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HB 119

March 29, 2023

TO: Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Interim Director of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 119 – County Boards of Education – Curriculum Guides and Courses of Study – Requirements

POSITION: Support

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 119.

This legislation would require each county board of education to follow policy and guidelines for the program of instruction for public schools established by the State Board of Education. The bill also requires the State Superintendent to notify a county if they are not following the policy and guidelines and allows the Superintendent to withhold funds from a county if they do not resolve the discrepancy.

Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) and City Schools have been working in tandem towards a comprehensive framework. HB 119 would not only fill the gaps, but would allow students the opportunity to receive developmentally appropriate health education and strengthen their ability to create a deeper understanding of body autonomy, health relationships, and consent.

All citizens, including our youngest ones, deserve the education to build a foundation that allows them to make meaningful decisions about their lives and futures; and this requires comprehensive education with access to information, resources and services they need to make informed, supported decisions about their bodies and relationships. To this end, the BCA believes that the City of Baltimore's young people deserves health education that is age-appropriate, medically accurate and comprehensive.

Young people who do not receive comprehensive health education may enter adolescence and adulthood ill-informed and miseducated. They likely enter into becoming sexually active early and enter into relationships without the knowledge they need to act responsibly and safely. If 18-year-olds are allowed to marry in Maryland, we owe them a comprehensive health education that will keep a young person of this age safe.

Stakes are high and time is of the essence for youth in our city. Lack of comprehensive health education can lead to unintended pregnancies, sexual assault, harmful relationships, STIs, and discrimination. Comprehensive health education is not just necessary, it is critical to the overall wellbeing, health literacy, overall educational achievement, and success that we want for our youth.

Passing this bill will help alleviate our public health crisis; lessen health and economic disparities based on gender and race; and increase dignity and reduce stress among our citizens. For these reasons, the BCA respectfully request a **favorable** report on HB119.

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