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Testimony in Support of Proposed bill 11-2017 Sponsored by Vanessa Atterbeary

HCCA thanks Delegate Atterbeary for introducing this bill which we support. We believe the districts for 5 of the 7 Board of Education Members should follow Councilmanic districts, unlike the other proposed bills which would require newly-drawn districts. We believe that using Council districts will actually cause less partisan issues than the process of drawing new districts. Those who are concerned with Council districts creating slates and thus more partisanship in the non-partisan Board of Education elections should understand that this election already has partisanship in it, and if a candidate wanted to slate with a Council Member, they could do that now, but likely would remain non-partisan, seeking the votes of all parties.

We must place larger emphasis on accountability of our elected officials over other concerns about this bill. Having a specific and known representative on the School Board, whom people would know easily in their Council district, will create that needed increased accountability. If your Board Member represents your Council district, then that smaller number of constituents who elect that Member are far more easily informed of the actions of their Member.

Running in a countywide race is a very difficult and often expensive endeavor. Grassroots campaigns have a harder time up against those more heavily-funded to get their messages across. It takes too much time and effort and even funds to inform voters across the whole County versus just a Council district on issues, and performance.

Some say that the system worked, after all, the Board Members are elected now, countywide, and change was made, but I say, it didn't necessarily work as easily as it should. Should it really take the countywide, bipartisan activity of multiple state and local political officials, civic leaders, Ravens and Steelers fans and cats and dogs hand-in-hand in the streets with a press article on wrongdoing every 2 weeks for a year, to get change? No, a situation should not have to reach the levels that our local Board of Education and HCPSS leadership issues reached in 2016, where you get a change after the 500th problem. Maybe if you had a Council district's worth of voters seeing what you are doing, then change could happen after the 5th problem, or maybe even 1 really big one, after all, this is about our children's educations, their safety and over half our County tax dollars.

Other issues, such as Members caring too much about their own district's needs, I point to the County Council as an example of being able to handle that issue. Keeping 2 at-large Members on the School Board would help even more with general issues.

In closing, I want to add that we'd like to see an edit to the bill, to include not allowing Board of Education Members to run for another office while a Member. If you are going to concentrate on holding a position elsewhere, then you should not be able to return to your seat as a consolation prize. You should be moving on, win or lose.

Thank you.