

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION HEARING

November 12, 2025

Testimony of Ethan
In Support of: Senate Bill 367

TESTIMONY

Hi, my name is Ethan, and I am a youth leader in the Students Speak initiative. Over the course of this semester, we have conducted research on student representation on school committees in six states: California, Washington, Oregon, Maryland, Minnesota, and, of course, Massachusetts.

I became involved in student advocacy during quarantine, when my 504 plan was taken from me without my input. As a student with ADHD, my 504 was one of the few things I had to support my grades, and without it, they plummeted. I had no voice on a matter that was very important to me. Unfortunately, I'd say that the way our school committees run is very similar; they may provide one student a seat at the table, but our ability to influence decisions is minimal.

I support Senate Bill 367 because student representatives should have a vote. I also believe the bill needs improvement to ensure that voting student members have an enriching experience. In its current form, Senate Bill 367 does not provide any form of training for student committee members, which I believe is essential for their success. Upon reviewing the Maryland statutes and speaking to past and current student committee members there, I found them to be a leading state in providing training for student representatives. They currently provide an orientation day with presentations from several district leaders and members, as well as budget and media training. One of the committee members we spoke with noted that this foundational training supported her to be successful as a voting member.

Providing a well-structured training like Maryland's could open up the door for another amendment to the bill that I believe is critical. It could support Massachusetts student members to participate and vote in executive sessions. According to Senate Bill 367, now, students will not be able to participate in such sessions unless the adult members approve it. However, students are the primary stakeholders and the best representatives for themselves. Student committee members should be voting on every decision that impacts them, including decisions made in executive sessions.

At the end of our discussion with a former Maryland student committee member, he emphasized the success of his predecessors, noting that their equal role and their ability to vote alongside adults, with a strong support system in place, allowed each of them to succeed as voting members. But maybe even more so, as I learned, being a voting student member provided Maryland students with the skills and experience to go beyond making an impact on their school communities. I ask that we provide the same opportunity for our student committee members here in Massachusetts.