

RE: Support for HB 586 – Education – Local Library Boards of Trustees – Student Members

Dear Chair Wilkins and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

While I am the Student Member of the State Board of Education, my comments today are not offered on behalf of the Board. I am writing to express my strong support for **HB 586**, which authorizes the selection of student members for local Library Boards of Trustees. As the **Student Member of the Maryland State Board of Education (SMOB)**, I have seen firsthand the immense value that youth perspective brings to high-level governance.

My role on the State Board allows me to vote on all policies and regulations that come before us. This responsibility is not a symbolic gesture; it is a recognition of the fact that students are the primary stakeholders in our educational system. Similarly, in jurisdictions like Anne Arundel County, the Student Board Member holds even broader authority, voting on sensitive matters such as personnel and board appeals. These established roles serve as a proven "proof of concept" that Maryland students possess the competence, professional maturity, and dedication required to govern effectively.

By passing **HB 586**, you will provide a similar platform for youth in our library systems. This legislation will:

- **Boost Youth Engagement:** Representation is a powerful catalyst for engagement. When students see a peer in a leadership role, they view the library not just as a quiet building for books, but as a dynamic civic institution that values their input.
- **Leverage Student Competence:** As evidenced by the success of SMOBs across the state, students are capable of navigating complex policy issues. Our libraries—centers of information and technology—would benefit immensely from the "digital native" perspective that only a student can provide.
- **Modernize Governance:** Local libraries are essential for workforce development and lifelong learning. Including a student member ensures that library boards stay responsive to the needs of the next generation of Maryland's workforce.

Maryland has long been a national leader in youth civic empowerment. HB 586 is a natural extension of our state's commitment to ensuring that those who are most affected by public policy have a seat at the table where those policies are made.

I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a **favorable report** on **HB 586**. Thank you for your continued support of Maryland's student leaders.

Sincerely,

O'Marie Barnes

Student Member, Maryland State Board of Education