

To: The Ways and Means Committee,

This is a written testimony for an UNFAVORABLE opinion of HB 192 Baltimore County Board of Education-Student Member-Voting

History of Student Member of the Board of Education (SMOB) Elections in BCPS:

- 2021 marked the second year of holding a county-wide election. From 2016 to 2019, the SMOB was elected by a special BCSC convention open to student leaders. Before 2016, a committee of BCPS staff and students convened to choose the SMOB. Undoubtedly, the step towards a county-wide election for students in grades 6-12 is an admirable step towards student leadership. This should continue.
- Only 2,914 middle and high school students voted in the 2021 election.
- According to data obtained through the Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA), there were a total of 59,325 middle and high school students in BCPS in the 2020-2021 school year.
- Thus, only 5.34% of eligible student voters participated in the election.
- The 2020 race was between three students, while the 2021 election featured two students. The difference in circumstances due to the pandemic also cannot be ignored, however, the discrepancy between the vote totals is significant.
- 8,072 students cast votes in 2020, nearly three times more than in 2021. While neither number should be applauded, there is a significant difference.

Reasons Against more SMOB rights

- Age-People under the age of 18 do not have the right to vote. Also, with advanced age comes life experience that provides more multifaceted insight and wisdom when making decisions.
- Representation-the majority of secondary students do not vote in the SMOB election, it is not widely advertised at all schools in the same manner. Only 5.34% of secondary BCPS students voted in the 2021 SMOB election.
- Influence-children look up to adults, especially adults in position of power. With experience and maturity, an individual is more likely to be resistant to the influence of others.
- Length of service-SMOB only serves on the BOE for 1 year and is also a full-time student. Learning the details of a complicated \$2+ billion budget often takes more than 1 full year to completely understand.

We agree that students who are motivated to run for the position of SMOB are highly intelligent and driven individuals.

We agree that the student voice is very important.

However, the current BCPS SMOB is very open about his political ambition which is admirable but hardly non-partisan. With only 5.34% of secondary students voting for Mr. Thomas in the 2021 election, it cannot be assumed that he represents the majority of students and issues related to students.

We would also like to note that the BCPS Board of Education at their December 21, 2021 meeting voted NOT to include increased SMOB voting rights to the Legislative Priorities 2022. Three of the twelve members were in favor of adding SMOB voting rights to the Legislative Priorities of 2022. We ask you to respect the decision made by the majority of the BCPS Board of Education members.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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