

Emily Tarsell, LCPC, LCPAT

**2314 Benson Mill Road
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Amend SB199

February 7, 2023

Dear Chairman, Sponsors and EEE Committee Members,

I am Emily Tarsell, a licensed mental health therapist and concerned citizen of Maryland. As a therapist, I worked with children and families for decades both in private practice and school settings. While I personally no longer have school-age children, I care deeply about children of all ages, the bonds between children and their family/caretaker and the bond between children, families, schools and community.

It seems like a good idea to introduce to children in a planned way experiences, concepts and information with the intent of helping them live healthy lives and have healthy relationships. Many families are already doing this. It is kind of a part of what basic parenting is all about. But this particular “Framework” comes across as too top-down. Many parents are understandably angry about this since it appears that they are being told what their children should learn and then patronizingly told they can “opt out” of some things but pretty much have to follow the framework for which they had no input.

The Framework is not culturally sensitive and was not developed in a way that would model understanding, cooperation, warmth, caring... the kind of values that are at the very heart of health and healthy relationships. The tone of telling parents/guardians that their children have to do this and that which may be counter to that family’s culture and values is divisive and, well, unhealthy. It does not help things to then say, “Well you can opt out.” That is not modeling the very behavior and values the program is presumably wanting to teach.

I urge you to lead by example and create a framework from the bottom up. That could mean starting over or at the very least amending what you have by letting families and children have more of a voice regarding the topics and content. Thank you.

Emily Tarsell, LCPC