

House Ways & Means Committee:
Testimony Favorable to HB1204: County Boards and Public and Nonpublic
Prekindergarten Programs and Schools – Discrimination – Prohibition (The Inclusive
Schools Act)

Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice Chair, and esteemed members of the Ways & Means Committee: my name is Shannon Quinn and I am the Advocacy Committee Chair of the LGBTQ Democrats of Montgomery County. My pronouns are she/her/hers. On behalf of our club, I am submitting this testimony **in full support of House Bill 1204: County Boards and Public and Nonpublic Prekindergarten Programs and Schools – Discrimination – Prohibition (The Inclusive Schools Act).**

This bill is about ensuring that Maryland students are protected to the fullest extent possible against discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. LGBTQ+ students deserve to receive an education in an environment free from discrimination, and to have access to tools that will allow them bring their full selves to school without fear.

While federal anti-discrimination law covers a certain segment of students, sexual orientation, gender identity, and marital status are *not explicitly covered*. This leaves a significant gap in protection for potentially vulnerable youth who may be grappling with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity for the first time in their lives.

It is well-documented that discrimination in school can have a devastating impact on students. In 2018, a nationwide Human Rights Campaign report demonstrated in stark detail the challenges that LGBTQ+ students in schools face, with a mere **26 percent** of participants reporting that they always feel safe in their school classrooms and only **five percent** of teens indicating a belief that their teachers and school staff are supportive of LGBTQ+ people¹. The National Transgender Discrimination Survey found that **81 percent** of transgender and gender expansive students in Maryland experienced harassment in school².

In a survey conducted by the Welcoming Schools Project, students indicated that fear and doubt that staff would effectively address the situation as two obstacles stopping them from reporting discrimination or harassment³. Students who have faced discrimination are significantly more likely to grapple with depression, anxiety, and difficulty in achieving academic success. Those students who have intersecting identities may face these challenges several times over.

¹ Human Rights Campaign, *2018 LGBTQ Youth Report*: <https://www.hrc.org/blog/hrc-uconn-survey-finds-anti-lgbtq-bias-overwhelmingly-affects-lgbtq-teens>

² FreeState Justice, *Resource Guide for LGBTQ Youth Maryland*: <http://freestatelegal.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Resource-Guide1.pdf>

³ The Welcoming Schools Project, *School Climate for Transgender Students*: https://assets2.hrc.org/welcoming-schools/documents/WS_School_Climate_for_Transgender_Students_Data.pdf

This bill would send a message to our students that discrimination will not be tolerated and will provide a path forward when students encounter these challenges. Critically, this legislation codifies the existing MSDE guidance in place, empowering LGBTQ+ students to take action against discrimination by providing a clear, tangible process and potential remedy. It will also guarantee that students attending private schools that receive state funding will have access to these necessary protections.

Our students have a right to robust protection against discrimination at school. Given this critical goal, the LGBTQ Democrats of Montgomery County strongly urges a favorable report on HB1204 - the Inclusive Schools Act.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this critical piece of legislation.

Shannon Quinn
Chair, Advocacy Committee
LGBTQ Democrats of Montgomery County