

**Testimony from Natalia Bacchus Baltimore Teachers Union Staff, District 43  
Resident**

**SB554 - Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners – Appointment Process -  
Alterations**

**Before the House Ways and Means Committee 4/1/26**

**Position: UNFAVORABLE**

Good afternoon members of the House Ways and Means Committee, My name is Natalia Bacchus. I'm a District 43 resident and staff at the Baltimore Teachers Union.

I'm writing to urge this committee to hold no vote or issue an unfavorable report on SB554, which would alter the Baltimore City School Board appointment process by eliminating the community panel. This legislation would reverse one of the few opportunities Baltimore City has to exercise local democratic control over its school board members. Up until 2022 Baltimore City was the only jurisdiction in Maryland whose entire school board was unelected/appointed. Even though we've added two elected seats out of 11 total, 19 other Maryland jurisdictions have fully elected boards, and the other four hybrid boards all have a majority of their seats elected.

We at the Baltimore Teachers Union believe this glaring difference is a vestige of white supremacy that says self-governance and democratic structures that empower citizens to choose their own representatives is a right that Baltimore City can't be trusted with. SB554 is in line with this paternalistic tradition of the state saying local decision making is fine for everywhere in MD except Baltimore City.

The community panel leverages the expertise of the content area experts in education and the directly impacted staff, students, and families to ensure that candidates for the school board possess the necessary skills and qualifications to serve our students. Keep in mind a lack of special education law expertise from school board members appointed by the state before the community panel was added led to City Schools being rightfully sued.

The community panel screens applications for appointed board seats, conducts interviews that are subject to the Open Meetings Act and are accessible to the public, and recommends to the Mayor a shortlist of qualified candidates to choose from. SB554 trades the expertise of

- The Baltimore Teachers Union;
- The Mayor's Office;

- The Baltimore City Council Education and Youth Committee;
- The Baltimore City Public School Administrators and Supervisors Association;
- The Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools;
- The Downtown Baltimore Family Alliance;
- The Fund for Educational Excellence;
- the PTA Council of Baltimore City;
- The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME);
- The Associated Student Congress of Baltimore City;
- The American Civil Liberties Union;
- The Parent and Community Advisory Board; and
- Disability Rights Maryland

for State Senators across all of Maryland, the majority of whom are not Baltimore City residents and who lack content specific education knowledge and the skin in the game which the current panelists have. It is a step backwards, removing the small slice of local control Baltimore City has over its own school system, despite already having the least amount of local control in the entire state.

This legislation is an insult to the hardworking people of Baltimore City Public Schools. None of its representative organizations were consulted prior to the bill's crafting, nor were they even notified that it was being heard in the City's Senate delegation so that we could speak against it. The lack of transparency and democracy in the bill's process alone should be disqualifying, in addition to the paternalistic content that trades hard won expertise for a game of statewide political trading.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to hold no vote or issue an unfavorable report on SB554. Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Natalia Bacchus

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