

March 5, 2017

Support Delegate McMillan HB 716 Amendments

Dear Senators and Delegates:

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of the three bills introduced to change the structure of the Anne Arundel County Board of Education (BOE) to an elected or hybrid elected/appointed school board. Clearly the current system of appointing board members is broken, and I am in favor of an all-elected school board with no Student Member of the Board (SMOB).

In my opinion, the SMOB should be an advisory member only. While it is important to hear the "student voice," a high school student simply does not have the knowledge or experience to provide meaningful oversight over a \$1.1 billion operation. Can you imagine a teenager serving on the Board of Directors of a \$1.1 billion corporation? Of course not.

At a minimum, as Delegate McMillan has suggested, the SMOB should not have a vote on the budget itself. A student, no matter how smart, hard-working, or well-intentioned, simply doesn't have the knowledge or experience to understand the matters that drive budget decisions – union negotiations, procurement and contracts, revenue and expense projections, basic government accounting, etc. Without that knowledge and experience, the SMOB cannot provide effective oversight.

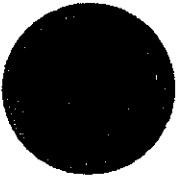
I also agree with Delegate Howard that if the SMOB continues to be appointed, the appointment process should be subject to open meeting and public information laws. When you take money out of the taxpayers' pockets to pay for a public operation, the taxpayers deserve the right and ability to determine how that money is being spent, how the decisions were made to spend it that way, who made those decisions, and how they were put in the position of making those decisions. Simply, my interests as a taxpayer in knowing who is deciding how my tax dollars are spent and how that person was appointed are superior to any privacy interests of a student who is voluntarily applying to be the SMOB.

The AACPS administration's opposition to open and transparent process raises my suspicions. What don't they want to come to light? The BOE is a public body overseeing a \$1.1 billion taxpayer-funded operation. The sun should shine on every aspect of that operation every single day. Nothing short of personnel disciplinary matters and advice from legal counsel should be closed to the public.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my comments to you, and please pass a bill that establishes an elected school board in Anne Arundel County. The current board is incredibly ineffective and accountable to no one. Let them be accountable to the public they serve.

Sincerely,

Teresa Sutherland
634 Riverside Drive
Annapolis, MD 21403



BOARD OF EDUCATION OF ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY

2644 Riva Road • Annapolis, MD 21401
410-222-5311 • 410-222-5500 (TDD) • 301-970-8644 (WASH) • 410-222-5629 (FAX)

March 6, 2017

The Honorable Pamela G. Beidle
Chair, Anne Arundel County House Delegation
and Members of the Delegation
165 House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Delegate Beidle:

At our March 1, 2017, meeting, the Board of Education took several positions on amendments – but not bills as a whole – now before the delegation with respect to House Bill 716 and/or House Bill 555. Most importantly, the Board strongly – as shown by its unanimous vote – opposes any effort, either through amendments before the delegation now or those still in process, to reduce the voting rights of the student member of the Board of Education.

Anne Arundel County has a rich and proud history of outstanding student service to our Board of Education and, quite frankly, our county as a whole. Our student Board member is believed to be the only one in the nation on a local Board to have full voting rights. That is a distinction we wear as a badge of honor, and one which has contributed greatly to innumerable Board conversations and initiatives over the years.

Our students have, at times, been the necessary voices of reason and clarity in multifaceted and complex discussions and decisions. They are bright, articulate, responsible, and passionate individuals who are preparing to be brilliant caretakers and leaders of our future.

We are the gold standard in this area. Across the state, other jurisdictions have been and are attempting to do what we do. This is a time for Anne Arundel County to continue to lead, not come back to the pack. We are setting the example for others to follow, and we urge you to reject any attempts to change the student member’s role.

Also with regard to the student member, the Board endorsed unanimously increasing the student Board member scholarship to \$8,000 to align with the pay proposed for most other adult members of the Board.

Further, the Board urges you to reject amendments that would force the Chesapeake Regional Association of Student Councils (CRASC) to be subject to the terms of the Maryland Open Meetings Act or the Maryland Public Information Act. CRASC is not a public body and, therefore, does not fall under the provisions of either Act. Even if it did, the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act presents significant concerns with regard to parental preference on student privacy issues so that such compliance with the Open Meetings Act may be difficult, if not impossible. The CRASC process for electing a student Board member also aligns with the process for the student member of the State Board of Education.

Finally, the Board would appreciate your consideration of staggering elections of members in any bill that provides for elected members. We believe that the certainty that an entire Board would not be new in any given year would be a benefit to our students and our school system. We also would appreciate consideration, given that Board members represent the entire county and not individual districts, that any elections for Board members be open to voters across the county and not limited to voters in a particular district.

Thank you very much for your consideration. Please don’t hesitate to contact me if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Stacy Korbela
President

Cc: Board of Education
Superintendent George Arlotto