

Baltimore County Council questions 'lack of wisdom' on schools' craft fair policy

Council Chairman Olszewski sends letter to Superintendent Hairston after angry parents voice displeasure

By Steve Schuster
sschuster@patuxent.com

Posted 3/17/11

Digg

Share

The Baltimore County Council chairman is questioning a Baltimore County Public Schools' policy that bans certain craft fairs on school grounds.

The move comes after about a dozen angry parents voiced their displeasure about the bans during a March 7 council meeting.

On Thursday, the *Towson Times* received a copy of a letter from County Council Chairman John Olszewski dated March 10 which was addressed to Baltimore County School Superintendent Dr. Joe Hairston about the Board of Education policy banning craft fairs and other such events on school grounds if outside, for-profit vendors are involved.

During the March 7 meeting, County Council members told a room of angry parents that the council has little sway over the policy. Olszewski said then he intended to write Hairston a letter pressing for a review of the policy.

Olszewski fulfilled his promise with the March 10 letter.

Olszewski wrote, "We question why the Baltimore County School Board would not adhere to state law as it pertains to school facilities.

State law states "Each County board shall [i.e. must] encourage the use of public school facilities for community purposes."

"In addition, we question the wisdom or lack of wisdom in making a rule to limit access to school facilities to the groups that add to the overall well being of our communities," Olszewski wrote.

Olszewski continued, "We suggest there needs to be some serious discussion and soul searching about this issue."

According to schools spokesman Charles Herndon, Hairston has responded to the letter, but Herndon declined to discuss the issue or Hairston's response to Olszewski because discussions of the details will continue at a Baltimore County Board of Education retreat on Saturday, Herndon said.

As the *Towson Times* has previously reported, the parents showed up at the council meeting even though there was nothing on the council agenda regarding the craft fairs issue.

The school system policy -- known as Rule 1300 -- prohibits commercial vendors from using school grounds for events. The policy comes into play when PTAs or other groups lease vendor space to vendors at fairs and other events.

Several parents at the meeting said they've become frustrated discussing the issue with school officials.

"I don't think I've ever come across a government entity that has been less responsive and less accountable to the public than ... the current Baltimore County Board of Education," said David Greene, a Lutherville resident, who said he's been a school parent for 10 years.

"With your help," Greene told the council, "maybe one day they will actually listen to us."

Greene said on Thursday that while he hasn't seen the letter, he is happy the council is not only listening but has taken proactive steps to remedy the problem.

The letter "sounds terrific ... I felt good about the response (the County Council) gave when all of parents testified a week ago," Greene said.

"I just hope that the superintendent and members of the Board of Education will listen to the chair of the County Council, and restore all of those activities they have denied during the last few years," said Towson resident Dr. Laurie Taylor-Mitchell, who also had testified at the council March 7.

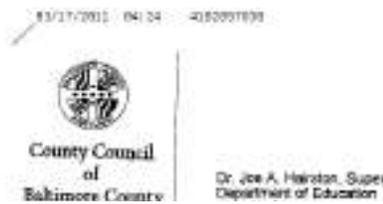
In an e-mail to the *Times* following the letter's release, Taylor-Mitchell said, "I remain convinced that BCPS's current policy is in violation of Maryland State Law ... on the use of school property for other than school purposes."

"Mr. Olszewski is right," added Leslie Weber, president of the Loch Raven High School PTSA, also in an e-mail regarding the letter. "It's so hard to get people to volunteer, especially at high schools, and when we're forced to continually fight the system just to help our school, it is beyond discouraging and frustrating."

On Saturday, the Board of Education will discuss Rule 1300 among other issues at a retreat in Towson.

This story has been updated.

[Baltimore County Councilman Olszewski letter to Hairston](#)



-
- 1 of 2
-
-
- [Download](#)
- [Share](#)
- [Fullscreen](#)

 Follow Steven Schuster on Twitter

Text BALTCO to 70701 to sign up for explorebaltimorecounty.com news alerts

user comments (2)