



**Maryland Commission
on LGBTQIA+ Affairs**

**TESTIMONY OF JEREMY BROWNING
DIRECTOR, MARYLAND COMMISSION ON LGBTQIA+ AFFAIRS
UNFAVORABLE STATEMENT ON SB0438
FAMILY LAW - FUNDAMENTAL PARENTAL RIGHTS**

February 14, 2024

Judicial Proceedings Committee

The Hon. William C. Smith, Chair
The Hon. Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair

Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee, my name is Jeremy Browning(he/him), and I am the Director of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs. The Commission was created by the 2021 Maryland General Assembly, and later altered in 2023, to assess challenges facing our LGBTQIA+ communities, establish best practices and recommendations for LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and provide testimony to legislative and administrative bodies.

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs is in strong opposition to Senate Bill 438, Family Law - Fundamental Parental Rights. While we acknowledge the importance of parental rights, we believe this bill prioritizes parental rights without adequate consideration for the well-being of LGBTQIA+ youth.

The Commission has extensively researched and analyzed the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in our state's education system. Reports such as the 2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey and the GLSEN 2021 Maryland State Snapshot reveal distressing data regarding the safety and well-being of LGBTQIA+ students in Maryland's schools.

These reports consistently demonstrate that Maryland's K-12 schools are frequently unsafe and hostile environments for LGBTQIA+ students. They experience alarming rates of bullying, harassment, assault, and discrimination from multiple sources, including peers, educators, administrators, and even family members. The

consequences of this hostility are severe, leading to lower academic achievement, diminished mental health, and increased risk of suicidal ideation and behavior among LGBTQIA+ youth.

According to the 2019 CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, transgender, nonbinary, and gender-expansive students face heightened risks and are disproportionately targeted for bullying and harassment in schools. Additionally, LGBTQIA+ youth of color experience compounded victimization due to both their racial and LGBTQIA+ identities, facing harassment and discrimination at alarming rates.

Moreover, the presence of anti-LGBTQIA+ groups in Maryland and across the nation further exacerbates these challenges, spreading misinformation and advocating for harmful policies that endanger the well-being of LGBTQIA+ youth. In this context, Senate Bill 438 could potentially embolden such groups and undermine efforts to support and protect LGBTQIA+ youth in our schools.

Given this dire situation, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs urges the committee to reject Senate Bill 438. Instead, we recommend prioritizing legislation and policies that address the systemic issues contributing to the marginalization and harm experienced by LGBTQIA+ youth in our schools.