

**OPPOSE HB 1385 Parental Rights Educational Rights
Hearing March 3, 11 am, House Ways and Means**

February 27, 2025

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Vice Chair Wilkins and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Abbie Ellicott and I reside in D31 in Anne Arundel County. I am a parent and a clinical psychologist. I strongly oppose HB1385 because it is potentially dangerous to children and far too restrictive for our public schools. This bill gives parents excessive oversight over too many aspects of their child's education. It would permit parents to have excessive control over curricula and instructional materials. It invades the privacy of our youth in ways that could be dangerous, specifically LGBTQIA children.

Parents currently are allowed to know a lot about what is taught in our schools and they are encouraged to be involved in their child's education. However, parents do not and should not be permitted to control or micromanage the curricula. The material taught in schools has been carefully vetted by expert educators. If parents are in control of curricula, our educational systems will be far too restricted in what they offer. Public schools need to offer multiple ways of understanding ourselves, our history and our larger world. This ensures that children are taught a variety of perspectives and it encourages critical thinking and problem solving. It helps our children become prepared to live in the broader world as informed, global citizens.

It would be a nightmare if parents were in charge of determining what our children are taught. Some parents would object to educational material simply because they do not like it or agree with it. Some parents would object to their children learning scientific subjects such as evolution because of religious beliefs. Others would object to information about history because it makes them uncomfortable. Others would object to material about health topics such as gender identity because they are biased. We need to trust our school systems and the many educational experts who develop and review curricula to make thoughtful, informed decisions about what is taught. We cannot and should not give this responsibility to individual parents. If parents want to control their child's education, they have the option of home-schooling or private schooling.

Similarly, it is not appropriate for parents to be informed of every school club or activity that their child participates in. This part of HB 1385 is clearly referring to children who participate in Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) clubs. Schools should not be required to inform parents if a child is participating in a GSA as it is a violation of that child's privacy. If a child is exploring

issues related to gender or sexual orientation, they may not be ready to share this with parents and it could be dangerous for them to do so. Some parents would become angry, rejecting or abusive. Children have the right to some degree of privacy about their lives; we need to trust that youth will share important information with parents when they are ready to do so. Similarly, schools should not be required to obtain parental consent before respecting a student's wishes regarding the pronouns or names they use in school. This is a matter that should be decided by the child and it is important that parental consent not be required.

Data from the GLSEN emphasizes the importance of schools cultivating safe and supportive environments for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. HB 1385 works against this goal, by requiring schools to obtain parental consent for involvement in GSAs and use of pronouns/names in school. It would make schools less safe and less welcoming for LGBTQIA students.

Research shows the importance of LGBTQIA youth being accepted by their parents. I wish that all children had parental support but we know this is not the case. Some parents are unable or unwilling to accept their LGBTQIA child. They may be rejecting, threatening, harsh or abusive. This can lead to terrible outcomes for that child, including homelessness, mental health struggles including suicidality, and increased risk-taking behaviors. Transgender youth are already at high risk for these problems; we should not create laws that elevate this risk.

I personally know many families where a transgender youth was maltreated by a parent when the parent learned the child's gender identity. The maltreatment included things like verbal, emotional and physical abuse, excessively harsh restrictions on the child's activities (e.g. refusing to let the child leave the house or attend school), attempts to make the child cis-gender via illegal conversion "therapy", and kicking the child out of the house. My anecdotal examples are consistent with data from the Trevor Project which shows that 16% of LGBTQ youth reported that they ran away from home, with more than half reporting that they ran away because of mistreatment or fear of mistreatment due to their LGBTQ identity. Transgender children are at elevated risk for mental health struggles and suicidal ideation when they experience parental rejection. Clearly, it would be dangerous for some LGBTQIA youth if schools are forced to share information about the child's gender identity with parents.

For all these reasons, I OPPOSE HB 1385 and I urge you to give it an unfavorable report.

Sincerely,

Abbie M. Ellicott
Severna Park, MD 21146
District 31