



Trans Maryland
1800 E Northern Parkway #66332
Baltimore MD 21239



GLSEN Inc.
110 William Street, 30th Floor,
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Senate Bill 0199
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 8, 2023
Position: Favorable with Amendments

Trans Maryland is a multi-racial, multi-gender community power building organization for Maryland's trans community. GLSEN's mission is to ensure that every member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. **We support with amendments SB 0199, Primary and Secondary Education - Comprehensive Health Education Framework - Established**). This bill is essential to ensure our trans and queer youth receive information about their existence in the primary and secondary school environment in the health curriculum. In order to fully support this bill, we require an amendment to the bill to remove the requirement for a parental or guardian opt-out. Codifying the opt-out is discriminatory, and sends the message to trans and queer youth and families that we do not have a place in public education, rather than codifying that we deserve the same rights to be reflected in curriculum (and as a result in public life), as our fellow cisgender and heterosexual counterparts. Cisgender (non-transgender) youth have a gender identity. Heterosexual (non-queer) youth have a sexual orientation. If your teacher is a man, he has a gender identity. If your teacher is a woman, she has a gender identity. If your teacher is a man married to a woman, he has a sexual orientation. If your teacher is a woman married to a man, she has a sexual orientation. Our previous governor of Maryland Larry Hogan has a sexual orientation and a gender identity, he is married to a woman and is heterosexual. He is a man, that is his gender identity. No one can opt out of these concepts in the school environment. It is impossible to remove gender identity and sexual orientation from primary or secondary education, because these concepts are woven into the fabric of our society.

Noting a proliferation of anti-trans and anti-queer opponents to this bill, we must ask, in 2023 why we are tolerating the assumption that trans and queer youth, families, and school faculty are the only ones who have a gender identity or a sexual orientation? We know the harm when the only representation for womanhood is white womanhood, and Black, Brown, and Indigenous women are not reflected in society or curriculum framework, we know the harm when the only representation for a body is an able body, and disabled bodies are not permitted to be reflected in society or curriculum framework. We know that presenting the myth that trans and queer people's existence is conditional in society is fundamentally wrong, and discriminatory.

We have openly queer legislators who are present in this hearing and the previous hearing on this bill. A few of our openly queer Maryland General Assembly's elected legislators are married, that is a fact that cannot be erased because some people experience discomfort. Discomfort is part of learning, and part of growth. The clear, non-discriminatory pathway to reducing that discomfort is learning about sexual orientation and gender identity in age appropriate ways. We have openly trans and queer persons of note throughout history, for instance we have students attending a public elementary school in Maryland named after Bayard Rustin, the Black

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cisgender gay man who was the architect of the 1941 civil rights March on Washington. Bayard Rustin's gayness is a part of who he was. It is impossible to remove trans and queer people from our Maryland public school system's curriculum framework because we are an integral part of the formation of this country, we are teachers and faculty there, and because many of our students go home to their queer family.

Our students must be taught about the existence of trans and queer people to prevent harm, discrimination, and violence, to learn about their fellow classmates, neighboring families, faculty, historical persons of note, and legislators in service of the betterment of our society. UNICEF states that "children are individuals, children are neither the possessions of parents nor of the state, nor are they mere people-in-the-making; they have equal status as members of the human family." UNICEF also states "Social research findings show that children's earliest experiences significantly influence their future development. The course of their development determines their contribution, or cost, to society over the course of their lives." What more costs will the queer and trans youth of Maryland bear if their government yields to those who seek to remove queer and trans youth and adults from public life? What costs will cisgender and heterosexual youth charge to our society if they are opted out of information about members of a vulnerable, marginalized group?

From the GLSEN 2019 National School Climate Survey, we know that Maryland schools were not safe for most LGBTQ+ secondary school students. 24% of Maryland's LGBTQ youth surveyed had experienced physical harassment, 12% had experienced physical assault, and 67% had experienced verbal harassment ([2019 National School Climate Survey, GLSEN](#)). Almost one quarter of surveyed Maryland LGBTQ youth experienced physical harassment, which is an unacceptable level of violence in our Maryland Public Schools. When we endeavor to improve the culture of violence against LGBTQIA+ people in our society by reducing those numbers, we know that education is key. Opting out of learning about the existence of this community is a pathway to continued violence, and is fundamentally out of alignment with acknowledging the inherent dignity of transgender and queer youth and families.

Codifying the parental and guardian opt-out exacerbates the public health emergency around Black trans women's safety. Black trans women are facing shocking levels of physical violence up to and including murder by people who were not taught that being transgender is a legitimate way to exist as a human being. Codifying the parental and guardian opt-out exacerbates the mental health emergency facing our LGBTQIA+ youth, and increases their risk of attempting or completing suicide. Data from the Trevor Project reflects that LGBTQIA+ youth in affirming schools had nearly 40% lower odds of attempting suicide compared to LGBTQIA+ youth in non-affirming schools (The Trevor Project, 2020). To clarify, it is not that LGBTQIA+ youth inherently experience higher levels of suicidal ideation, but it is the way their gender identity or sexual orientation is treated by others in their environment that impacts this aspect of their mental health (Johns et al., 2019; Johns et al., 2020; Meyer, 2016). Our trans and queer youth in Maryland deserve better.

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The first Black governor elected in Maryland, Governor Wes Moore, set the standard for us all in his recent State of the State speech where he implored us to “leave no one behind”. It is imperative we follow his guidance and ensure we do not leave our trans and queer youth in Maryland’s public schools behind. This crucial piece of legislation will benefit our youth in the state of Maryland, the adoption of an amendment removing the parental and guardian opt-out for gender identity and sexual orientation is imperative. For these reasons, Trans Maryland and GLSEN **urge a favorable with amendment report on SB 0199.**

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