

January 27, 2025

Delegate Atterbeary and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express an Unfavorable viewpoint on HB 161, the Comprehensive Health Education Framework for Primary and Secondary Education in Maryland.

As a parent of children in Maryland public schools, it is concerning that this bill, which infringes on parental rights and input regarding educational content, is being proposed for a third legislative session.

The Comprehensive Health Education Framework contains materials that conflict with the personal, religious, and spiritual beliefs of many Marylanders and exposes children to content that is not universally age appropriate.

It also removes the ability for parents to decide what their children are exposed to in public schools and whether our children are mature enough to understand such challenging subjects. Additionally, the framework includes topics like gender identity and sexual orientation, which are complex subjects influenced by our personal, religious, and spiritual beliefs.

Furthermore, the bill presents logistical challenges regarding county implementation and parental opt-out options. For instance, how can parents opt their children out of family life and human sexuality while districts are still required to expose them to HIV and AIDS prevention education, given the overlap between these topics? This lack of clarity raises concerns about how parents can effectively navigate their rights in this context while districts also attempt to follow the potential law.

Moreover, mandating this framework statewide undermines the authority of elected Boards of Education and limits voters' ability to influence local school curricula. Only parents know our children best and are best positioned to determine when our children are developmentally ready and mature enough to understand these subjects and in what context. Public schools should focus on core academic subjects rather than potentially controversial topics that are heavily influenced by personal, religious, and spiritual beliefs.

I urge The Maryland General Assembly to vote Unfavorable on HB 161 and refocus educational efforts on strengthening Maryland students in the core academic subjects. The most recent MCAP (Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program) results revealed ongoing challenges in student proficiency with only 48.4 % of students proficient in English and a mere 24.1 % proficient in Math. As State Superintendent Dr. Carey Wright stated, "It is clear that we must accelerate gains urgently for students across Maryland." The state's current educational priorities should concentrate on improving core academic performance rather than forcing districts to adopt the Health Education Framework.

Thank you,

Kerry Gillespie