

## HB1204 The Inclusive Schools Act

### SUPPORT

Attention:

The Honorable Anne Kaiser and members of the House Ways & Means Committee:

My name is CJ Ward and I am currently enrolled as a graduate student in organizational psychology. I am submitting this written testimony in support of HB1204 and SB0993 as a bullying prevention and LGBTQ+ educator and advocate

The reason I support these bills is that they will improve the lives and save the lives of LGBTQ+ students. Multiple peer reviewed psychological research studies have examined the negative impact discriminatory practices have on students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, non-binary, agender, gender-fluid, asexual, or any other identity other than heterosexual (Zewditu et al., 2018). Additionally, the Human Rights Campaign Youth Report shows that only 26% of LGBTQ+ youth report always feeling safe at school (HRC, 2018). Something must be done to ensure students can feel safe 100% of the time so they can focus on learning and not their safety.

Students spend eight hours or more under the supervision of school staff, starting with their morning bus ride. There must be protective measure in place to provide not only a physically safe environment, but a psychological and emotionally safe one as well. Parents need to be able to bring forth issues of discrimination or bullying based on a personal demographic identifier without worrying if their child or family will suffer retaliation from school administrators or staff. Schools must be held accountable for acts of discrimination so improvements to policies and processes can be fairly assessed and improved. If schools are unwilling to hear and address complaints of discrimination it puts all students at a higher risk for emotional and psychological stress.

No-one should ever be afraid to report an incident of bias, discrimination or retaliation. As a parent, I have taught my child there is no greater gift than a strong voice in an adverse situation, and to always take a stand when he sees bias or discrimination in play. Schools must be willing to hear those voices when they speak and actively seek a solution, otherwise students stop speaking and suffer in silence, which creates a false narrative that there isn't actually a problem. Having a clear written policy provides guidance and uniformity for students to engage in the process.

The state of MD has the opportunity and obligation to lead on this issue and set a standard for public schools and private schools that receive public funding in order to protect every child and family, regardless of personal identifiers subjected to bias and discrimination. I urge you to stand proudly in bipartisan support for the children in the state of MD and unanimously pass HB1204 and SB0993. It is the right thing to do and will ultimately not only improve the lives of children but improve the public-school systems as discriminatory practices will be reduced.

Thank you for your time.

CJ Ward

“She/Her”

102 Old House Court

Pikesville, MD 21208

References:

HRC Youth Report (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report>

HRC Gender-Expansive Youth Report Retrieved from <https://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-gender-expansive-youth-report>

Zewditu, D., Rasberry, C., Steiner, R., Brener, N., & McManus, T. (2018). Trends in Secondary School's Practices to Support Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Students, 2008-2014). American Journal of Public Health, 108 (4), 557-564.