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The Honorable Vanessa Atterbeary
House Ways and Means Committee
131 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Testimony of Trans Maryland

IN SUPPORT OF

House Bill #161: Primary and Secondary Education -
Comprehensive Health Education Framework - Established

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

Trans Maryland is testifying in support of House Bill 161 with an amendment to remove section 5 of the bill, which allows parents to opt their child out of this education.

Trans Maryland is a multi-racial, multi-gender, trans-led community power building organization dedicated to Maryland's trans community. Trans Maryland believes in protecting the rights of all Marylanders, particularly transgender community members, to access safe and inclusive reproductive healthcare.

Comprehensive health education is a vital right for all of our students as it gives them access to information about their bodies. This education has been shown time and time again to have many positive impacts on young people, such as reducing rates of domestic and intimate partner violence and empowering healthy relationships and communication skills.¹ Additionally, while many are concerned that comprehensive sexual education increases promiscuity among adolescents, the evidence shows that proper comprehensive sexual education reduces sexual activity in general and increases behaviors that reduce risks associated with sexual activity.²

Of most importance to the LGBTQIA+ community is the consistent evidence that inclusive comprehensive sexual education, like the education proposed by HB161, reduces rates of homophobia and homophobic bullying among students.³ According to the Trevor Project, a suicide prevention organization for the LGBTQIA+ community, 49% of transgender adolescents reported being bullied in the last year and those adolescents were 3 times more likely to attempt

¹ Eva Goldfarb and Lisa Lieberman. "Three Decades of Research: The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education" *Journal of Adolescent Health* 68 (2021): 13-27
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.07.036>

² Helen Chin, et al. "The Effectiveness of Group-Based Comprehensive Risk-Reduction and Abstinence Education Interventions to Prevent or Reduce the Risk of Adolescent Pregnancy, Human Immunodeficiency Virus, and Sexually Transmitted Infections: Two Systematic Reviews for the Guide to Community Preventive Services." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 42, no. 3 (2012): 272-294
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2011.11.006>

³ Goldfarb and Lieberman. "Three Decades of Research," 16.



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suicide than their transgender peers who did not report being bullied.⁴ With these statistics, it is clear why comprehensive health education that includes education on gender identity and sexual orientation, as established by section 3 V of this bill, is so vitally important to the LGBTQIA+ students in Maryland's schools.

Transgender people have always and will always exist, same as people from any sexuality or gender expression, including cisgender and heterosexual. Educating students on gender identities and sexual orientations alongside information about their physical and mental health gives them language and knowledge to explore their identities in a safe environment.⁵ It teaches students that they are not alone in their hardships and helps them find community and builds compassion and understanding amongst peers. The skills, language, and understanding that comprehensive health education builds about every topic that it teaches are all things that transfer to the world outside of the classroom and make a more understanding, compassionate, and educated community for all.

Access to education is not harmful and, as stated earlier, can actively fight against the very issues that these groups claim to be concerned about in terms of unplanned teen pregnancies and the spread of STDs.

This is why we are asking for an amendment to remove section 5 of this bill which permits parents to opt their child out of the comprehensive health education program. Education is a fundamental human right and we owe it to all of our students to provide them with the best and fullest education that we can provide. By allowing parents to selectively decide what information is "appropriate" for their child to learn, we are denying children the right to learn about something as fundamental and personal as their own bodies.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB161 with an amendment to remove the opt-out portion of the bill.

⁴ R. Nath, et al. "2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People." *The Trevor Project* (2024) www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024.

⁵ Goldfarb and Lieberman. "Three Decades of Research," 16.