

Good afternoon, Chair Attbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and distinguished members of the Ways and Means Committee.

My name is Gavin Falcón, and I am Sophomore at Long Reach High School in Howard County. I am testifying on behalf of Howard County Association of Student Councils or otherwise known HCASC in my position as First Vice-President to request a favorable report of Bill HB0052 - "Your School, Your Voice Act". Our resolution in support of this bill was voted on unanimously by all of HCASC's elected officials among our student member of the board of education.

HCASC is calling on the General Assembly to help ensure us students have a voice in the officials that directly impact us as students. Maryland has always been a state that has promoted its youth being at the forefront of education one of our states greatest prides. However, in our current state, many students are feeling disconnected from our schools with Board of Education members not feeling they need to appeal to us as students. Through simple votes they decided the policies and rules for the entire county's school district. But can we ensure they will accurately take into account the voice of us as students ? The constituents they are supposed to be representing. Without the need to appeal to us as students in elections there is no tangible need for them to do so in the entirety. This can lead to Board members being ill informed when they are voting, voting only accounting for the minority of the groups not considering the student body impact and voice resulting in decisions negatively impacting us more than anyone else.

An example of this in Howard County was with the recent renovations. Dunloggin Middle School objectively was at a greater need for renovations, something agreed upon by every student I have met regardless of schools. Nonetheless because they only need to be respondent to the parents our voices were brushed under the rug. A recurring action harming our educational experience, making it feel as if our voice means nothing, setting a precedent for life for many Howard County Students.

And Some may say we as students do have representation through the Student Member of the Board of Education (SMOB). But we have to understand that they only have 1 vote on a limited number of matters versus an entire Board composed of around 5-6 members. They can simply be outvoted every single time if it comes down to it.

So with this all being said HCASC is in full support of Bill HB52 "Your School, Your Voice Act" and we plead with you all to help ensure our voices are heard and matter too in our schools.