

# EQUITY FOR ALL KIDS



To: Chair Pendergrass and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee  
From: Shamoyia Gardiner, Education Policy Director  
Re: House Bill 531: Discrimination - Definition of Race - Hair Texture and Hairstyles  
Date: March 6, 2020  
Position: Support

Black students in Maryland's public schools represent just 33.6% of total enrollment.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, Maryland's public schools disproportionately push Black students out, at nearly twice the rate they exist in the general population. 58.54% of students suspended or expelled in the 2018-2019 school year were Black.<sup>2</sup> There is simply no justification for the overrepresentation of Black students in school push-out cases, particularly when nearly half of the offenses that all students are disciplined for are non-violent.

There is a clear culprit, however—white supremacist systems and culture which maligns Black students in school and Black people in life. Actively resisting and dismantling the systemic and cultural structures of white supremacy is necessary to ensure the realization of ACY's vision of a Maryland in which all children and young people are treated equitably.

House Bill 531 would extend the definition of racial discrimination to include textures historically associated with race, including those specific to members of the African Diaspora, and protective hairstyles including twists, braids, and locs. Passage of this bill would be that active resistance, not only providing recourse and language to support claims of discrimination but making clear to all Marylanders that the State is committed to the protection of all its residents.

HB 1444 offers new protections for all Black people in Maryland, but will specifically benefit gender and sexual minorities, people whose identities are not cis-gender and heterosexual, because the bill would codify these anti-discrimination protections on the basis of hair texture and style rather than sex or gender. That is to say, this bill will not only protect boys with locs who compete in wrestling tournaments and girls with afros who give valedictorian speeches, but extend such protection to gender non-conforming youth who enjoy presenting themselves in multiple ways and transgender young people stepping into their truest selves. **With equity for all kids in mind, ACY urges a favorable report on this bill.**

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<sup>1</sup> MSDE. *Maryland Public School Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity*. September 2018.

<sup>2</sup> MSDE. *Suspensions, Expulsions, and Health Related Exclusions*