Charlotte Persephone Hoffman, Esq.
(they/she)
Policy Director
charlotte@transmaryland.org

Monday March 3, 2025

The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary
House Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Testimony of Trans Maryland

IN OPPOSITION TO

House Bill #1385: Children - Parental Rights - Educational Rights

To the Chair, Vice Chair, and esteemed members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

Trans Maryland is a multi-racial, multi-gender community power building organization for Maryland's trans community. In that capacity we work with transgender young people all across the state, as well as their families, friends, and classmates. Since 2021, we have seen unprecedented attacks on trans youth across the country, at both the state and federal level. While Maryland has thus far resisted joining the bandwagon of anti-trans legislation, legislation like House Bill 1385 demonstrates that not even Maryland is free from this wave of anti-trans rhetoric, which is too often framed through a false lens of "parents rights."

To be clear, Trans Maryland deeply understands the importance of supporting parents, and indeed, many of us at Trans Maryland are parents ourselves. In our capacity as advocates for transgender Marylanders, we frequently hear from transgender and queer parents whose families are not provided space in our society to thrive, as well as the parents of transgender youth who are struggling to help their children through a system that wasn't built for them. While you might think these are exactly the parents who would benefit from "parental rights," their families and children are instead the targets of a disingenuous legislative bait and switch.

At the end of the day, bills like HB1385 are not designed to provide parents with tools to meet the specific needs of their children; they are instead designed to erase from the school curriculum all evidence that families like them exist.

While nominally framed as creating an individual right of parents to review school materials in advance and opt their children out of any lessons they find objectionable, the end result of House Bill 1385 would be to drown teachers and school administrators with complaints about any content deemed "woke," until the schools preemptively comply with the demands of the loudest voices.

Charlotte Persephone Hoffman, Esq.
(they/she)
Policy Director
charlotte@transmaryland.org

And drown teachers will, for House Bill 1385's scheme is entirely unworkable, requiring teachers and schools to post lesson plans far in advance, rework units on the fly when parents object (for literally any reason), and struggle to figure out how to make classrooms inclusive of all students when exclusion is demanded by a critical mass of parents. With our teachers already overworked and underpaid, House Bill 1385 would likely result in an exodus of our best teachers from the profession.

Even if House Bill 1385 wouldn't create an administrative burden so massive as to make education impossible, it would still be a poor policy choice for Maryland schools. Our students must be taught about the existence of trans and queer people to prevent harm, discrimination, and violence, as well as to learn about their fellow classmates, neighboring families, faculty, historical persons of note, and legislators in service of the betterment of our society. By discouraging the teaching of any content deemed objectionable by the most conservative members of our state, House Bill 1385 would create schools where the only names mentioned are those of dead, straight, cisgender white men, and where those names are only ever mentioned in awe and reverence, never in critique.

Finally, House Bill 1385 would contribute to an existing climate of discrimination and harassment in far too many of our schools. According to the GLSEN 2019 National School Climate Survey, 24% of Maryland's LBGTQ youth surveyed had experienced physical harassment, 12% had experienced physical assault, and 67% had experienced verbal harassment. Instead of helping to erase this, House Bill 1385 would instead encourage it by denying majority students the opportunity to learn about people unlike themselves and by denying marginalized students the ability to articulate their right to exist free of harassment and discrimination. At the end of the day, opting out of learning about the existence of queer and transgender people is a pathway to continued violence, and is fundamentally out of alignment with acknowledging the inherent dignity of transgender and queer youth and families.

For these reasons we urge an unfavorable report on House Bill 1385.