

March 30, 2026

Del. Jheanelle K. Wilkins
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Letter of Opposition to SB0554, Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners - Appointment Process - Alterations

As a teacher in Baltimore City Schools, a Baltimore City Schools parent (class of 2026!), and an active member of the Baltimore Teachers Union, I write to respectfully but urgently request the committee to reject SB 554, Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners - Appointment Process - Alterations.

Teachers, parents, and community advocates have been pushing for years to expand community involvement in the selection of Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners members. In 2023, we welcomed the first elected members of the Board. Since then, many of us have advocated for increasing the number of elected positions, and the powers of the student representative. This legislation would take us in the opposite direction by removing a crucial way in which the people of Baltimore - including families, teachers, and students - can play a role in the selection of the district's leadership. I teach American Government and I can report that already too many of my students feel that their voices do not matter as youth, and will not matter when they are old enough to vote, in part because they see so many ways in which systems seem to limit the input of citizens, especially in Baltimore. As a result, many express disinterest in voting, or even learning about political systems. It is hard enough to combat this attitude without the General Assembly taking significant control of the schools away from Baltimore and putting it in the hands of Annapolis and an - let us say, "eclectic" - assortment of private organizations, some of which are not even based in Baltimore City.

Baltimore City is unfortunately unique in Maryland in that we are the *only* jurisdiction where a supermajority of the school board is appointed rather than elected, and where board members serve as volunteers. The Community Panel that currently makes recommendations to the Mayor regarding appointed members at least serves to mitigate the undemocratic nature of our school board, by including members that represent the voices of teachers and paraprofessionals, parents, disabled students, and student government. Senator Hayes' bill would remove those voices from the process, giving a much weaker role to (with Senator Ferguson's amendment) a wide variety of groups that dilute the voice of Baltimore City constituencies.

Sen. Hayes has defended the changes in his bill by pointing out that the majority of Baltimore City's funding comes from the state, with the implication that this gives Annapolis the right to control Baltimore City Schools in the interests of the state as a whole, even if that is not what people in the City need or want. But there are at least two problems with this argument. First, Baltimore is far from unique in getting the majority of its funding from the state - Allegany,

Caroline, Somerset, and Wicomico county all receive a larger share of their funding from the state than Baltimore does (and Baltimore City is just one of 13 districts that get more than 50% of their funding from the state). Second, this argument frames state assistance to Baltimore City schools as a kind of charity that should come with a right to determine whether or not the funds are being spent in the way our generous benefactors see fit. It is not charity. The funding that comes to Baltimore City schools (and other jurisdictions) is a way of addressing both historical and persisting racial, social, and economic inequities that burden schools in poorer districts. Trust me, as a teacher and parent, I am not always completely satisfied with the way that the Baltimore City School System runs things and spends money! But the way to address those concerns is to increase the opportunities for people in Baltimore City to have meaningful input into the leadership of our school system, not to reduce them in favor of increasing the power of our (already unusually strong) Mayor, and subjecting that power to the desires of Senators from across Maryland rather than the will of the people of the City.

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