

## **Mohammed Choudhury**

State Superintendent of Schools

BILL:	Senate Bill (SB) 119	DATE:	February 8, 2023
SUBJECT:	Primary and Secondary Education - Comprehensive Health Education Framework - Established	COMMITTEE:	Education, Energy, and the Environment
POSITION:	Support		
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## **EXPLANATION:**

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) respectfully submits this testimony in support of **Senate Bill 199 - Primary and Secondary Education - Comprehensive Health Education Framework - Established**, which ensures a research-based, best-in-class, developmentally-appropriate approach to health education across grade bands. Protecting the health education framework process in law ensures that the health education framework can remain free from subjectivity and bias.

MSDE has heard testimony at State Board of Education meetings this year pertaining to the health education framework – testimony that calls for MSDE to better explain the difference between frameworks and curricula. So, before I talk about what this bill *is*, let me first dispel myths of what it *is not*. SB 199 is not a curriculum bill – a framework is not a curriculum. In fact, SB 199 enshrines parental rights to a process that ensures that their children have a developmentally- and age-appropriate, scientific, researched-based framework for health education within which *local education agencies* (LEAs), not the State, adopt and implement their curricula. SB 199 strengthens the process to meaningfully engage parents in the process of curricular adoption and codifies opt-out provisions for families. SB 199 requires LEAs to establish clear opt-out policies, guidelines, and procedures for family life, human sexuality, gender identity, and sexual orientation topics. It also requires LEAs to make arrangements for families who "opted out" their students to receive appropriate alternative learning activities. Covid-19 makes clear that parents and guardians must have opportunities to be part of the educational experiences of their child.

Senate Bill 199 - Primary and Secondary Education - Comprehensive Health Education Framework – Established Education, Energy, and the Environment February 8, 2023

Now, what *is* this bill? With regard to the framework itself, SB 199 will codify and protect the existing process by which MSDE and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) collaborated with a broad cross-section of stakeholders to develop the current State framework that LEAs use when making their own, local decisions about curriculum and instructional materials. Codifying these provisions in State law will ensure that the skills and curricular outcomes of the health framework remain tied to objective, scientific, data-driven, and evidence-based research. MSDE and MDH aligned the framework to national and State standards and Maryland legislative requirements using data about Maryland's youth along with scientifically and medically accurate information to identify essential health education skills at each grade level.

This bill emphasizes the requirements of the Comprehensive Health Education regulation (COMAR 13A.04.18) by mandating that LEAs convene a joint committee of parents and/or guardians, educators, health experts, and representatives of the local education community to review and comment on the instructional materials used in the family life and human sexuality unit to ensure that it is age-appropriate and represents all students regardless of ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

This bill also provides opportunities for parents and/or guardians to view instructional materials and make informed decisions about allowing their students to participate in the family life and human sexuality unit, including the gender identity and sexual orientation topics.

MSDE respectfully requests that you consider this information and issue a favorable report on **Senate Bill 199**. Please contact Justin Dayhoff at 410-767-0439 or <u>justin.dayhoff@maryland.gov</u> for any additional information.