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LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

Bill: HB 0155/SB 0098 Inclusive Schools Act

Organization: PFLAG Salisbury Inc., PO Box 5107, Salisbury Maryland 21802

Submitted by: Michèle Schlehofer, Legislative Chair

Position: **FAVORABLE**

SALISBURY PFLAG SUPPORTS THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS ACT

I am submitting this testimony in FAVOR of HB 0155/SB0098 on behalf of PFLAG Salisbury, the Salisbury, Maryland Chapter of PFLAG National.

Salisbury is located in the Wicomico County Public Schools (WCPS) district, which contains 24 schools and serves more than 15,000 students. WCPS has zero policies, guidelines, or procedures established for the protection of LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) youth.

This legislation is much-needed. Over the past 6 years of PFLAG Salisbury's operation, we have witnessed a revolving door of LGBTQ+ youth and their families who reach out to us with complaints about the treatment of LGBTQ+ youth in WCPS. These complaints include, but are not limited to, harassment and bullying of LGBTQ+ youth by teachers, school staff, and other students, school administrators who suppress the formation or activities of LGBTQ+ centered student clubs, intentional misgendering of transgender students, school staff who "out" LGBTQ+ youth to unsupportive parents, and school staff who suggest families move to urban areas or homeschool, in response to requests for a supportive school climate.

These instances pervade schools in the district across all levels, and contribute to an overall school climate that is at best unsupportive and at worst openly hostile. Such environments contribute to lower academic performance, lower GPA, increased absences, increased likelihood of school dropout, and less likelihood of attending college among LGBTQ+ youth. Therefore, PFLAG Salisbury Inc. supports HB 0155/SB 0098 and recommends a FAVORABLE report in committee.