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## EDITORIAL

# Time to bring by-district voting into Board of Education elections

There may be no bond as closely felt between elected officials and their constituents as between school board members and those they represent. Although families with children in public schools are the most obvious concerned constituents, others are stakeholders also — school issues are community issues.

When school-related concerns arise, voters will want to go to “their” representative on the board. But in Howard County, they can’t because the school board is entirely elected at large.

An effort is underway to change this.

Two Howard legislators have drafted a bill that would change school board elections here — five of the board’s seven members would be elected by district and the two remaining elected at large. The five school board districts would correspond to the five County Council districts. The current staggered election cycle would also change, with all board members’ four-year terms coming up for a vote with the gubernatorial election.

We see such a change as an important

step forward in accountability and diversity on the school board. Although board members live in different parts of the county, at-large voting means that each member has essentially the same voting base — the most densely populated parts of the county. This is inequitable.

A significant illustration of the problem occurred recently when parents in western Howard County learned about mold in some schools. They expressed frustration over a lack of action and answers from the entire board, not just from their own regional board member.

State Del. Vanessa Atterbeary, a mother of three young children and, along with **Councilman Jon Weinstein**, one of the authors of the legislation, called it “absolutely a problem” that **citizens facing a problem in their neighborhood do not have a specific face on the board to go to.**

“As a parent, I think it’s important to have your school board members accessible. It’s important to know who they

are, it’s important they be representative of their constituents and it’s important they be invested in the school districts they represent,” Atterbeary said.

The Howard County Education Association likes the idea. HCEA President Paul Lemle said, “I think it gives voters a much better chance to get to know their board member.”

School board seats throughout Maryland are filled a variety of ways — district election, at-large election, gubernatorial appointment or some combination of those. If the change is made, Howard would join five other Maryland counties, including nearby Montgomery, that elect school boards through a hybrid of by-district and at-large voting.

Howard County residents know who on the County Council sits in the seat allocated to their district. And the council member in that seat knows what the needs and concerns are in his or her district. The same should be true on the Board of Education.