

**Written Testimony of Melissa Schober, Disability Rights Maryland Appointee to the Parent and
Community Advisory Board, District 43 Resident
HB433 - Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners – Alterations
Before the House Ways and Means Committee
Position: Favorable**

Good morning members of the House Ways and Means Committee.

My name is Melissa Schober and I'm a District 43 resident. I support HB433 to increase the amount of student members of the Baltimore City Schools Board of Commissioners from one to two, to give those student members full voting rights and the ability to participate in closed/executive sessions, to alter the process by which those students are chosen to be more democratic, and to establish a commission to research and make recommendations of board member compensation.

“The success of our schools can't be measured only by proficiency on statewide tests and increases in graduation rates. We must think in terms of the skills and dispositions we foster, the quality and depth of experiences we provide, **the opportunities we create for our young people to discover their voices and develop their agency** [emphasis added].”

Those are the words of current Baltimore City Schools CEO Santelises, printed on the first page of [*Building A Generation: City Schools' Blueprint for Success*](#). If Baltimore City School leaders truly believe those words – if they are to be more than pleasant rhetoric – then they too should have unreserved support for a bill that furthers the inclusion of student self-determination.

As consumers and recipients of education, students are well-positioned to offer unique perspectives on school governance. Under the current statute, those perspectives may be offered but ultimately have no formal bearing on decisions related to personnel; capital and operated budgets; school closings, re-openings, and boundaries; collective bargaining; student disciplinary matters; and appeals to the Board – all matters upon which the student is prohibited from voting on.

Further democratizing school governance, as Anne Arundel and Montgomery Counties have already done, increases formal student voice and clearly demonstrates that their school system believes they are valuable members of their education community. That buy-in and ownership is critical to foster a healthy school climate – one of the measures included in Maryland's ESSA plan. Student perspective and ground truth should be valued, not just as opinion but in formal governance. At present, only high schools students with an active Student Government Association are able to cast votes for the student member of the board (SMOB).

HB433 would also create a commission to study the compensation for school board members. Were the commission to recommend compensation, we would simply be falling in line with 22 of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions and recognizing the labor of the school board. And make no mistake, service is very real work: a [2010 survey](#) of 900 board members from 418 different districts nationwide found that almost 40% of board members in districts with at least 15,000 students reported working more than 40 hours per month, or more than 10 hours per week. The expectation that individuals do this critical work for free limits who serves on the Baltimore City School Board. If we desire a Board that reflects the community it serves, we must be frank about what limitations a volunteer, uncompensated position imposes in a city where [one in five residents lives at or below the federal poverty line](#).

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB433. Thank you.