

Dear Ways and Means Committee,

I am writing to express my concerns with HB119.

At a high level, I am concerned that the comprehensive health education framework to be developed by the state may be overly restrictive on local school boards. I would prefer that the state provide *general* (i.e. *noncomprehensive*) guidelines for school boards to incorporate into their curricula. Maryland is an incredibly diverse state, so allowing for this autonomy at the local level would allow for school boards to particularly target the health education needs of the students in their local areas rather than needing to strictly follow a comprehensive framework which may require emphases on topics of lesser relevance to students in a given geographical area.

I also have a specific concern with the inclusion of Subparagraphs IV and V in Paragraph 3 of the content being considered for addition to existing law. It is definitively appropriate for youth to be educated on these topics by their *parents/guardians*, not the public school system. It may be true that some parents/guardians fail to fulfil this responsibility or that there are special circumstances where a youth does not *have* a parent/guardian to fulfil this task, and I imagine proponents of the bill would cite these scenarios as a reason they feel these topics should be included in public education. However, I believe that mandating the inclusion of these topics in public education will create a more serious problem by sending the incorrect message that education on these topics is not primarily the responsibility of parents, even though it is.

Additionally, these topics have sadly become politicized and ideologically charged. This will have the practical implication that the mandated instruction on these topics will often include a significant ideological component rather coming from a position of objectivity. This is another reason it is inappropriate for them to be addressed in a government mandated fashion.

As stated above, I would prefer that these topics were not included in the legislation, but I do appreciate the allowance provide for parents to opt out. I do believe that the exception for HIV and AIDS should *not* be included, however, but that parents/guardians should be permitted to opt out of these topics as well. At a minimum, I believe parents should be permitted to agree to educate their children on these topics privately rather than in the classroom.

I also believe that steps should be taken to ensure that the alternative learning objectives and measurable goals to be established by school boards for students whose parents opt out are acceptable to those parents.

Thank you for your consideration.