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The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chairman
And Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee
Senate of Maryland,
Annapolis, Maryland

RE: **HB 119** – County Boards of Education – Curriculum Guides and Courses of Study –
Requirements – **OPPOSED**

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members,

HB 119 uses intimidation and threats of loss of state funding for any deviation from the State Board of Education's policy and guidelines for the program of instruction for public schools. It requires that a county board must follow every element of the State Board's curriculum guides and prohibits local boards and schools from allowing any student from opting out of any course of instruction in a manner not approved by the State Board. The State Superintendent acting alone can force withholding of 10% of state funding for a county school system with a 30-day notice to comply. The State Superintendent can withhold an additional 10% of state funds after 90 days if not satisfied with the response.

Such a dictatorial approach will stifle innovation and creativity at the local level. It will hamper county boards of education, most elected by county voters, in responding to the needs, concerns and values of their citizens regarding the education of their children. Local flexibility is crucial to bringing all children up to grade level in reading and mathematics after 2 years of COVID interruptions and the detrimental impacts of virtual education.

One can only guess that HB 119 is a response to the vocal objections of parents to the State Board of Education's adoption of its "Comprehensive Health Education Framework". This framework begins with pre-school and continues through 12th grade. Some objections to the Framework include:

- **Standard 1a: Mental and Emotional Health**
 - There is just one mention of "parents" for grades Pre-K through Grade 5 but repeated use of "trusted adults" who can help with emotions or feelings. Parents must be identified as the most important trusted adults, and family beliefs and values respected.
 - Parents must be involved whether they agree with the action or not. School systems that exclude parents on the premise of protecting student privacy as it relates to mental or emotional health are violating parental rights and legal obligations. Parents will be left to deal with the consequences, monetary and emotional.



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- These elements of the Framework are even more concerning in light of the State's recent change that allows 12-year-olds to seek mental or emotional health counseling and treatment without parental knowledge or consent. This diminishes parental rights and increases the likelihood that school or health personnel can guide a 12-year-old into counseling or treatment without parents' knowledge or consent.
- **Standard 1b: Substance Abuse Prevention** waits until 4th grade to talk about cannabis or illegal drugs, but in Grade 2 introduces the subjects of alcohol, nicotine, and electronic smoking devices. Edible cannabis products are likely to become an increasing danger as recreational cannabis is rolled out.
- **Standard 1c: Family Life and Human Sexuality**
 - Kindergarteners will *"identify different types of families (e.g., single-parent, same gender, intergenerational, cohabitating, adoptive, foster, etc.)"* with no mention of two-parent, heterosexual, or married families.
 - Grade 6 -- *identify human reproductive systems, including medically accurate names for internal and external genitalia and their functions, and describe conception and its relationship to the menstrual cycle and vaginal sex.*
 - Grade 7 -- *identify solo, vaginal, anal, and oral sex along with possible outcomes for each; and identify ways to prevent pregnancy, including not having sex and effective use of contraceptives, including condoms.*
- These are highly sensitive subjects. The *Framework* makes no mention of protecting the innocence, modesty, or dignity of children in these discussions. How will classes be structured? Who will teach the more sensitive subjects? What are their qualifications?

We are concerned that this intersectionality of education and health services could lead to children being prescribed:

- (1) Contraceptives or abortion pills, or referred for abortions.
- (2) Puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones or gender-affirming surgery before age 18.

It is widely recognized that the human brain continues developing until about age 25, which is why juveniles are not held to the same level of responsibility for serious crimes committed under age 18. For these same reasons, a child under age 18 should not be able to submit to actions that permanently remove their ability to reproduce.



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Whether intentional or not, provisions of the *Framework* and this bill will have negative implications for the two-parent family as the basic unit of our society.

Parents and citizens need to have access to proposed curriculums for all subjects and have the opportunity to voice their concerns before adoption of policies and curriculums. One size does not fit all.

For all of these reasons please give **HB119** an **UNFAVORABLE** report.

Sincerely,
Ella Ennis
Legislative Chairman
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