

Good afternoon, members of the committee. My name is Christopher Keane, and I am a leader from the Inaugural Maryland Corps/Service Year Option program and an active community member. I am here today to express my strong support for House Bill 391, which proposes important changes to the election process for members of certain county boards of education in Maryland.

This bill addresses a crucial issue of representation and accountability within our educational system. By requiring that board members representing specific districts be elected solely by the voters residing in those districts, HB 391 ensures that these representatives are directly accountable to the constituents they serve. This fosters a stronger connection between the community and its school board, promoting greater responsiveness and understanding of local needs.

HB 391 recognizes the existing district structures in several counties, aligning school board elections with the established systems used for electing county commissioners. This consistency strengthens the democratic process and empowers voters to choose representatives who are intimately familiar with the unique challenges and opportunities within their specific districts. This localized representation allows for more focused advocacy and ensures that the diverse voices within each district are heard and considered in school board decisions.

The bill's provisions, as outlined for counties like Calvert, Cecil, Garrett, Montgomery, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, and Worcester, demonstrate a thoughtful approach to implementing district-based elections. These provisions acknowledge the

existing county commissioner districts, where applicable, and establish a clear framework for voters to elect representatives from their local communities. The inclusion of at-large positions in some counties further balances localized representation with a broader county-wide perspective.

As someone who has worked as an election judge in Washington County, I have been asked about the school board members and have witnessed voters refrain from voting because they didn't know who their board member was. This experience underscores the importance of engaged and accountable representation. HB 391 takes a significant step toward strengthening that representation within our school boards. It empowers communities to elect individuals who are deeply invested in the success of their local schools and students.

While this bill addresses counties with pre-existing commissioner districts, it also raises an important question for other counties: whether a district-based or county-wide election system best serves their communities. This conversation is essential for ensuring that all Maryland counties have the most effective and representative school board structure.

I believe that having a direct representative from one's community is fundamental to a healthy democracy. HB 391 promotes this principle and will lead to more responsive, informed, and effective school boards. I urge the committee to give HB 391 a favorable recommendation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

