

**Testimony from Drake Smith, Former Student Member of the Anne
Arundel County Board of Education, District 32 Resident
HB433 - Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners – Alterations
Before the House Ways & Means Committee
2/10/22
Position: Favorable**

Good morning members of the Ways & Means Committee,

My name is Drake Smith and I am a District 32 resident from Odenton, Maryland in the northwestern part of Anne Arundel County. I am currently a freshman political science major enrolled at Lincoln University of Pennsylvania. Last year during my senior year of high school I served as the 47th Student Member (aka SMOB) of the Anne Arundel County Board of Education and I had full voting rights.

I am here to respectfully urge the committee to report favorably on HB 433. I believe that Delegate Wells' bill is one that truly puts the students of Baltimore City first.

My firsthand experience on the Anne Arundel County Board of Education is built on the foundation of nearly half a century of student members who have served with full voting rights since 1975.

HB 433 increases the number of student members on the board from one to two and grants both student members full voting rights. Last year myself and my fellow student members from around that state in a letter defended student board member voting rights by stating, "It is not enough for the Student Member to just be given a representative opinion. The Student Member should be allowed a vote at all times, not only when it is convenient. Their voice is vital to having a school system that is responsive to its students, and furthermore, their vote is important in ensuring the school system takes the opinions of students seriously. Not only does a voting student member provide relevant information based on the lived experiences of themselves and fellow students, but they solidify the board's responsibility to listen to students." Since I had full voting rights like my adult colleagues, I'm confident that my student peers were more engaged because they understood that my input and actions on their behalf were respected and mattered.

During my tenure I had to do a lot of myth busting when others raised concerns about a student board member's capability to vote and deliberate on all matters. One myth I hear a lot is that student board members cannot understand complex topics like budgets, legal items, and personnel issues. However, I believe that understanding these topics is confusing for any new board member. After all there are no real set qualifications to become a board member other than age and residency. And that's the beauty of our democracy that anyone can do it, advanced degree not required. But

whenever I needed to learn something new, I would do my research, review the facts, ask questions, and consult board staff to clarify anything. On budgets, students are best equipped to assess whether line items are positively impacting student well-being and achievement due to their firsthand experience in the classroom. When working on the budget for the next fiscal year I would often reflect on my experiences as a student to advocate for classroom funding and make my votes accordingly. If personnel issues came up we would review them in closed session before the public meeting. If I or another board member recognized one of the parties involved, we would notify board legal counsel about our relationship and adhere to the recusal policy if counsel determined there was a conflict of interest.^{1,2}

Giving the students of Baltimore City two student members with a full vote also ensures that the board hears two student perspectives instead of just one. If I had another student member serving with me, I would have been better equipped to engage the students of Anne Arundel County. I've also observed similar benefits from my counterparts in Caroline, Dorchester, Talbot and Queen Anne's counties where two student members serve at the same time.³

And if every Baltimore City student from grades 6-12 can vote in the SMOB election they will see firsthand just how important voting and civic engagement is years before they turn 18. Implementation examples exist in Howard and Montgomery counties where students in grades 6-12 can vote.^{4,5} Let me paint you a picture of a little 6th grader sitting in class. She really hasn't found her niche in school. She doesn't play a sport, she's not a part of any clubs, she really just goes to school and goes back home. Her soul is missing a passion and she doesn't know what it is. Until one day her teacher informs her of the upcoming SMOB election and how to access the candidates campaign information. She goes home that night and does her research and a fire is lit within her. She decides to run for her own school's SGA. She then joins the regional SGA. She joins a future SMOB candidates campaign team. And then in her senior year of high school her name is on the ballot. And win or lose the experiences she gained will set her apart from other students when she goes off to college and continue to drive her beyond. This can be the beginning of creating a new generation of civically engaged citizens. This bill will reach those students out in the weeds. And it is you, in this committee, who have a chance and a choice to make this a reality for Charm City.

Before I close, I'd like to emphasize why it's so important that HB 433 establishes a commission to study compensation for school board members. I spent about 28 hours per week carrying out my duties for the school board on top of my class work. Being a Student Member changed my life and opened so many doors for me. I earned an \$8,000 scholarship for my service and because of it I will not have to pay any out of pocket expenses for my collegiate education this academic year.⁶ In the 22 counties that compensate board members, this MSDE approved line item accounts for a small fraction of a district's overall budget.⁷ For example, in fiscal year 2022 the Anne Arundel

board compensation was \$59,000 or 0.004% of the total \$1.3 billion budget.⁸ Given the time commitment and sacrifice it takes for board members to serve effectively, compensation is a reasonable expectation.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB 433.

Sincerely,

Drake Smith
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References

1. Board of Education Handbook, The Board of Education of Anne Arundel County, Rules of Order (pg. 24 of 28): "In the event there is a disqualification or recusal of one or more Members because of a real or perceived conflict of interest, and the disqualification or recusal results in less than a quorum, the disqualified or recused. Member(s) shall disclose the nature/circumstances of the conflict and may subsequently participate if necessary for the Board to take action on the item."
<https://www.aacps.org/cms/lib/MD02215556/Centricity/Domain/157/BOEHandbook-12.17.pdf>
2. AACPS BOE Policy BAF - Ethics and Conflict of Interest (pg. 6-7 of 22 Part 2. Prohibited Conduct and Interests, 1. Participation)
<https://aacpschools.org/boardpolicies/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2020/12/FINAL-BAF-Ethics-and-Conflict-of-Interest-2019.pdf>
3. Maryland Association of Student Councils - SMOB Spectrum Chart
<https://mdstudentcouncils.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SMOBSpectrumChart.pdf>
4. Howard County Public Schools Board Policy 2010 - Student Representation
<https://policy.hcps.org/2000/2010/>
5. Montgomery County Board of Education Student Member of the Board (SMOB)
<https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/student-leadership/smob/>
6. §3–2A–07 Education Article, Anne Arundel Board of Education, Compensation
<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Laws/StatuteText?article=ged§ion=3-2A-07&enactments=False&archived=False>
7. Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Financial Reporting Manual for Maryland Public Schools. See pgs. 59 of 174: Expenditure Account Definitions, Category 201 - Administration, 20121 General Support Services - Board of Education Services
<https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DBS/FinancialReportingManual/FinancialReportingManual2014.pdf>
8. AACPS FY 2022 Budget - Board of Education (pg. 54):
FY22 Total Board Member Compensation → \$59K = \$10K Pres + \$9K VP + (\$8K x 5 Adult Members) + (\$8K Scholarship x 1 student member)
Board Member Compensation as a Percentage of Total FY22 Budget
($\$59K / \$1,367,218,894$) X 100 = 0.004%
<https://www.aacps.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=5310&dataid=88452&FileName=FY22%20Approved%20Budget%20Book%20Web%20Version.pdf>