

Bill Numbers: HB1204
Lead Sponsor: Delegate Wilkins
Committee: Ways and Means

Written Testimony By: Kate MacShane, LCSW-C
Psychotherapist and Clinical Director
Maryland Center for Gender & Intimacy
Frederick, Maryland

Position: Support

Esteemed Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Kate MacShane, and I am a licensed clinical social worker based in Frederick, Maryland. I am the founder and clinical director of the Maryland Center for Gender and Intimacy, a practice that specializes in the provision of affirming mental health services for people who identify as LGBTQ+. I am a member of the World Professional Association of Transgender Health; the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists; and the National Association of Social Workers.

Many of the clients I serve are children and adolescents who attend Maryland public schools. Over the past five years, I have observed that the level of protection from discrimination that my clients face varies widely depending on the county in which they live and the school they attend. For example, students in Frederick County, which has an exemplary policy (Policy 443) that codifies anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ students, experience a much more consistently safe school environment than their peers just across the county line in Washington County, where there is not a policy that explicitly prohibits gender- and sexuality-based discrimination in schools. My clients in Washington County are far less likely to be out to their peers and teachers as gay or transgender, in large part due to their awareness that their school's policies are not set up to protect them from discrimination from their peers or even from school staff. The implementation of MSDE's recommendations on anti-discrimination are just that: recommendations. Ultimately, absent sweeping state-wide anti-discrimination legislation, the protection of students' civil rights (and mental health) is left up to the discretion of individual administrators and teachers. We can, and must, do better on behalf of our most vulnerable students.

I urge you to vote in support of HB 1204, the Inclusive Schools Act, so that all Maryland students can experience the same level of safety and civil rights protections.

Sincerely,

Kate MacShane, LCSW-C