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# MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

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## WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE HOUSE BILL 629: COUNTY BOARDS OF EDUCATION – STUDENT MEMBER – VOTING

February 5, 2021

### **POSITION: Oppose**

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland’s public school systems. We are committed to making discipline responsive to students’ behavioral needs, fair, appropriate to the infraction, and designed to keep youth on track to graduate. **CRSD strongly opposes House Bill 629, which would limit the voting rights of student members of county Boards of Education.**

It is imperative that students have a voice in their educational experience. Maryland has long been a leader in supporting student voice and participation in shaping school policies on the local and statewide level. In 1974, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 476, which created the student member position on the Anne Arundel County Board of Education. This was the first such position in our state. The very next year, a bipartisan bill was introduced to grant the student member voting rights equal to those of the other members of the Board. Other jurisdictions across the state followed Anne Arundel County’s lead, and the General Assembly continued to uplift student voices in Maryland public education. In 1985, the General Assembly added a student member position on the Maryland State Board of Education; that student member is able to vote on the majority of matters that come before the State Board. Maryland is one of few states to allow student members voting rights, and this is surely part of what sets Maryland’s public education system apart.

This bill seeks to strip student voice from the education process in a way that is arbitrary and regressive. By limiting the ability of student members of the County Boards of Education to cast the “deciding vote,” this bill silences student voice perhaps when it is most necessary: when the adults in the room are at an impasse. It is at this moment when the student member’s voice is perhaps most essential, because they will make a vote that will directly impact themselves and their constituents, the students throughout the school system. Whether it is related to issues of school discipline and pushout, virtual learning, extended schools years, or any other myriad of issues that come before the Board of Education, the impact on students must be centered in that decision making. This bill sidelines one student’s voice at the expense of all other students in the County. This reactionary bill is the first step in removing student agency from their school experience; the General Assembly should not take it.

**For these reasons, CRSD opposes House Bill 629.**

For more information contact:

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**CRSD Members**

ACLU Maryland  
The Arc Maryland  
Attendance Works  
Disability Rights Maryland  
Bmore Awesome, Inc.  
The Choice Program at UMBC  
Community Law in Action  
Family League of Baltimore  
MD Developmental Disabilities Council  
NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland  
Office of the Public Defender  
Open Society Institute  
Project HEAL at Kennedy Krieger Institute  
Public Justice Center  
Restorative Counseling Services  
Schools Not Jails  
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