



## LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

Bill: **HB0119/SB0199 County Boards of Education - Curriculum Guides and Courses of Study - Requirements**

Organization: GLSEN Maryland, [chapter@md.glsen.org](mailto:chapter@md.glsen.org)

Submitted by: Michele Schlehofer, Board Member

Position: **FAVORABLE**

### GLSEN MARYLAND SUPPORTS MDSE EDUCATIONAL GUIDELINES

I am submitting this testimony in **FAVOR of HB0119/SB0199** on behalf of GLSEN Maryland, the statewide chapter of GLSEN National, a nonprofit organization centered on creating and sustaining inclusive K-12 education for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) students.

GLSEN Maryland supports HB0119/SB0199 as it promotes education which is inclusive of LGBTQ+ students. LGBTQ+ students are often drastically underserved by existing school curricula. School districts in some areas of our state are not implementing MDSE guidelines, depriving students in these districts access to a robust education. **Requiring county school districts to follow educational curricula outlined by the Maryland State Department of Education ensures all students educated in Maryland public schools are taught from a curriculum inclusive of LGBTQ+ people, which has significant educational benefits to students.**

**LGBTQ+ students face considerable stigma at school which negatively impacts their education.** Research by our parent organization, GLSEN National, finds that LGBTQ+ students in unsupportive school environments experience greater absenteeism, have higher rates of dropout, and have lower GPAs (GLSEN, 2019). As a result of their experiences in K-12 schools, LGBTQ+ students are less likely to go on to college.

**Schools usually do not teach about LGBTQ+ history, culture, and people, and often expose students to anti-LGBTQ+ stereotypes.** The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (2019) found that less than 20% of schools taught students about LGBTQ+ history, culture, and people; worse, 17% of schools reinforced *negative* stereotypes about LGBTQ+ people in their curricula, contributing to stigma of LGBTQ+ students. GLSEN (2019) finds that only 21.4% of Black youth are taught positive representations of LGBTQ+ history, culture, or people at school.

The damaging effects of curricula not inclusive of LGBTQ+ people become even more apparent when considering that **very few LGBTQ+ youth have access to inclusive health and sex education.** GLSEN's research finds that only 8.2% of LGBTQ+ youth had access to inclusive health education at school. LGBTQ+ youth perceive the health education they receive in school as inadequate (Pampati et al., 2020). Existing health education not only ignores the needs of LGBTQ+ youth, but in the case of education centered around dating, intimate relationships, and sexuality, it promotes heteronormative stereotypes that exclude and marginalize LGBTQ+ youth (Bible et al., 2020; Gowen et al., 2014; Hobaica, 2017).

**Comprehensive health education which is inclusive of LGBTQ+ youth leads to better public health, and aligns with best-practices in public health.** Inadequate and non-inclusive curricula leads to LGBTQ+ youth having worse health outcomes, such as participation in high-risk activities (Hobaica, 2017) which lead to greater likelihood of unplanned pregnancy (Bodnar & Tornello, 2019; Herrick et al., 2010) and greater risk of dating and intimate partner violence (Hobaica, 2017; Kann, 2016). LGBTQ+ youth who attend schools with inclusive curriculum have lower levels of depression and suicidality (Proulx et al., 2019). Comprehensive, inclusive health education helps prevent dating and intimate partner violence, fosters the formation of healthy intimate relationships, helps prevent child sex abuse, improves social and emotional learning, and improves media literacy (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). Inclusive health education is recommended by the American Medical Association, the National Education Association, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is supported by the CDC and the American Bar Association. **Failure to include the needs of LGBTQ+ students in health curricula means withholding the latest advancements and best-practices in public health from all students.**

Finally, **broadly inclusive education benefits all youth, not just LGBTQ+ students, by improving school climate.** It is not just LGBTQ+ youth who are the target of anti-LGBTQ+ bullying; students who are heterosexual or not transgender are also frequent targets of anti-LGBTQ+ bullying (for instance, heterosexual students who are not transgender can also be called anti-gay slurs, teased for being too effeminate or masculine, etc.; Fisher et al., 2012; McCarty-Caplan, 2013). Because offering comprehensive, inclusive education reduces stigma and marginalization of LGBTQ+ youth, it leads to improved school climates for *everyone*. Students at schools with inclusive education reported hearing fewer slurs, lower levels of victimization, felt safer, missed fewer days of school, and had a higher GPA in comparison to students whose schools did not cover LGBTQ+ topics in education (GLSEN, 2019). LGBTQ+ students whose schools had inclusive curricula also report feeling safer and more accepted (GLSEN, 2019). Similar patterns have been found for Black LGBTQ+ youth (GLSEN, 2020); further, Black LGBTQ+ youth who attend schools with LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum also felt their race or ethnicity was more supported at school (GLSEN, 2020). Similarly, Snapp et al. (2015) found that LGBTQ+ youth who attend schools which included LGBTQ+ youth in anti-harassment curricula reported lower harassment, less victimization, and felt more safe and supported in their school. And, schools that have implemented inclusive health curricula find that students are subsequently more likely to intervene when witnessing bullying (Baams et al., 2017; Proulx et al., 2019).

Given the disproportionate educational disparities experienced by LGBTQ+ youth, coupled with the research which demonstrates that inclusive education reduces these disparities and improves school climate for all students, GLSEN Maryland supports comprehensive education which is inclusive of LGBTQ+ youth. Therefore, **GLSEN Maryland supports HB0119/SB0199 and recommends a FAVORABLE report in committee.**