



## Testimony for the House Ways and Means Committee

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

#### UNFAVORABLE

April 1, 2026

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 to the Baltimore City Public Schools' Board of Commissioners. Currently, the Baltimore City Public School Board Community Panel (Community Panel), comprised of 13 stakeholder organizations, interviews applicants for open board seats and makes recommendations to the Mayor for appointment. SB 554 would remove the Community Panel from the process and instead, candidates would be unilaterally appointed by the Mayor and subject to approval by the Senate of Maryland. SB 554 represents a step backwards, reversing recent efforts to give the community and education stakeholders more power in choosing school board members that best represent their interests.

**Community and stakeholder voices are indispensable to the process of appointing city school board members.** SB 554 removes the Community Panel from the process of seating city school board members. Due to our representation of the plaintiffs in *Bradford vs Maryland State Board of Education*, the ACLU of Maryland is currently a member of the Community Panel.<sup>1</sup> The other 12 panel members include: 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 vast and diverse constituencies throughout Baltimore City, and most of them are focused on improving educational outcomes and experiences for the most underserved populations in city schools. Supplanting the Community Panel with the Senate of Maryland in

---

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

the process removes the community voice and core stakeholders in the city school system – along with their valuable expertise and knowledge in areas such as diverse parent and student perspectives, disability rights, race and gender equity, and the interests of teachers and other school employees.

**SB 554 diminishes meaningful community input, transparency and accountability.** ACLU of MD supports any effort to improve notification, transparency, and community input. However, SB 554 only gives the illusion of broader community input and accountability. Currently, the Community Panel spends many hours, day after day, tediously and thoroughly vetting and interviewing applicants for the board. The process is live streamed and recorded. The panel then submits a list of top candidates from which the Mayor can appoint. There were over 40 applicants for the board when the panel convened the last time. Panel members disclose any relationships that they have with applicants, and we have made decisions to recuse certain panelists when we determined that there was a conflict of interest. We remove politics and cronyism from the process – our only consideration is the qualifications of the candidates and how well they will serve the students and family of Baltimore City Public Schools.

SB 554 removes the Community Panel and instead, requires the Mayor to hold one citywide hearing and notify hundreds of community organizations and service providers to attend and provide input on what will likely be only a few candidates selected by the Mayor. And SB 554 gives the Mayor unilateral power to select school board members and gives the the Maryland Senate the power to approve the appointment – there is no requirement that the Mayor select the candidate who receives the most community support.

The Maryland Senate currently has only five representatives who live in the city and the remaining 42 senators represent other counties in Maryland. It is not good policy to give confirmation power to a governmental body of which less than 13% of its members represent Baltimore City.

Currently, only two members of the board are elected by the voters of Baltimore City. Of the remaining 10 board seats, 9 are appointed by the Mayor – chosen from a list of candidates interviewed by the Community Panel – and the student member is elected by the Associated Student Congress of Baltimore City. SB 554 would further dilute the community voice and concentrate even more power in the hands of the Mayor.

**Proposals to change the composition of the city school board or the policy governing the appointments of its members deserve a much more thorough conversation and robust engagement with the affected community.** There are many different opinions among education stakeholders and the broader community regarding how to structure the city

school board and appoint its members. Some people favor a fully elected board. Others believe that the Community Panel should expand its membership to fill gaps in expertise and representation – and some believe that the panel should be able to directly appoint a certain number of board commissioners. And there are other opinions about establishing a hybrid board to include the aforementioned ideas – including giving the Mayor a certain number of appointments. **Among all of these ideas, one this is clear – passing SB 554 in this moment is premature and negligent.**

**For the foregoing reasons, we ask the committee to give SB 554 an unfavorable report.**