

Senate Bill 382, Harford County – Board of Education – Terms of Appointed Members

Testimony submitted by - Jeanne Smith 404 Chadford Ct Bel Air, MD 21014, opposed to this bill.

I am speaking today in opposition of SB 382, this bill has been changed significantly from the HB 283, which was introduced in the house. The HB's intent was to rotate terms of the Harford County School Board, so the board would not consist of all new members at once, I support the original HB 283 presented by Delegate Reilly.

The senate version has added an amendment that Harford county school board members have 6 elected positions and 3 appointed by the county executive with the county council approving of these appointments. Currently, the Harford County school board has 6 elected members and 3 appointed by the Governor. It would seem the change would be a good thing, since as Senator Gallion has stated in his meeting with Harford County delegates, it brings the decision closer to home. Unfortunately, I have seen over the past 3 years of attending, watching, and speaking at county council meetings, the majority of county council members vote with the county executive, even when the public voices opposition. The council has been a rubber stamp of what the county executive puts forward and I don't see this changing in the future. The County executive in Harford County has enough power as is.

Now, to give him or her additional power to appoint 3 Board of Education members, is like the fox watching the chicken coop. As voiced by one our delegates, who was concerned about the senate bill stated, "Giving the county executive so much power, since about 50% of the executive budget goes toward county schools and those two entities often butt heads on funding. Those three votes on the Board of Education are automatically his."

Furthermore, it would take a super majority of 5 of the 7 council members to veto any candidates put forward by the county executive, which just doesn't happen in Harford County. In fact, when you Goggle Harford County Council vetoes county executive, the only reference that comes up is, a veto that dates back to 2014. The county executive gets what he wants, this bill will give him or her even more power by having a say on the school board.

Please, do not vote for this bill, these changes are being push through to appease a group of Harford County parents who are not happy with the Board of Education's decision regarding schools not fully reopening during the pandemic.

Any changes in how Harford County School Board Members are elected or appointed needs to go through adequate discussion and meetings with the community. This has not been done, the last time extensive public input was sought for on how school board members are selected was in 2009.

Thank you!