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**Senate Bill 554 – Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners - Appointment Process -
Alterations
Ways and Means Committee
April 1, 2026, 1:00pm**

UNFAVORABLE

On behalf of the Baltimore Teachers Union, I respectfully urge you to issue an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 554, which would eliminate the existing Community Panel responsible for recommending nominees for our local Board of School Commissioners and instead vest that responsibility in the State Senate.

For years, the Community Panel has reflected a deliberate and hard-won commitment to inclusive governance. It includes representatives of labor, students, parents, civil rights advocates, community organizations, charter school advocates, and disability rights leaders — including participation from the American Civil Liberties Union. That breadth of representation is intentional and it is foundational to ensuring that the Board of School Commissioners reflects the diversity, lived experience, and educational expertise of the communities it serves.

This bill replaces that broad-based, subject-matter-informed body with the State Senate — a legislative body whose members, while deeply experienced in public policy, are not selected for nor required to possess specialized expertise in public education governance, special education compliance, civil rights enforcement, or the operational realities of urban school systems. Selecting school board commissioners requires a nuanced understanding of federal special education law, Title IX compliance, collective bargaining, student discipline reform, charter oversight, and the day-to-day challenges facing classrooms. The existing Community Panel was structured specifically to ensure that these perspectives are present at the table.

It is particularly concerning that this legislation removes the formal involvement of civil rights and disability advocates at a time when their presence is not only appropriate, but essential. Our district has previously faced costly corrective action stemming from special education and civil rights litigation. The inclusion of disability advocates and the ACLU on the Community Panel was not symbolic, it reflected a recognition that oversight and accountability must include those who have historically had to litigate for students' rights. Removing those voices risks repeating past mistakes and undermines public confidence that the district will meet its legal and moral obligations to students with disabilities and students whose civil rights have too often been compromised.

The elimination of labor and parent representation similarly sends a troubling message. Educators and families are not special interests — they are primary stakeholders. They are the individuals most directly

affected by the decisions of the Board of School Commissioners. A governance structure that sidelines us diminishes democratic participation and weakens the legitimacy of board appointments.

We are also concerned about the process by which this legislation has advanced. Stakeholders who have participated in and relied upon the Community Panel process were not notified in advance that this bill would be introduced or voted upon. The absence of meaningful stakeholder engagement in crafting legislation that fundamentally alters governance undermines the very transparency and accountability principles that the Board of School Commissioners is meant to uphold. Good governance reform should model the openness it seeks to promote.

Additionally, this proposal shifts authority away from a balanced, community-centered process toward a purely political one. While the Senate plays an indispensable constitutional role in our state government, concentrating appointment recommendation authority in a single legislative chamber risks politicizing a process that has benefited from diverse, nonpartisan community input.

Finally, as a history teacher, I'd like to provide some historical context. When this language was added in 2017, with then Delegate, now Senator Hayes as the lead sponsor, it was introduced as a City Administration bill and enjoyed broad support from the delegation. At a time when the City is taking its assets back from state control, including the Baltimore Police Department, it's disappointing that the Senate wants to take us farther from local control.

For these reasons — the loss of subject matter expertise, the exclusion of civil rights and disability advocates, the devaluation of community voices, and the troubling procedural path this bill has taken — we respectfully ask this Committee to issue an unfavorable report on SB554.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.