

January 27, 2025

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Distinguished Committee Members—

My name is Brandon Russell, and I am a life-long resident of St. Mary's County. I serve as Vice Chair of Pride Southern Maryland, a nonprofit responsible for hosting an annual LGBTQIA+ pride event. Additionally, I represent the Southern Maryland region as a Commissioner on the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs. My experience with these organizations provide unique insight, though I must stress these views are my own and I am not speaking on behalf of any organization.

I urge a **favorable** report on HB161: Comprehensive Health Education Framework.

Two resources are available on the website of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs. The first, "A Decade of Data: Meta-Analysis of Data and Insights on the Experiences of LGBTQIA+ People in Maryland" (1) covers relevant subjects like access to affirming spaces, school bullying, and youth risk behavior. Data shows only about half of schools in Maryland provide LGBTQ+ affirming spaces, a significant opportunity (Figure 4, pg. 49). Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors and/or use tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Graphs, pg. 71).

The second resource available online is the "Post-Election LGBTQIA+ Community Insights Report" (2). The report is based on a survey, conducted between November 12 and December 6, 2024, with nearly 800 responses representing all 24 jurisdictions across the state. Results showed 47% of respondents felt worthless, while 49% felt hopeless "a little, most, or all of the time," (pg. 7-8)

Including topics like health promotion, mental and emotional health, substance abuse prevention, family life and human sexuality, gender identity and sexual orientation, safety and violence prevention, safe and appropriate social media and internet use, healthy eating, and disease prevention and control will directly, and positively, impact the statistics listed above. LGBTQ+ youth deserve access to spaces in which they can learn necessary information to keep them safe and well.

Once again, I urge a **favorable** report on HB161.

Thank you for your consideration.

Brandon Russell  
St. Mary's County, MD

(1) [https://gocri.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/01/A-Decade-of-Data\\_-\\_Meta-Analysis-of-Data-and-Insights-on-the-Experiences-of-LGBTQIA-People-in-Maryland-1.pdf](https://gocri.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/01/A-Decade-of-Data_-_Meta-Analysis-of-Data-and-Insights-on-the-Experiences-of-LGBTQIA-People-in-Maryland-1.pdf)

(2) <https://gocri.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/01/Post-Election-LGBTQIA-Community-Insights-Report.pdf>