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Honorable Chairperson Anne R. Kaiser  
House Office Building,  
6 Bladen St.  
Annapolis, MD 21401 – 1991

February 20, 2020

Re: SUPPORT for HB1204, Testimony from the Human Rights Campaign in support of comprehensive nondiscrimination protections in education

Dear Chairperson Anne R. Kaiser and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBTQ citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. HRC believes that all youth deserve a safe educational environment that is free of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. On behalf of HRC's more than three million members and supports, more than fourteen thousand of whom live in Maryland, we thank you for allowing us to submit testimony in favor of HB 1204.

The passage of this nondiscrimination legislation is critical to ensuring the safety and well-being of young people and their families in Maryland. LGBTQ students face unique challenges in schools as a result of stigma and discrimination, with many LGBTQ youth reporting instances of bullying and harassment.

Schools have an obligation to provide safe and affirming learning environments for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Unfortunately, many LGBTQ youth have reported feeling unsupported by school staff and administrators. According to the 2017 National School Climate Survey conducted by GLSEN, just over one-third of students indicated that their school administration was somewhat or very supportive of LGBTQ students.

LGBTQ students who experienced high levels of victimization were three times as likely to be absent from school and had grades on average a half a grade lower than their peers. Though these statistics reflect the experiences of LGBTQ students, consequences like absenteeism, lowered educational aspirations and academic achievement, and poorer psychological well-being can affect all students who experience acts of discrimination.

For LGBTQ students, as well as their parents and legal guardians, addressing discrimination can be an uphill battle. By codifying anti-discrimination protections, HB 1204 will ensure that



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LGBTQ students and their families are protected from and have a clear remedy to stop discriminatory action. As a result, we strongly support and urge you to swiftly pass this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sarah Warbelow". The ink is black and the signature is fluid and legible.

Sarah Warbelow  
Legal Director  
Human Rights Campaign