



TESTIMONY PACKAGE 'B'

Community Members

2024

MARYLAND STUDENT COALITION

PACKAGE 'B'

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Collected Testimony Package

January 17, 2024

TO:	Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment; Maryland Senate
FROM:	Blenda Undrakhbold - Student, Centennial High School (443)-909-9988, blendaundra1006@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 grader attending Centennial High School, the Director of Partnerships of the Maryland Student Coalition, and president of the Mental Health Club at Centennial High School, in favor of Senate Bill 189.

As an Asian American who grew up in a predominantly white area, it was hard growing up in a classroom where I was the only Asian student among everyone else. People would say my food smelled bad or I had small eyes, and it made me feel like an outcast, something a 3rd grader should never have to experience. I remember wishing I had blonde hair and blue eyes and being insecure to speak to my parents in my native language in front of other students.

Every year, my elementary school would hold a book fair where students were allowed to buy all sorts of books within their interests. One day after school I stumbled upon a picture book where the main character looked like me; an Asian girl with black hair. I picked up the book and read it all in one setting, not only to realize that for the first time, I felt like I wasn't alone in this. Students all over Howard County have faced the same experiences growing up, just like I did, and a simple 10-page book was able to ease my insecure thoughts and emotions. I want this to happen to every Asian American student—to feel like they aren't alone in this. Senate Bill 189 grants the wishes of those who want to feel heard and worthy, to educate others on different cultures and perspectives. If every book we read in English class is written by the same white authors, such as Shakespeare, Harper E. Lee, or F. Scott Fitzgerald, it will fail to recognize and emphasize the importance of other cultures and ideologies. Diversifying the authors can allow *all* students to feel heard, especially the ones who feel like outsiders in their classrooms.

Not only can Senate Bill 189 unify students of all different backgrounds, but it will be able to broaden perspectives of diverse cultures. Reading books from diverse authors such as Jason Reynolds, Maya Angelou, Rupi Kaur, and many other diverse writers can ensure that our Future Generation will grow up in an environment where they can read books from all sorts of different identities, leading them to make the world a better place for those who felt isolated.

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:	Honna Trinkl, Student - Poolesville High School 240-22-4280, britttrinkl@gmail.com 8333 Tea Rose Dr Gaithersburg MD, 20879
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 and the Recruitment & Retention Manager of Amnesty International, in favor of Senate Bill 189.

I would like to begin by stating that it should be one of the foremost goals of the Maryland government to recognize the sheer amount of diversity in Maryland, which, according to the Washington Post, is the most diverse state on the East Coast. Maryland has over 889,900 students enrolled in its public schools, and after graduation, these students will be exposed not only to Maryland's diversity but also to a globalized world that is becoming increasingly interconnected.

The importance of recognizing this diversity lies in the core values of creating a healthy society that promotes equality and justice. Therefore, a well-rounded education will provide much-needed exposure to rich diversity and help students challenge stereotypes, prejudices, and biases. It also fosters empathy and understanding, contributing to a more inclusive and tolerant society. These are only a few of the benefits of bringing diversity to the authors in our English curriculums. A few others would be the promotion of cultural competence, broadened perspectives, and enhanced learning environments.

With this in mind, it is hard to argue that this inherent heterogeneity should not be represented to the next generation through their education. The future of Maryland students is full of many different people from various backgrounds. To ignore this fact would be to ignore our students' futures. If given the ability to create a better, more tolerant, and inclusive society, it should not be a question to take advantage of it.

As a student at Montgomery County Public Schools, I've seen some diversity in what we learn, but not as much as I'd like. Most of what I've learned about different cultures seems to focus on the most well-known groups or what people consider "normal." What stands out to me is that I've never come across any stories or books written by someone like me – someone who comes from a mixed-race background, just like many people in Maryland.

This lack of representation makes me feel like my experiences aren't fully acknowledged in what we study. It's like my story and the stories of others like me are missing from our English classes. I think

it's important for the school curriculum to include a wider range of voices, including those from mixed-race backgrounds like mine.

I acknowledge that others can relate to their cultural issues being represented, and I don't have an issue with that. However, I find it challenging to see that my own experiences are not reflected in the curriculum. I wish that a younger version of myself could have encountered someone who shared her struggles and life experiences in school. It would have been inspiring and brought a sense of childlike joy to her. Now, all I can do is hope that the passage of this bill will allow a little girl who stands in my shoes to see herself represented in the education she receives.

By including more diverse perspectives, the school can make sure that all students feel seen and understood. It's not just about me – it's about creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for everyone, no matter where they come from or what their background is.

For the above reasons, 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:	Jordan Hayes, Student Member on the Board of Education - Calvert County Public Schools 443-771-6275, Hayesj.stuco@gmail.com 11615 Shoshone Trail, Lusby MD, 20657
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 Patuxent High School, the Student Board Member for CCPS, Class President at Patuxent, and one of three Student Workshop Coordinators for the Maryland Association of Student Councils, in favor of Senate Bill 189.

The state of Maryland works hard to maintain local authority over curriculum, which is an absolutely wonderful practice. This allows school systems to cater to their students' needs and interests. But, at times, this ability can cause an issue when it regards the content matter and Origin.

This bill will require all MD students to be exposed to a diverse group of author background, inspiration and information that we have seen filtered or overlooked in some school systems. The role of our education system is to prepare our students for the real world. We cannot do this by allowing them to continue to be deprived of knowledge of the diversity of our Society.

This bill is personally important to me as a Student Board Member. I witness students in the school system who are so incredibly naive to the happenings of the world around them. They lack exposure to current events and topics. This is something the state of Maryland can force a stop to. By requiring a more diverse English curriculum students of Maryland will be more exposed to the rich history, societal perspectives and many other experiences that they have been sheltered to in the past. This bill will open the door for students to read so many previously overlooked books and pieces of writing or speech!

It will be truly refreshing to see a new generation of Maryland students aware of the diversity of our society, especially through great literature.

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:	Shreya Dinesh, Senior Associate - Maryland Student Coalition 240-454-4031, sdines.debate@gmail.com 3263 Eleanors Garden Way, Woodbine MD 21797
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 freshman attending Glenelg High School, a Senior Associate of the Maryland Student Coalition, and the Corresponding Secretary of the Howard County Association of Student Councils, in favor of Senate Bill 189.

This bill is important legally because it supports the inclusiveness of learning about different races, cultures, and ethnicities in Maryland's school system through the advancement of the public school curriculum. Changing the curricula to be more diverse and involve people of all races is something that contributes to upholding the values in laws already passed in our state through other sectors of education; such as History.

The bill stands not only as important legally, but vital to students living in the state of Maryland. When learning about extreme discrimination African Americans faced due to the Jim Crow Laws in history class, students are exposed to acts of horrible racism. From this curriculum, they're able to realize that treating others differently because of the color of their skin isn't okay. Although this curriculum is helpful to these realizations, it should not be the only subject that is. English Language Arts holds just as much weight in shaping how students act and think, through the literature and authors it teaches about. Having a more diverse curriculum would benefit and supplement thoughts of embracing all people.

As a Howard County student brought up by parents who emigrated from India more than twenty years ago, the passing of Senate Bill 189 proves as a major decision for me. To further the acceptance of all ethnicities and backgrounds, the school system must nurture and work to improve the scope of which students like me are being taught every day. English has always been my favorite subject, but as my freshman year has continued, a lack of diversifying authors, and other material being shown in class is noticeable. We have never once learned about or gone through works written by worldly figures such as Mahatma Gandhi or the Dalai Lama. While I realize this subject is being taught in a country already famous for its vast group of successful authors, I still believe we should be highlighting those coming from different countries and nationalities as well. English Language Arts curriculum, especially during this generation, must incorporate core societal principles to public

students when being taught. From a firsthand high school student point of view, what is being taught plays an impactful role in shaping students' views on our differences.

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:	Tina Chen, Maryland Ambassador - Cancer Kids First (443)-854-3655, tchen2228@gmail.com 6624 Huntshire Drive, Elkridge, Maryland, 21075
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 Long Reach High School, the Maryland Ambassador for Cancer Kids First, and Project manager of Howard County Scholars, in favor of Senate Bill 189.

As an American-born Chinese (ABC) who experienced a significant cultural transition from a predominantly Asian-American area in New York to the diverse landscape of Maryland, I have come to recognize the importance of cultural and racial representation in literature.

This realization became apparent in my school's English Language Arts (ELA) curriculums, where classics by white authors, such as Shakespeare, are normalized and dominate the readings each year. While acknowledging the historical significance of these works, I advocate for a more inclusive approach that introduces literature from diverse authors and backgrounds.

Many educators and scholars agree that exposure to literature representing various cultural perspectives enriches the educational experience, fostering understanding, empathy, and a more comprehensive worldview. I strongly believe that incorporating works from authors of different ethnicities, backgrounds, and experiences into the ELA curriculum will create a more engaging and inclusive learning environment.

This shift will not only benefit students from underrepresented backgrounds but also contribute to the cultural competence of all students, preparing them for engagement with the diverse world beyond the classroom.

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:	Earmyas Mitiku, Student - Long Reach High School 301-242-1939 , e.miti894@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, my name is Earmyas Mitiku. I am writing as a current junior attending Long Reach High School in favor of Senate Bill 189.

As a second-generation Ethiopian American, I have been fortunate to grow up among a diverse community. I believe that being around so many different people has changed my perspective, and taught me to see the value of other cultures. Unfortunately, our diversity as a nation isn't reflected in our education. Minority authors are severely underrepresented in the English curriculum, and I feel that by failing to encourage diversity in our texts, the school system has done a disservice to its students.

SB 189 would signify a shift from the uniformity of the ELA curriculum present in Maryland classrooms to a more diverse and inclusive literature selection that more closely represents our varied cultural makeup. By being exposed to a wider variety of texts, students will be exposed to new, unique viewpoints, providing them with an enriched learning experience. Furthermore, various studies have shown that students feel safer when they see their experiences and cultures represented in society and education.

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:	Harshit Kesharwani, Student - Howard High School (667) 686 76210, harshitkesharwani06@gmail.com 7407 Federline Ln. Ellicott City, Maryland 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 9th grader attending Howard High School, the secretary of the Financial Literacy Club, in favor of Senate Bill 189.

As an Indian who immigrated to the United States when I was only 5 years old, my journey has been shaped by the challenge of trying to fit into a new environment and culture. The bill, SB 189: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts, aims to make school books more diverse and relatable. Growing up, I started to feel excluded as people struggled to see me as Asian because they did not know the diverse cultures in Asia. School books did not show diverse authors and perspectives either, which made me feel like I was not important, and invisible.

Having different voices and perspectives in school books is super important. Studies have shown that when someone reads about another culture, we can understand each other more, and think more critically. When we see ourselves in what we are learning, we feel more confident and improve in school. The SB 189 bill can change how we learn in Maryland. By adding more diverse authors to our English classes, we will start to recognize that our world is unique and exciting to learn about because of all the different cultures and backgrounds people come from. This means we can get more interesting and complete education. It is like a whole new door to different worlds because of more diverse books. To support SB 189, it is important to explain things clearly and make sure everyone can feel included. People may not know about diverse cultures in Asia, like India. When we share stories and help others learn more, we can get more people to feel included and not left out. Diverse books help us grow and learn, we can get more people to support the bill and make our schools more welcoming.

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

Thank you.