

Testimony in **SUPPORT** of Senate Bill 199- **with amendments**  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
**Primary and Secondary Education – Comprehensive Health Education Framework - Established**  
February 8, 2023

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman  
Chairman  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan  
Vice-Chair  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan,

The Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at the University of Maryland School of Medicine submit this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 199 (cross-filed HB0119)– **with amendments**. This bill, sponsored by Senators Lam, Rosapepe, Hettleman, and Washington requires the State Department of Education, in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health, to develop a comprehensive health education framework and requires each county board of education to create an age-appropriate curriculum that is consistent with the comprehensive health education framework. This bill also requires each county board to establish a method by which a parent or guardian may opt out of certain topics, subject to certain requirements.

The Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at the University of Maryland School of Medicine is one of the largest and oldest departments of basic science in the School of Medicine. We advance the health of the public by investigating the causes, treatments, and prevention of human health problems. We optimize our effect through teaching, collaboration, and service to the community. Our department is a multidisciplinary team dedicated to improving the health of the public by training medical students, graduate students, and health professionals, conducting research, and serving as a resource to the university, the state, and the broader community. As such, we are the home to a number of experts who are well-qualified to weigh in, from a scientific perspective, on the proposed legislation.

This legislation is an effort to codify a framework that already exists and is mandated by COMAR regulations. Our experts in preventive medicine, public health, and community engagement agree that passing this education is necessary to ensure that all students in Maryland receive the standardized Comprehensive Health Education Curriculum that has already been written, reviewed, and approved by the Maryland State Department of Education. Of note, the sponsor of this bill, Senator Lam, is a graduate of the University of Maryland School of Medicine and is trained and board-certified in Public Health and General Preventive Medicine; as such, he is well within his subject-area expertise in proposing this legislation. Esteemed and trusted colleagues, who are also preeminent scholars in the fields of nutritional epidemiology and public health, are among those who reviewed and contributed to the framework. In summary, those who have designed the curriculum and written the associated legislation are considered trusted experts and are competent to make recommendations regarding the implementation of this educational framework. This bill is designed to improve the health of Maryland’s children in an objective and measurable manner.

Topics such as bullying, violence prevention, sexuality, gender identity and sexual orientation are recommended components of comprehensive health education, so listing them explicitly will provide a mandate for their inclusion in local curricula where they may not have previously been included. These are vital pieces of a comprehensive health education framework and therefore, integral to this bill. There is a plethora of evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of comprehensive health education curricula in schools, which includes education on sexual health. Comprehensive sexual education in schools has been recommended by the U.S. Community Preventive Services Task Force as an

effective tool to reduce risky sexual behavior by teens<sup>1</sup>. The Community Preventive Services task force also recommends school-based anti-bullying and violence interventions be part of school health curricula<sup>2</sup>. The CDC has designed and promoted a program on school health which includes recommended standards for health education in schools<sup>3</sup>.

While opt out clauses are common gaps for jurisdictions to provide a mechanism for parents and guardians to decline to participate in comprehensive health education on behalf of their children, these clauses are in opposition to our central values of diversity, equity, and inclusion and we recommend changing the bill to read that local boards **may** provide an opt out procedure rather than **shall** provide an opt out procedure.

Finally, we acknowledge that education cannot and should not be wholly prescribed by statewide measures, however this bill is unique and important because of the evidence above that clearly shows the benefit of exposing children to a comprehensive health education curriculum. From our scientific public health perspective, statewide standards for comprehensive health education result in healthier kids. As there is not scientifically demonstrated detriment to children who participate in comprehensive health education, opt out clauses should be at the discretion of the local board, who should have the option to eliminate them from their implementation efforts.

With this one proposed amendment, and on behalf of the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, I urge you to offer full support of SB199.

Respectfully Submitted,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thecommunityguide.org/findings/hiv-aids-other-stis-and-teen-pregnancy-group-based-comprehensive-risk-reduction-interventions.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thecommunityguide.org/findings/violence-prevention-school-based-anti-bullying-interventions.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health-education/index.htm>. The CDC also has developed a Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (HECAT) that can be used to assess the quality of health education curricula.