

HB161 Unfavorable
January 29, 2025
House Ways and Means Committee

I urge you to give HB161 an unfavorable report.

HB161 would force a health education framework on every school in the state. In addition to disallowing flexibility to meet local needs, the bill does not allow parents to opt-out of the gender ideology and sexual orientation pieces of the health education framework. Disallowing opt-out is extreme and culturally insensitive. It also violates the long established Constitutional right of parents to direct the upbringing, care, and education of their children.

There are very good reasons why this bill has faced strong opposition every time it has been proposed.

If HB161 is adopted, the results will be:

1. **Expensive lawsuits** against school districts and the Maryland Department of Education based on the unconstitutionality of the bill.
2. **Harm to students** from diverse cultural backgrounds who will choose not to attend public school, likely resulting in less preparation for academic and professional success. It will also mean less diversity and cross cultural friendship in our schools.
3. **Potential loss of federal funding** for our schools, due to US Department of Education directives.
4. **Drastically decreased trust** and confidence in elected representatives for authorizing this bill that would allow and enforce the framework along with any changes to the framework made later behind closed doors by unelected officials. Lack of transparency is harmful to democracy.

MSDE and the state legislature should empower schools to focus on academics in a school environment where our culturally diverse students can learn and thrive. A heavy-handed top-down enforcement of a state health education framework written by unelected officials and subject to change at any time with no legislative or public oversight is not right for Maryland. Please vote no on HB161.

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