

Hey MASC! My name is Merin Thomas and I am a junior at James M. Bennett High School. I reside in the Eastern Shore area. I have been involved in student government throughout my school career from being an NJHS Secretary in middle school to then becoming my class' Historian for the past three years. I come from a county that is not often exposed to opportunities like MASC. I can speak firsthand on how this affects children from the Eastern Shore because they may not know certain tasks they can do to better their high school career

Personally, I am running for SMOB to become a voice for each child in Maryland; my prime focus being the smaller counties of Maryland. Many students from these smaller counties wish they had the same chances as kids up north of Maryland and with my experience, as someone from a small county, I believe it will benefit the Board. Ensuring that students from each county feel seen and heard would be one of the priorities I choose to accomplish. Being a SMOB member consists of being a voice for the students. For example, doing more period drives (collecting menstrual products and women's undergarments) around the state would be something I fight for in each county as it was a success in the city of Salisbury. The drive made the stigma around Period's decrease in Salisbury. The conversation was brought up again on how we can make our students feel comfortable during their periods in the school environment they are in. Students look towards the student members of the Board of Ed to embody the ideas that students from all parts of Maryland want to see implemented in their schools/counties. Southern Maryland, and in particular Wicomico County, aren't given the same resources to ensure success for students. Even though Wicomico county does not have the same resources as students from northern Maryland, this doesn't mean the students are not successful. Multiple students have left Wicomico County and have gone to achieve amazing careers, with some going into the Naval Academy, full rides to state schools, and acceptances into Ivy League Colleges. It isn't impossible to be from a small town and be successful, but by having discussions with students that went on to achieve bigger things, I can understand why they wished they had the same support and importance as other counties in Maryland.

The role of the student member in the Maryland State Board of Education is to advocate for their peers. In addition, the student member must provide a sense of leadership, show maturity, and be a voice that represents both the youth of Maryland as well as members of the board. I work to be dependable, empathetic, and to take my responsibilities seriously. I take every opportunity to be involved with my peers and community. I make sure to be the person that my peers can approach, whether they need a helping hand or just want someone to talk to. I believe my experiences as a South Asian student will ensure that everyone will always have an equal voice on the Maryland State BOE. I firmly believe I will fit the role of being a student member on the board and carry the title with pride.

Some changes I would like to implement and advocate for:

- 1) *Having more leniency and education on menstrual hygiene.* I strongly believe that this issue can be resolved by implementing lessons in all health courses throughout Maryland. A study done at the University College of London by reproductive health professors has shown that many cramps have the intensity of a heart attack. Many of our students have intense pain that prevents them from attending school or focusing on their classes. I strongly believe for this reason we should adjust the number of absences allowed per semester.
- 2) *Giving more resources to underprivileged communities in Maryland gives the chance to have a safe space away from an environment that a child may not feel growth in. Giving students the benefit of a good environment can only help them in excelling in school and other extracurricular activities.* After-school clubs that encourage safe "escapes" for students who feel overwhelmed can be what keeps students safe and happy.
- 3) *Having more opportunities for students to have an option to stay home with the anxiety growing around Covid-19.* Making sure kids have a way to feel safe and motivated is what we should give to them. So ensuring a possible hybrid schedule and spaces throughout the day for kids to get breaks is a must!