

HB 1385 OPPOSE

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Children - Parental Rights - Educational Rights

House Ways and Means Committee
Monday, March 3, 2025 at 11:00am

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Kellen Sweeney. I live in Baltimore City with my husband and four-year-old child. I work in public health when I am not busy with my favorite job – being Teagan’s mama. **I oppose House Bill 1385.**

The idea that this somehow advances parents’ rights to me is illogical. With respect to curriculum, teachers are generally happy to share information about the curriculum with parents who ask. They do have to balance those requests with the time it takes to fulfill them vs. the other educational activities they could engage in, and it’s important that those conversations not reduce time teaching actual students. All this bill would do is increase burden on our already overworked public school teachers and give parents license to harass teachers when they don’t like the answers they receive. If parents start demanding more and more granular information and are required to do so, it will just take away from time educating our kids and increase teacher burnout. It would be better for parents to just partner collaboratively with their kids’ teachers. We do this with our four year old’s pre-K teachers regularly, and they have been responsive to our requests, without jeopardizing their attention to the students.

Parents can also ask about when specific topics will be covered and keep their child home from school that day if they feel strongly about it. It should not be a burden on the school system to find alternative care for that child if the parent wants to opt their child out of specific topics on an a la carte basis, and the attendance record should reflect that the child missed required instruction. Those are decisions parents can make if they feel strongly about specific topics.

It is also illogical to require schools to inform parents about the nature of all extracurricular activities. Parents can just ask their kids. If their kids are not honest about it, there is probably a reason for that. Part of growing up is navigating independence and how to have hard conversations with your parents.

The same principle applies regarding pronouns and chosen names. It is not uncommon for a kid to share their thoughts about their gender with a trusted teacher before a parent. I know this because I was head of my high school's LGBTQ alliance in high school and talked with many students about this exact scenario. There is nothing sinister about talking to a teacher first, and it doesn't even necessarily mean a problematic relationship with the parent. It is just because the stakes for having that conversation with a parent are very high. If your parent does not react supportively, it is emotionally devastating. Even kids with supportive parents may test it out with teachers first – if a teacher is not supportive, you don't have to live with them! - or ask teachers with help figuring out how to discuss constructively with their parents. This is a healthy expression of kids' growing independence and learning to have hard conversations with their parents, which is part of the educational experience. It is every educator's goal to support that kid in having that conversation with their parents, or to ask the kid's permission to help with that conversation. If the kid refuses that permission, there is usually a good reason – it is because the kid does not think they will be safe, and we don't want to put kids in unsafe positions, or discourage them from getting support from teachers in learning how to navigate these conversations because they are afraid they will be outed to their parents without their consent or involvement in that conversation.

As a parent of a child entering Kindergarten this year, **I urge an unfavorable report on HB 1385.**