

Testimony from Commissioner Ashley Esposito
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners
SB0554 Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners - Appointment Process – Alterations
3/11/26 | Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Position: Unfavorable

To the members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee,

My name is Ashley Esposito. I am a resident of Maryland's 40th Legislative District, Baltimore City's first woman elected school board Commissioner, and a parent of a student enrolled in Baltimore City Public Schools. Thank you for allowing me to provide my perspective on Senate Bill 0554.

Before running for election to the Board of School Commissioners, I was an applicant in the appointed process. Through that experience and watching the Community Panel interview applicants over the years, I learned what it takes to serve on a school board and to govern a major urban school district. Watching those interviews and participating in the process also gave Baltimore City residents insight into how candidates are vetted and allowed candidates to speak directly to community members about their qualifications and desire to serve. It is also a strong tool for recruiting future Commissioners.

School board service is important work. In my first year on the board, I logged over 600 hours serving on behalf of Baltimore's students. Commissioners must oversee school policies, budgets, and student outcomes for a school system serving tens of thousands of children and their families. We need to ensure that the candidates who are vetted are vetted by people closest to the work and fully understand the responsibility.

Eliminating the Community Panel deprives the public of an important process for selecting new school board members. Visibility and inclusion of community members in the selection process have built trust between the community and the school district. At a recent school board meeting, community panel members from organizations that serve on the panel testified about the importance of maintaining the community process. They requested that Commissioners voice their personal concerns about this bill. As decisions are being made about changing governance structures, I urge you to hear from the stakeholders who work with, teach, and raise the children who attend Baltimore City Public Schools.

The Community Panel has been one vehicle for engaging Baltimoreans in conversations about school board governance. The Community Panel interview process has allowed educators, community stakeholders, parents, and students to hear from candidates about their qualifications. Those conversations have also given the broader community insight into the issues facing each group that serves on the community panel by listening to the questions they ask each candidate.

I would like to see other elected officials partner with community stakeholders to explore ways to continue to grow community engagement through the community panel process. I would also be remiss if I did not mention the important role Baltimore City students have had in this conversation. Students have been advocating for increased Student Government Association membership and building the capacity of their Student General Assembly.

Students have shown leadership by engaging with the Commissioner selection process, where decisions about their education are being made. Students have provided thoughtful questions and insight into the needs of Baltimore's school children at every cycle of Commissioner selection. As board members work to make decisions about governance and oversight, student voices should be a part of those discussions, especially regarding who serves on the board. They have a very robust election process for their own Student Commissioner, who serves on the board.

Ensuring there are avenues for community and student engagement will continue to build strong systems of governance and help us reach our shared goal of ensuring a bright future for Baltimore's children. I strongly urge the committee to oppose SB 0554 and encourage the sponsors to work with the community to better understand the current process and offer feedback on how our systems can be improved. Thank you for your time and for all you do for Maryland's students.

Commissioner Ashley Esposito
Board of School Commissioners
Baltimore City Public Schools