

**Testimony from Blanca Rosalez, Baltimore City College student, SOMOS Student Organizer and Baltimore resident**

**HB153 - Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners – Student Members and Task Force to Study Compensation and Student Members**

**Before the HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE**

**02/01/2023**

**Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Good afternoon members of The House Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Blanca Rosalez. I'm a Baltimore City College student as well as a SOMOS student organizer and I'm a Baltimore resident. I support HB153 to give student members of the board expanded voting rights, 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 on board member compensation and adding a second student member of the board. As a student myself, I believe that passing this bill is incredibly important, coming back from a pandemic has not been easy at all, but there has not been any option but to keep moving forward, however that doesn't mean that everything is now fixed, there is a huge problem with students' mental health, it is not being prioritized, as a SOMOS student organizer I've learned about many schools who don't have enough resources such as counselors and psychologists. During January 2021 students and teachers were being asked to return to their normal classes in the middle of a pandemic, without the minimum resources a school should provide such as a nurse during all school hours, SOMOS organized a student strike for the school board to agree to our demands, later on in December 2021 a petition was made to return to virtual learning due to the increased amount of Covid cases around schools, 1,601 signatures were made yet nothing was done. There is also a huge issue about our school safety and nothing is being done, outsiders can access school zones and shoot students. After these tragic events, students are asked to go back to school as usual after two days, it has become so normalized that no one talks about it. It is not safe anymore, students are being asked to keep going to school and yet nothing is being done to ensure student safety around our schools, a testimony from another City College student, as well as a SOMOS organizer, said "student representatives would give valuable insight and feedback on how certain decisions would affect students. Many decisions seem to be made without accounting for how students would be affected or how they would respond." And this is why I believe this bill is so important, there is no one better to represent students other than themselves and we have said this over and over again, all students should have a say in what goes on in our education system.

Finally I'd like to emphasize as an organizational member of the VOTES (Voices Towards and Elected School Board) Coalition, this bill is already a significant compromise. We met with members of the school board and the mayor's office over multiple years in good faith discussions after pulling the bill two sessions ago that would have more dramatically

restructured the school board. Their concerns and ideas were incorporated into this legislation to ensure that we can move towards a more democratic, transparent, youth centric and effective board.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB153.  
Thank you.

Sincerely,

Blanca Rosalez

Baltimore City College

SOMOS

[blanca.rosalez2023@baltimorecitycollege.us](mailto:blanca.rosalez2023@baltimorecitycollege.us)

443-922-0662