

Dear Members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Organizing Black. I am a resident of District 41 in the Roland Park neighborhood of Baltimore City. **I am testifying in support of House Bill 433.**



HB 433 makes changes to policies on student members of the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners, adding an additional student member, removing restrictions on matters the student member(s) can vote on and on which meetings student member(s) can attend, and ensures broader representation by further democratizing the method by which student member(s) of the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners are chosen. Additionally, it enacts the Task Force to Study Compensation for the Baltimore City School Board of Commissioners.

Giving student Board members less of a vote than adults, as is current policy, tells students that their voices do not matter. That is not the message our students should be receiving from their School Board. Student commissioners must have equitable voting power, as students themselves are the ones most impacted by decisions made by the Board. In other Maryland jurisdictions, student Board members have equal voting rights. Enfranchising all Baltimore City's students to pick their representatives through direct democracy will ensure the selected student commissioners best represent actual student interests. In addition to granting students full voting power, adding another student Board member lessens the impact of a single "tokenized" student voter who (currently) is given the impossible task of accurately representing the multitude of student voices in Baltimore City.

In addition, Baltimore City is one of only two jurisdictions in Maryland that does not compensate school board commissioners. Lack of compensation fuels inequity, because all too often, only commissioners with who can afford to volunteer for what is, in essence, a part-timed, unpaid position – those with flexible schedules and higher incomes can participate. Thus, lack of compensation puts low-income students at an unfair disadvantage. This bill addresses the current inequality in the makeup of Baltimore City School Board of Commissioners by providing compensation to Board members so that economic status will no longer be a determining factor in a community's ability to participate in School Board decision making.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to **vote in support of House Bill 433.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah Johnson
1 Merryman Court
Baltimore, MD 21210
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore