



## Testimony for the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

### Senate Bill 554 – Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners - Appointment Process - Alterations

UNFAVORABLE

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AMERICAN CIVIL  
LIBERTIES UNION  
OF MARYLAND

FRANK PATINELLA  
SENIOR POLICY  
STRATEGIST

3600 CLIPPER MILL ROAD  
SUITE 200  
BALTIMORE, MD 21211  
T/410-889-8555  
F/410-366-7838

WWW.ACLU-MD.ORG

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS  
COREY STOTTLEMYER  
PRESIDENT

DANA VICKERS SHELLEY  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ANDREW FREEMAN  
GENERAL COUNSEL

The ACLU of Maryland urges an unfavorable report on SB 554, which seeks to alter the current process for vetting and appointing candidates for Baltimore City Public Schools' Board of Commissioners. Currently, the Baltimore City Public School Board Community Panel (Community Panel), comprised of 13 stakeholder organizations, interview applicants for open seats on the board and makes recommendations to the Mayor for appointment. SB 554 would remove the Community Panel from the process and instead require that candidates selected by the Mayor be subject to approval by the Maryland Senate.

**Community and stakeholder voices are indispensable to the process of appointing city school board members.** Due to our representation of the plaintiffs in *Bradford vs Maryland State Board of Education*, the ACLU of Maryland is statutorily designated as a member of the Community Panel.<sup>1</sup> The other 12 panel members include the Baltimore Teachers Union, Mayor's Office, Baltimore City Council Education and Youth Committee, Baltimore City Public School Administrators and Supervisors Association, Maryland Alliance of Maryland Public Charter Schools, Fund for Educational Excellence, PTA Council of Baltimore City, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Associated Student Congress of Baltimore City, Parent Community Advisory Board of the city school system, and Disability Rights Maryland.

These organizations represent broad and diverse constituencies throughout Baltimore City, and most of them are focused on improving educational outcomes and experiences for the most underserved students populations in city schools. Replacing the Community Panel with the Maryland Senate in this process would remove the voices of community members and core

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<sup>1</sup> MD Code, Education, § 3-108.1

stakeholders in the city school system – along with their valuable expertise in areas such as diverse parent and student perspectives, disability rights, race and gender equity, and interest of teachers and other school employees.

The Maryland Senate currently includes only five members who live in Baltimore City, while the remaining 42 senators represent other jurisdictions across the state. While the current appointment process may not be perfect, SB 554 would eliminate the existing community-based mechanism entirely and allow the Mayor to effectively select candidates unilaterally. It is not sound policy to grant confirmation authority to a governmental body in which fewer than 13% of members represent Baltimore City.

Currently, only two members of the board are elected directly by the Baltimore City voters. Of the remaining ten seats, nine are appointed by the Mayor and the student member is elected by the Associated Student Congress of Baltimore City. Many stakeholders believe that the Mayor holds too much influence over the board's composition. SB 554 would further dilute the community input and concentrate even more power in the hands of the Mayor.

Proposals to change the composition of the city school board or policies governing appointments to it warrant a far more thorough public conversation and robust engagement with the communities most affected. Advancing SB 554 without such a process would be premature and irresponsible.

**For the foregoing reasons, the ACLU of Maryland respectfully urges the committee to give SB 554 an unfavorable report.**