

March 4, 2020

Ways and Means Committee Hearing

House Bill 1422 Public Schools - Redistricting - Community Advisory Committees for Student Assignment

Testimony from Janelle Wong (5410 Duvall Dr. Bethesda, MD)

I submit this testimony as a state resident and parent of two children who attend public schools in Montgomery County.

First, let me express my gratitude for the time and energy Delegates Qi and Fraser-Hidalgo have devoted to public service in the state of Maryland.

HB 1422 seeks to mandate a community advisory committee for student assignment during the school redistricting process. The community advisory committee would review and provide input on any redistricting proposals being considered by the county board.

I wish to raise two concerns about this legislation. The first is related to equity. Research by scholars of local governance suggests that parents who are *socioeconomically advantaged* will have an outsized role on these boards and that they will not work for access, but instead pour their energies into making schools more "selective" and less socioeconomically and racially diverse.¹ The result will be that the students who would benefit most from attending high-performing schools will be further restricted through the input of the advisory board members on the districting process. Unfortunately, one unintended, but very common outcome of these types of advisory commissions is that they stack the deck *against* equity. A bill like this should include stronger safeguards against this kind of deck-stacking. For example, Fung (2015) argues that self-selection or appointment by members of the governing body, who rely on their social networks, to a community advisory board may simply further the advantages of the most advantaged members of a community.

Although the stated goal of this bill is to facilitate transparency, it is unclear how a board made-up of a handful of stakeholders will improve transparency. As a parent, I see the board as an additional and perhaps unnecessary layer of bureaucracy. The process for selecting the board members is not clear, nor is it apparent how concentrating power with a small set of parents and teachers on a community advisory commission will help with the dissemination of information or amplify the views of the much broader community beyond the advisory board members.

Thank you for considering these concerns. Again, I appreciate the public service of the bill sponsors.

¹ Fung, Archon. "Putting the public back into governance: The challenges of citizen participation and its future." *Public Administration Review* 75, no. 4 (2015): 513-522. Rigney, Daniel. *The Matthew effect: How advantage begets further advantage*. Columbia University Press, 2010.