

January 27, 2025

Re: oppose Bill HB0161

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed bill that seeks to prohibit parents and guardians in Maryland from opting their children out of health classes in public schools. While I respect the importance of health education in schools, I firmly believe that this legislation infringes upon parental rights and fails to honor the diversity of values, beliefs, and needs within our communities.

Parents and guardians are the primary educators and caretakers of their children, uniquely positioned to determine what is appropriate for their family's cultural, moral, and religious values. By removing the ability to opt out of health education classes that may conflict with these values, the bill undermines the role of parents and places the state in opposition to families.

Health education often covers sensitive topics such as sexuality, reproduction, and mental health. While these topics are undoubtedly important, they are also deeply personal. Families deserve the autonomy to decide when, how, and by whom these subjects are introduced to their children. The one-size-fits-all approach of mandatory participation disregards the individuality of students and the rich diversity of Maryland's communities.

Furthermore, forcing participation in such classes may erode trust between parents and public schools, a partnership that should be built on collaboration and mutual respect. Parents who feel alienated or disempowered may become less involved in their children's education overall, which could have long-term consequences for student success.

I urge you to reconsider the implications of this bill and advocate instead for legislation that empowers parents while still promoting comprehensive health education. For example, strengthening communication between schools and families about health class curricula and ensuring alternative educational pathways for students whose parents opt out would be more constructive approaches.

I respectfully request that you oppose this bill (including any bill that prohibits parents opt-out) and support policies that uphold the rights of parents and guardians in the education of their children.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Guiling Zhao