



Testimony in Support of HB1140

League of Women Voters of Baltimore County

This letter is in support of HB1140.

This legislation increases the elected members of the Baltimore County Board of Education to nine and aligns the education districts with the newly created nine Councilmanic districts. Additionally, it reduces from four to two the number of gubernatorial appointments by the Nominating Commission and retains the student Board member.

The League of Women Voters Baltimore County was instrumental in advocating for the passage of the hybrid school board bill in 2014. This is an issue in which the League has a long history of supporting greater democratic access and expanded diversity on the Board of Education.

We support this legislation because it increases the number of elected Board of Education Members. By increasing elected representation on the Board, residents are able to hold Board of Education members more accountable. Moreover, through an election process voters gain greater control of the democratic process. Elected representation is a more democratic and transparent path to diversity than appointment through a nominating commission.

By aligning the education districts with councilmanic districts, voter confusion regarding geographic boundaries is lessened. Moreover, it provides routine collaboration between Council members and their corresponding Board of Education member. It allows for conflicts to be resolved more efficiently. Also, it provides opportunities for joint advocacy, particularly for capital funding, transportation and school construction.

The expansion of the County Council to nine districts is an important tool in increasing direct representation and racial equity. This step should be extended to the Baltimore County School Board in an effort to avoid voter disengagement and governance fragmentation.

Also, the League promotes transparent and accountable redistricting processes. We believe the responsibility for fair redistricting should be vested in an independent special commission. The Baltimore County charter requires the County Council to initiate the redistricting process by establishing a commission to hold public hearings and recommend to the County Council legislation for revising the councilmanic election districts.

This bill provides a logical and democratic path forward for greater voter engagement and better governance of the Baltimore County Board of Education. We ask the delegation vote favorably on HB1140.

In League,

Ramona Johnson

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Baltimore County