

**Board of Education Testimony**  
**Howard County Delegation Public Hearing**  
**Draft Bill Ho. Co. 1-11SS**  
**October 11, 2011**

Good evening, I am Dr. Janet Siddiqui, Chairman of the Howard County Board of Education. The Board appreciates your continued support of our public school system.

The Howard County Public School System has a long record of focusing on student achievement. Because this continues to be our focus today, the Howard County Public Schools System is one of the highest performing systems in the nation and state and was the ONLY county in the State of Maryland to reach Adequate Yearly Progress or AYP in this most recent school year and our graduation rate remains above the state average. It is this commitment to student achievement that unites our Board of Education in unanimous opposition to this proposed legislation. The Board appreciates this opportunity to explain our position to Delegate Turner's proposed legislation.

The Board asks the Howard County Delegation not to rush to a solution, when the problem is not clearly defined. We must ask ourselves if this is the Howard County way? A county that prides itself on diverse opinions and working together to find solutions in a democratic way.

The Board values diversity. Unlike many other school systems, the Howard County Public School System has made significant progress toward eliminating all gaps in student achievement in just eight short years. Our school system actively engages parents and community, values diversity and prepares its educators and leaders to be culturally proficient and to knowledgeably represent the interest of all students.

The Board opposes this bill due to a series of unintended negative consequences. This legislation, if enacted, would change the equal representation of all students and schools by all Board members, overrule the decision of Howard County voters to elect all members of their Board of Education, and jeopardize the search for our next Superintendent.

The recommendations of the Commission ignore the wisdom and intentional design of those who separated the Board of Education from the executive and legislative functions of the county government. Even before 1972, the Governor and not the County Executive appointed Howard County school board members. Any fundamental change to be made to the current election process should not occur without the approval of the electorate.

This bill arbitrarily reverses a decision of Howard County voters and takes away the rights of citizens to elect all seven members of their Board of Education. It's concerning that the legislation proposes to election by district – rather than countywide - as it may change the nature of all Board members representing the needs of all students.

It should also be noted that the Commission made no recommendation with respect to the student member. The student member is a full member of the Board, even though the position carries only partial voting rights. The wording in the current law is deliberate. If any other member of the Board is not present, the number of votes to pass a motion remains at five.

This legislation is proposed as “an emergency measure... necessary for the immediate preservation of the public health or safety” is a blatant attempt to have this bill pushed through the General Assembly in the upcoming special session and enacted before Howard County residents realize that their voting rights have been stripped from them.

The last and most severe unintended consequence relates to the process of selecting our next Superintendent of Schools. The Board is very concerned about how potential candidates will view the recommendations of the Commission and this proposed legislation. We ask that you consider what message you are sending to potential candidates and how it may impact their decision to seek the Superintendency in Howard County. The Board's decision on who will serve as our next Superintendent is likely the most far-reaching decision we will make during the next year. It is critical for us to demonstrate the strength of our excellent school system to recruit the very best candidates to choose from. This bill only weakens our position.

In closing, the Board of Education would remind the delegation to put students first and take pride in democracy. We may not always agree with the will of the people, but that is not cause to remove them from the process. We make decisions that place the highest consideration on the achievement of all students in every school in Howard County. The Board would suggest that if people think that democracy is not working, what we need is more democracy, not less. And when we make a decision about the governance of our school system, the Board would suggest that we place the concern about student achievement -- first.

Janet Siddiqui, MD, Chairman  
Board of Education of Howard County