

Unfavorable Testimony for Maryland HB 1529/SB 656

Baltimore County Board of Education – Alterations of Elected Member Districts and Establishment of Redistricting Process

I am writing as a representative of the Baltimore County Parent and Student Coalition, Inc (BCPASC) to submit opposition to HB 1529/SB 656.

BCPASC is a nonpartisan volunteer grassroots organization of 5,000 members that seeks to ensure students are the first priority in Baltimore County Public Schools. We seek to ensure the school board is governed in accordance with the law, specifically that the roles are non-partisan.

Senate Bill 656 seeks to alter the election process and redistricting procedures for the Baltimore County Board of Education. While the bill aims to improve representation, we believe it introduces significant challenges that could ultimately harm the community.

1. **Loss of Opportunity for Increased Elected Representation:** Under the current structure, the Baltimore County Board of Education includes a mix of elected and appointed members, ensuring a balance between local representation and expertise. SB 656 does not address the potential for increasing elected seats, which would provide greater accountability to voters and enhance democratic representation.
2. **Risk of Gerrymandering:** The bill allows for redistricting after each decennial census, but the process could be subject to political manipulation. Without clear safeguards, this creates opportunities for gerrymandering, undermining fair representation and eroding public trust in the electoral process.
3. **Disruption to Stability:** Frequent redistricting risks destabilizing the board's composition and continuity. This could hinder long-term planning and decision-making, negatively impacting students, families, and educators.
4. **Strain on Resources:** Implementing redistricting every ten years will require significant financial and administrative resources. These funds could be better used to address pressing educational needs such as reducing overcrowding or improving school infrastructure.
5. **Lack of Community Input:** SB 656 does not adequately prioritize community engagement in the redistricting process. This omission risks alienating stakeholders who deserve a voice in decisions that directly affect their schools and neighborhoods.

We oppose HB 1529/SB 656 because it proposes significant changes to the Baltimore County Board of Education election process that we believe will have negative

consequences for the community, the educational system, and the transparency of the process.

We agree with Senator Sydnor's statement from his testimony that many stakeholders do not want to increase the size of the Baltimore County Public School (BCPS) Board of Education. However, we disagree that constituents do not have a desire to decrease the number of gubernatorial appointments. One possible amendment is to increase the elected members of the Board of Education to nine to correspond with the additional two county districts and reduce the number of at large Governor appointed members to two leaving the Board of Education total the same with twelve members.

HB 1529/SB 656 overcomplicates the selection of elected Board members by disconnecting them from County Council Districts. Continuing the seven current county districts as zones for Board of Education representation seems illogical and unnecessarily disconnects the county council districts and school districts.

Senator Sydnor testified that he crafted the bill using a framework based on Montgomery County ([Montgomery County BOE](#)) but they only have eight members of the Board of Education, all of whom are elected to represent their 160,000 students compared to twelve Board of Education members for Baltimore County's 110,000 students. HB 1529/SB 656 does not define that countywide voting will replace district specific voting yet multiple public testimony spoke in favor of this change. Rather than adopting this bill, we suggest you consider an alternative that couples the school district and county council boundaries without increasing the size of the Board of Education.

In conclusion, we urge the committee to vote UNFAVORABLE on SB 656/HB 1529. The bill's provisions could fragment the education system and reduce accountability to the people of Baltimore County.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Amy Adams, President BCPASC

Mary A. Taylor, Vice President BCPASC

