



TESTIMONY PACKAGE 'A'

Coalition Leads

2024

MARYLAND STUDENT COALITION

PACKAGE 'A'

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Collected Testimony Package

January 17, 2024

TO:	Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment; Maryland Senate
FROM:	Chikamara Obioha, Director - Maryland Student Coalition (410)599-1815, chikamaraobioha@gmail.com 5209 Spurr Terrace, Ellicott City, MD, 21043
RE:	SB 189: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts
POSITION:	In Favor

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a current senior attending Howard High School, the Deputy Director of the Maryland Student Coalition, and current student representative on the Howard County Community Action Council from Howard County, in favor of Senate Bill 189.

The way we can move forward and make change as a county, state, county, and individuals must start at schools. The youth today are tomorrow's leaders, and diverse education is the gateway to shaping empathic, communicable, and sincere leaders who will serve their constituents. History inherently supports Senate Bill 189, the Civil Rights Act of 194, the 19th Amendment, and the Crime Control Act of 1986 are all landmark statements that justify the means of passing the bill.

From the civil rights movement to the suffrage movement, time and time again, students are subjected to an ever-changing world. A world that must reflect what we learn in schools. Students must be able to practice the same civic engagement they learn in class and that stems from the content they consume in school. English class is the one universal lesson students are taught K-12th, and it is the one class students learn how to engage and communicate with each other. According to the National Institute of Health, the English curriculum has been proven to impact a student's global perspective. The same global perspective they gain from reading and being exposed to diverse literature and perceptive through diverse authors.

If passed, this Senate Bill 189 will enable students to write a new page in our history books. With the implementation of this bill, students will be able to break down the stigma placed around other ethnic and self-identifying groups of people created by systematic discrimination through the silencing of diverse perspectives. Senate Bill 189 will standardize the rules around the English language arts reading curriculum while allowing – within certain boundaries – for customization across locales. In its authentic form, Senate Bill 189 is a supporting tool for both the likes of local jurisdictions and the students they support.

In my own experience as an advocate, I, like many students across the state of Maryland, have witnessed the disparities in the curriculums being taught across Maryland, especially within the

literature we read. Beginning in middle school, I can only recall reading books by white authors. I was subjected to reading literature that only represented my past, not my present. It wasn't until high school that I learned of the marvelous and eye-opening novels of many African-American, Latinos, LGBTQ+, and more POC authors. With each book I read through my time in secondary school, it became overwhelmingly evident to me that students are being taught primarily through a single perspective. Especially after learning of the Carroll County Banned books list that prohibited the teaching of many ground mark novels such as "The Sun and Her Flowers," by Rupi Kaur. The literature I read has made a heavy impact on the individual I have become and I believe prohibiting students from learning about how others live through diverse perspectives is unjust. Members of the committee, *you* can provide the environment that fosters the emotional and social growth of these students. While my own experiences in student advocacy support this idea, I understand not all students in Maryland are given this same treatment.

Soon, we students will be the leaders of tomorrow with our schools, governments, and communities. Giving students the proper education to expand their knowledge of the many experiences that living in Maryland to not afford us allows students to grow into the educated leaders of the tomorrow.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 189.

Thank you.

January 17, 2024

TO:	Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment; Maryland Senate
FROM:	Elani Bui, Deputy Director - Maryland Student Coalition (240)907-9265, elanibui@gmail.com 22620 Sweetspire Dr, Clarksburg, MD, 20871
RE:	SB 189: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts
POSITION:	In Favor

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a current junior attending Richard Montgomery High School, the Deputy Director of the Maryland Student Coalition and current State Affairs Deputy for the Montgomery County Regional Student Government Association, in favor of Senate Bill 189.

Despite living in a world of technology, people are still divided and ignorant about practices different from their own. Literature has been used for centuries as a way to share peoples' cultures and customs, to expand their empathetic capabilities and curiosity, and to provoke thought. Having an English curriculum with media that is representative of the student body is essential to fostering this inclusive community. This is not a matter of just race, but a matter of culture. An Asian American author will write differently than a White one because the Asian author grew up with different experiences that shape their mindset and values. They grew up with different interpretations of familial relations, different ideas of what bullying means, and different goals for the future. If these cultural experiences are never discussed, and Asian children only read White-centric stories, they will feel ostracized by their own experiences. Furthermore, children are denied the opportunity to read in a new style which limits their interpretation of life.

This was my class' exact response when we read *The Namesake* last year. I fell in love with the book since it artfully touched on the immigrant experience for both the first and second generations. I could relate to Gogol as he desperately wanted to suppress his culture but also was irrevocably connected to it, especially during times of grief. However, my White friends hated the book and writing style. They didn't understand why Lahiri would write such an unlikeable character and were frustrated at the slow plot. My first time feeling seen in my English classroom was immediately shadowed by White distaste. We need to address this disconnect early on so that students can fully integrate into society.

The bill aims to represent all minorities including those of different religions, social classes, gender and sexual orientations, and the disabled community. This bill does *not* plan to completely replace the staple literature in English classes such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It only asks that minority writers be given a chance to showcase their talent and spread their stories. Maryland is a progressive state, and the passage of SB189 is necessary to progress our future. Maryland is not

alone in this interest. Other states have already taken on codifying diverse curriculums in state law; notably, the state legislatures of Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, and New Jersey have worked to pass curriculum regulations that are inclusive of gender and sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, mental and physical disabilities, and religious tolerance.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 189.

Thank you.

January 17, 2024

TO:	Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment; Maryland Senate
FROM:	Arpit Kesharwani, (410) 777-6246, arpit.harsit01@gmail.com
RE:	SB 189: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts
POSITION:	In Favor

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a current 11th-grade student attending Howard High School, the Director of Partnerships of the Maryland Student Coalition, and student representative of the Howard High School SGA, in favor of Senate Bill 189.

As Ralph Lauren, a philanthropist, and businessman, once said, “Books open windows to the world and have the power to transform lives”. Books serve as a way for students to get a “window” to other cultures, ideologies, and perspectives that are in other countries around the world. Students must be given access to diverse literature because it helps broaden their perspectives, cultivate their critical thinking skills, and develop empathy and respect. As the state of Maryland is growing in population and diversity, our students must be aware of other cultures. Currently, schools across Carroll and St. Mary’s counties have banned books that are written on and by diverse authors. By doing this, the students in these countries are unable to be educated on crucial topics and in the future will lack empathy for their colleagues from different cultures. Senate Bill 189 ensures that schools provide students with books that can help them learn about diverse cultures, perspectives, and ideologies.

I immigrated to the United States exactly ten years ago; ever since I have attended several public schools across Maryland. I remember walking into class and being asked questions like, “Why is there a *red dot* on your forehead?” or “Why don’t you celebrate Easter or Christmas like *us*?” or “How did you even move here?”. To my eight-year-old self, those questions made me feel uncomfortable, hesitant, and isolated. School is supposed to be pictured as a safe space for all students, but thousands of immigrant students, including myself, didn’t feel this way. However, Senate Bill 189 can change this and encourage schools to include books from diverse authors. My school primarily limits students to only reading books by Shakespeare, Harper E. Lee, or F. Scott Fitzgerald. If this bill is passed, schools can be encouraged to add books from authors such as Jason Reynolds, Maya Angelou, Rupi Kaur, and many other diverse writers. This will allow students to have a broader understanding of different cultures, identities, perspectives, challenges, and ideologies. In the future, this would allow students from different cultures to feel less isolated and uncomfortable in schools.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 189.

Thank you.

January 17, 2024

TO:	Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment; Maryland Senate
FROM:	Chloe Chang, (301) 605-3132, chloechang630@gmail.com 25369 Damascus Park Terrace, Damascus, MD 20872
RE:	SB 189: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts
POSITION:	In Favor

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a current sophomore attending Poolesville High School, the Director of Finances of the Maryland Student Coalition and Student Coordinator of Make Us Visible Maryland and President of Poolesville High School Amnesty International, in favor of Senate Bill 189.

As the Maryland population continues to grow in diversity, school curricula should adapt accordingly to reflect Maryland's student bodies. Not only do English and language arts classes improve students' understanding of and ability to use written and spoken language, they also improve students' ability to communicate and relate to others. As students speak and write, they also listen to, read, and understand the ideas and experiences of others. A diverse language arts curriculum is crucial for students to develop the empathy, understanding, and cultural awareness needed in today's increasingly diversified world. This bill will allow students to be taught these necessary skills, as well as ensure that school serves as a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students, no matter their background or ethnicity.

As an Korean American student in a predominantly white rural town, I have witnessed firsthand the ignorance that comes with a lack of exposure to diverse stories and education. From microaggressions to blatant discrimination to constantly being asked, "Where are you really from?", my identity as a natural-born American citizen has been questioned and undermined by my peers since kindergarten. Since then, I began to express my individuality and find my voice through writing, which made language arts and English classes consistently my favorite ones. However, with curriculums that never represented my experiences as an Asian American, it became increasingly difficult to enjoy or learn from such classes. It was not until ninth grade that I came across assigned material in class with diversity and Asian American representation — if I ever wanted to read diverse narratives before, I was forced to actively seek out such books outside of school. There are countless minority students who, like me, are underrepresented in their school curriculums, especially the undiversified language arts courses. The passing of this bill can ensure that no student in Maryland will face the ignorance that I and many others struggled with for years.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 189.

Thank you.

SB 189

January 17, 2024

TO:	Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment; Maryland Senate
FROM:	Madison Watts, Director of Senior Associates - Maryland Student Coalition (309)429-4066, maddiecassiewatts7@gmail.com 3904 Arbor Crest Way, Rockville, Maryland, 20853
RE:	SB 189: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts
POSITION:	In Favor

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, I am writing as a current junior attending Rockville High School, the Director of Senior Associates of the Maryland Student Coalition, and a current Advocacy Initiatives Coordinator in the Montgomery County Regional Student Government Association, in favor of Senate Bill 189.

The students of Maryland are diverse and the curriculum should represent and align with that dynamic. Engagement and participation are vital in the academic space, but how are students able to reflect on and analyze the content presented if they cannot relate to the information? Having an inclusive and diverse English language arts curriculum will ensure that students feel connected to the content that they are learning and that students are able to exit their secondary education system with sufficient knowledge pertaining to different cultures, identities, and ideas. A diverse and inclusive English Language Arts curriculum will produce empathetic and understanding individuals who are aware of global issues and the issues relating to those around them. The current Eurocentric English Language Arts curriculum is robbing students of this valuable and imperative knowledge.

As an African American student, I have felt severely underrepresented in my English curriculums year after year. I have not felt connected to the information presented in class because it is from the Eurocentric point of view. As a result, I am less interested and less incentivized to understand the information to a larger extent. In school, I read the required content and complete the required tasks but do not take time to appreciate the themes or messages because I feel very disconnected from the information. In fact, the lack of diversity and inclusivity in my English language arts curriculum has prompted me to venture out on my own to find books and content that I can relate to. If I had been presented with diverse topics in my English language arts curriculum earlier in my educational career, I would have had a greater passion for learning and felt included in my studies. School should be the place where students receive quality education on a plethora of topics, including racial diversity, regional diversity, gender diversity, and more. At a place where students are supposed to learn about the world and a wide range of topics, it is unfair to exclude diverse and inclusive topics within the English language arts curriculum. I genuinely and honestly believe that students would benefit from a diverse English language arts curriculum.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 189.

Thank you.