-alone bill with dedicated increases in salary would be preferred.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report on SB0574 from this Committee.