



Maryland Youth Advisory Council
c/o Governor's Office for Children
100 Community Place,
Crownsville, MD 21032

Noureen Badwi, *Chair*
Carmelli Leal, *Vice-Chair*
Aidan Douglas, *Secretary*
Christina Drushel Williams, *Advisor*

February 19, 2020

The Honorable Anne R. Kaiser
Ways & Means Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: HB 1204
Position: Support

Dear Chair Kaiser,

On behalf of the Maryland Youth Advisory Council, I am pleased to have the opportunity to offer support for HB 1204, the Student Equal Rights Protection Act.

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council (the Council), established through State Legislature (Chapter 559, Acts of 2008, Chapter 69, Acts of 2009, and Chapter 620, Acts of 2016), prides itself on being a coalition of diverse young advocates and leaders from across the State, working to serve as a voice for youth in the State of Maryland. As leaders in our communities, and as appointees of the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, Maryland Association of Student Councils, Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the University System of Maryland, we take every opportunity to address relevant issues by influencing legislation, spreading public awareness, and serving as a liaison between youth and policymakers regarding issues impacting youth.

This bill codifies current Maryland State Department of Education guidance and prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability for all students, Pre-K-12 who are enrolled in our public schools and in schools receiving public funding. Additionally, the bill establishes a complaint and remedy process and prohibits retaliation against the individual filing a complaint. Finally, the bill requires school boards and schools to develop written policies regarding these protections.

While federal law protects some students from discrimination, it only prohibits discrimination based on race, color, national origin, language, sex, religion, and disability. Marital status, sexual orientation and gender identity are not explicitly covered and the Council is pleased to see these additions for protection. According to GLSEN, since 2001, at least 20 percent of LGBTQ youth reported being verbally harassed in school due to their sexual orientation and/or gender expression, and at one point, reports of verbal harassment due to sexual orientation climbed to nearly 50 percent. Reports of verbal harassment steadily declined until 2017, where reports either plateaued or increased slightly.

Sixty-six percent of Maryland's LGBTQ youth report being victimized at school because of their sexual orientation, and 56 percent were victimized because of their gender expression. However, these youth also report being victimized based on religion (23%), disability (25%), and race/ethnicity (25%). Most of these youth never reported the incident to school staff (54%), and only 29% of students who reported incidents said it resulted in effective staff intervention.

The time is and always has been right to take urgent action to ensure all students are safe in school. For these reasons, the Council supports **HB 1204** and respectfully requests a favorable report from the committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Noureen Badwi".

Noureen Badwi, Chair
Maryland Youth Advisory Council