

Chair of Ways & Means,

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to add my testimony in **support of HB 1422**, an act that establishes minimum state wide standards to ensure transparency and accountability when local school boards education vote to begin a local school redistricting process or vote to change local school catchment areas.

I am a parent of three children currently being educated in the public school system in Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system since 2014. Prior to moving to Montgomery County, my family resided in Calvert County and Saint Mary's County in Maryland where my children also attended local public schools. I am providing testimony today because I am very concerned that parents who often do not have the time to fully participate in local politics or do not have direct access to local representatives are being placed at a severe disadvantage during highly politicized redistricting processes approved by local school boards.

In the United States of America, education of children has and always will remain a primary responsibility of the local government. In particular, the determination of the eligibility of a particular student to attend a particular school will always remain a local decision subject to local priorities. In addition, decisions on exceptions to policy for students to attend schools that they are not assigned to will always be a local decision based on availability of local resources. As an immigrant, my family has always appreciated the opportunities provided by the local public schools supported by the local communities instead of by narrow political interests. I believe that my children have equal access to opportunity specifically because the local government engages in a fair and equitable process to allocate appropriate resources to help all children succeed.

However, in the last few years, something as simple as changing school catchment areas (assigned school boundaries) have become overly politicized even if they are undertaken to account for the dynamic nature of local population growth and shifts. A majority of this politicization is due to "astroturfing" campaigns supported by and financed by organizations that have no ties to the local community. These sponsors of these organizations are masked by layers of political action committees and non-profits to make it appear as their positions originate from and are supported by local grassroots participants. These "astroturfing" organizations have effectively hijacked local conversations about local schools and have overwhelmed the local school boards ability to make well-reasoned decisions impacting the local community.

Therefore, I believe that HB 1422 has some common sense solutions to ensure that our local democracy is not hijacked by organizations and groups from outside the local communities that will be directly affected by any changes to local school district boundaries. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide my input in **support of HB 1422**.