

**Senate Education, Energy & the Environment Committee**

**SB 554 Education Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners - Appointment Process -**

**Alterations**

**Bill Hearing Date: March 11th, 2026**

**Position: Unfavorable**

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Cortly Witherspoon Jr, and I am an 11th grader at Bard High School Early College in Baltimore and also a member of A.S.C.B.C (Associated Student Congress of Baltimore City). I oppose SB 554, which not only removes the requirement that the Mayor meet with community groups when deciding on Board Members, but also requires the Maryland State Senate to approve them.

The Baltimore City School Board is composed of nine appointed and three elected members. Ensuring that stakeholders influence the nine appointed members, who compose three-fourths of the school board, is critically important. Currently, the Mayor must reach out to a community panel, which is composed of many different stakeholder groups such as teachers, students, and parents.

This is an important part of the process, as this is where stakeholders can give their views. [I have seen firsthand how important community voices are in decision-making. When my school, William Pinderhughes, was facing closure, the Sandtown community came together, spoke up, and successfully fought to keep it open. That experience showed me how powerful it is when the people most affected by decisions have a seat at the table.

As a young person who grew up around community activism and advocacy, I know that community members bring perspectives that policymakers may not otherwise see. At a time when many people feel disconnected from government, it is especially important at the local and state levels to make sure people feel heard. Our Constitution begins with “We the People,” reminding us that government exists to serve the people, and their voices should always be part of the conversation. Without these engagement sessions, stakeholder groups may be deprived of a say in who oversees their school system.

Also, subjecting Baltimore City School Board Members to Senate confirmation is not a substitute. No other school district has to go through this sort of regulation from above. There is a major difference between a Mayor being forced to go to his constituents for guidance on school board members, and being forced to go away from his constituents, to the State Senate, for approval on it. This will only take the process further away from the stakeholder groups that are directly affected by school board decisions.

School Districts should fulfill local needs, and stakeholder groups should have a say in their composition. The Mayor should consult stakeholder groups when he appoints a school board member, not the Maryland Senate. Therefore, we request an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 554.

*Thank you for considering my testimony,*

*Cortly Witherspoon Jr*

*[State Legislative District (40) [6672318642/cortlywitherspoon1@gmail.com]*