

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL HB0161 - FAVORABLE

Primary and Secondary Education - Comprehensive Health Education Framework – Established

TO: Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Wendy Novak, Carroll County, Maryland

I'm a member of the Maryland Commission for LGBTQIA+ Affairs, a resident of Carroll County, and a parent of a high school student that witnesses hate in schools. They have heard students saying that only white people are LGBTQ. They have been told that if you are or support LGBTQ people, you are going to hell and have even witnessed class discussions on the gender identity of a specific student present in the classroom. Our LGBTQ students are more likely to miss school out of fear for their safety, and more likely to be physically harmed on school campuses.

The Maryland Department of Education was concerned about these facts and created the Maryland Comprehensive Health Education Framework. I support this bill because it codifies the overall concepts listed in the framework by establishing a "floor" for what is taught as part of the Maryland health education curriculum. It leaves the particulars of the framework up to the Counties and State Dept. of Education while guaranteeing an inclusive curriculum for all students. This allows each district to tailor the materials for its students and consider a wide range of stakeholders when developing the content. It contains and affirms the long-standing opt-out for Family Life and Human Sexuality, allowing parents to exercise their discretion over what is taught to their children-- and it also guarantees that the rest of the curriculum is inclusive of and representative for all students. This opt-out provides a compromise for those parents that do not wish their children to receive the Family Life and Human Sexuality topic. The topics in the comprehensive health framework are crucial to our students' education. An educated student will make better decisions for their health.

Our public schools have a responsibility to include all students, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. The parents claiming that children should be protected from knowing our LGBTQ community members exist and calling affirming parents hateful names are teaching hate to their children. They will not be teaching their children accurate information about the LGBTQIA+ community. Regardless of what a parent believes or not, their student will encounter LGBTQIA+ students, staff, or faculty. This bill ensures students will receive an accurate education about LGBTQIA+ topics. Students receiving an inclusive health education will be better empowered to make healthy decisions. Inclusive health education benefits all, not just our LGBTQIA+ students, by improving the school climate, and reducing the stigma and marginalization of our LGBTQIA+ students.

Students are the stakeholders; they have the right to a comprehensive education.

I request a favorable report on HB161.