

Final SB656 Board of Ed Balt County-Sen Sydnor Tes

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Children, Youth, and Families

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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony for Senate Bill 656
Baltimore County Board of Education – Alterations of Elected Member
Districts and Establishment of Redistricting Process
Before the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 19, 2025

Good afternoon Chair Feldman, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee,

Next year, Baltimore County will be holding elections for a number of elected offices, including our school board. While, the Baltimore County Board of Education consists of 12 members,¹ seven board members are seated after participating in a nonpartisan election. Under current law one member is “elected from each of the seven councilmanic districts in the county, established by the County Council of Baltimore County, by the voters of that district”²

Last summer, the County Council introduced a Charter amendment in Bill No. 47-24 which proposed to increase the number of council members from 7 to 9, beginning with the 2026 election cycle. Section 5 of the bill states that:

... the thirtieth day following the general election on November 5, 2024, the County Executive and County Council shall send written notification to the Baltimore County delegation to the Maryland General Assembly that §3-2B-01 of the Education Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland relating to the composition and method of election of the Baltimore County Board of Education is to be amended to consist of: nine nonpartisan elected members, elected from the nine councilmanic districts of Baltimore County, as set forth in this Act, by the voters of that councilmanic district; two appointed members; and one student member.

While Baltimore County voters expanded the County Council from seven Councilmembers to nine, the County Council did not have the authority to bind us to enact legislation to increase the number of elected members of the school board to nine and reduce the number of appointed members from four to two. This authority rests with us to determine how—and if—the State provisions will be amended.

¹ Education Code §3-2B-01(a).

² Education Code §3-2B-01(b)(1)(i).

After seeking the input of several stakeholders, it became clear that they did not want a larger school board. It was also clear that decreasing the number of gubernatorial appointments was unacceptable as well. So, I set out to produce a method that kept things as close to status quo as possible but addressed the reality that the number of our elected school board members were tied to a seven-member County Council. I looked at the several school systems that elected school board members to determine how best to proceed and Montgomery County provided a framework which I could use in Baltimore County.

Senate Bill 656 (“SB 656”) proposes that new framework. If we do not want to increase the school board, and we do not want to modify the balance we have with our hybrid board, we had to create school board districts separate and apart from County Council districts. So, SB 656 uses the seven current council districts and converts them to school board districts.³ We would use these current council districts for the 2026 and 2030 elections and Baltimore County voters will continue to vote for a school board member who would be a resident living within their school board district.

Under SB 656 and beginning with the next decennial U.S. Census in 2030, school board districts will be reapportioned after each census,⁴ effective until the following decennial U.S. Census.⁵ The mechanics of the redistricting process are intended to mimic what is done in Montgomery County. Our County School Board will submit proposed reapportioned maps to our Baltimore County delegation by December 1st of the calendar year immediately following the census⁶ and we will take the proposal under consideration and introduce legislation that next legislative session creating the school board districts for the 2034 election. To be clear, we are not obligated to accept its proposal and may introduce legislation that differs from the proposal.⁷

Starting with the 2034 General Election, one member will be elected from each of the seven school board districts established by the aforementioned redistricting process. The reapportioned districts will be substantially equal in population.⁸

In conclusion, as I noted at the beginning of my testimony, current law dictates that that one member is “elected from each of the seven councilmanic districts in the county, established by the County Council of Baltimore County, by the voters of that district”, so we cannot wait until the next legislative session to address this; we have to address this matter this session. In 2026, there will be nine Council districts and no longer align with the Education Code. For that and the aforementioned reasons, I ask this Committee for a favorable report on SB 656.

³ See proposed Education Code §3-2B-01(b)(1)(i)(1).

⁴ See proposed Education Code §3-2B-11(B)(1)1.

⁵ See proposed Education Code §3-2B-11(B)(1)2.

⁶ See proposed Education Code §3-2B111(C)(2).

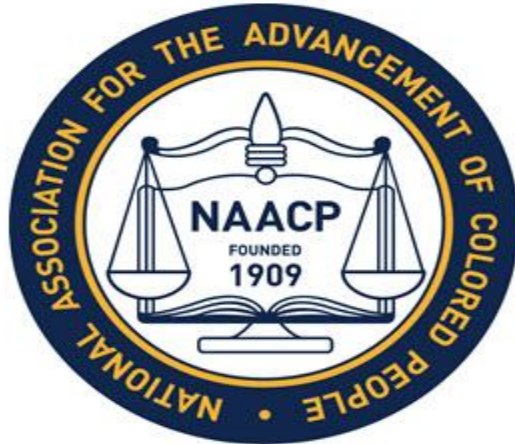
⁷ See proposed Education Code §3-2B-11(D)(2).

⁸ See proposed Education Code §3-2B-11(B)(2).

SB0656 Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Ryan Coleman

Position: FAV



Randallstown

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February 20 2025

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for SB0656-Baltimore County Board of Education - Alterations of Elected Member Districts and Establishment of Redistricting Process

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

The Randallstown NAACP is a 500 member branch located in Baltimore County, Maryland. We have members in Baltimore County and Baltimore City. One of primary focuses is ensuring the quality of life for all residents especially black Marylanders free of discrimination. Our branch is here to advocate and support our children and especially our black children to get a world class education

The Randallstown NAACP has received many concerns that the past school

boards have been too political and not focused enough on our children. This bill gives us the tool to ensure some balance on the Baltimore County School Board. **The Randallstown NAACP supports SB 0656 and requested a favorable vote out of this committee.**

yours

Ryan Coleman
Randallstown NAACP, President
<https://randnaacp.org/>
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Written Testimony SB565.pdf

Uploaded by: Ugonma Chike-Kalu

Position: FAV

Written Testimony of Ugonma Chike-Kalu, Student Member, Baltimore County Board of Education on Senate Bill 656 – Baltimore County Board of Education Redistricting

Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 656. My name is Ugonma Chike-Kalu, and while I serve as the Student Member of the Baltimore County Board of Education, I am testifying today in my individual capacity. *My remarks do not reflect the views of the Board as a whole but rather my perspective as a student leader and advocate for equitable representation in education governance.*

Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) is the third-largest school system in Maryland, serving over 111,000 students with diverse needs, backgrounds, and aspirations. Our school board must reflect that diversity—not only in demographics but in thought, lived experiences, and advocacy. The proposed changes in SB 656 offer a more inclusive framework for representation, balancing localized district interests with countywide accountability.

Currently, Baltimore County elects its school board members by councilmanic districts, meaning residents only vote for the candidate representing their area. While this system ensures localized representation, it also limits voter engagement with the broader leadership of the board. SB 656 introduces a hybrid model—one that maintains district-based representation while also allowing the entire county to vote on all board seats, similar to Montgomery County. This shift is critical for four reasons:

1. ***Expanding Voter Input for Stronger Accountability:*** A school board's decisions affect every student and educator in BCPS, yet voters are restricted to choosing only one representative. By allowing countywide voting for all board seats while maintaining district-based candidacy requirements, we ensure that board members are accountable not just to a portion of the county, but to all who are impacted by their decisions.
2. ***Ensuring Equitable Representation and Redistricting:*** Baltimore County's population is growing and shifting, and our school board's district boundaries must evolve accordingly. The bill mandates redistricting after each decennial census to reflect changes in student populations and community needs. This provision prevents disparities in representation,

ensuring that no district is disproportionately under- or overrepresented due to outdated boundaries.

3. ***Aligning School Governance with Best Practices:*** Montgomery County has long operated under a system where all voters have a say in electing board members while ensuring geographic diversity through district-based candidacy. This approach strengthens public trust in education governance and encourages more robust, issue-based campaigns rather than hyperlocal political battles. Given the complexities of leading a district as large as BCPS, a board structure that balances district and countywide accountability is essential.
4. ***Representation Must Reflect Our Realities:*** As a student representative, I witness firsthand how board decisions impact classrooms, mental health resources, curriculum choices, and school safety policies. Effective board governance requires leaders who not only advocate for their district's needs but also collaborate to address systemic issues affecting the entire county. Moreover, SB 656 does not change the student member's role, but it reinforces a broader principle: students deserve a school board that is truly representative, engaged, and responsive to their needs. When board members are elected with input from all county residents, they are more accountable for decisions that shape the future of every student, not just those in their immediate district.

SB 656 is not about restructuring for the sake of change—it is about strengthening our school board's ability to serve students, parents, and educators equitably. A hybrid election model, combined with regular redistricting, ensures that BCPS leadership is responsive, representative, and accountable. I urge the committee to support this bill and move it forward for the benefit of all Baltimore County students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ugonma Chike-Kalu

Student Member, Baltimore County Board of Education (Testifying as an Individual)