

Harford County Caucus of African-American Leaders

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March 1, 2021

VIA-EMAIL

Re: SB 382 / HB 283

Dear Senator Paul G. Pinsky:

I write this letter as President of the Harford County Caucus of African-American Leaders. As an organization, we are opposed to SB 382 as amended. Also, as a former Board of Education (BOE) member, I can predict this legislation will have severe unintended consequences, if adopted.

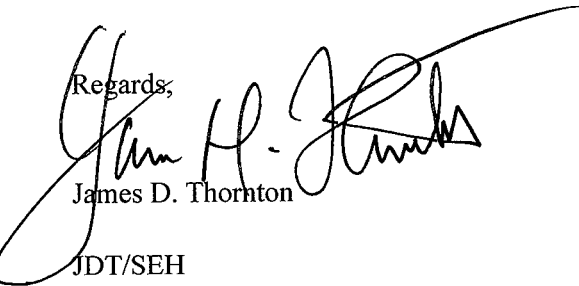
First, the appointment process will become unnecessarily politicized. There will be too much control by the County Executive in the affairs of Harford County Public Schools. The BOE is a quasi-state body for a good reason. Local school systems have been considered by both Maryland Court of Appeals and Maryland Federal District, in a number of cases, to be state agencies. There is a clear line today, County Government provides the funding, and the BOE is responsible for ensuring state educational policies are implemented. As I recall, there are only a couple of jurisdictions that have granted the County Executive/Mayor the powers being contemplated with this amendment. They were districts with severe management problems over many years.

As I think back to several years ago, I am reminded of the contention that existed at the time about whether a new school should be built in Havre de Grace. To have had a BOE that had three members (1/3) appointed by the County Executive could have tainted their decision-making abilities. The decision to build a new school should be based on what is right for the students, community, and taxpayers, not purely to accommodate the preference of the County Executive. I would think BOE members should not be subjected that type of pressure. This is just one of the many types of decisions the BOE is confronted with as a governing body as it does its work.

In addition, over the years, Harford County's County Executives have demonstrated varying level of commitment to ensure that Boards and Commissions reflect a commitment to diversity and inclusion. This proposed legislation is a potential risk in eliminating a diverse board based, with the County Executive failing to take into consideration potential candidates: ethnicity, gender, and political ideology.

In closing, we respectfully request this bill be tabled this session to allow for quality community input.

Regards,


James D. Thornton

JDT/SEH

"The only thing that is more expensive than education is ignorance." Ben Franklin