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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 Ways and Means Committee
March 27, 2025

Good afternoon Chair Atterbary, and members of the Ways and Means 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).