

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 706
Commission on LGBTQ Affairs—Established**

**Health and Government Operations Committee
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1:00 PM**

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Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 706, legislation that would establish the Commission on LGBTQ Affairs in the Governor’s Office of Community Initiatives.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland’s public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for career and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

According to the Governor’s Office of Community Initiatives’ website, “The Governor’s Office of Community Initiatives (GOCI) engages Maryland communities through the governor’s seven ethnic and cultural commissions to deliver the voices of Marylanders to the Hogan administration, connect the administration with Marylanders, and alert the administration about real-time needs of communities in Maryland.” Those ethnic commissions are: GOCI on African Affairs, GOCI Asian Pacific American Affairs, GOCI Hispanic Affairs, GOCI Middle Eastern American Affairs, GOCI South Asian American Affairs, and the Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs. Their purpose is to, “...work together with the [GOCI] to connect Marylanders from their respective communities to state resources and to advise [the governor] on the needs of their communities. The commissions also work to celebrate the culture, heritage, and history of their respective communities, and identify areas in which their communities can serve Maryland.”

MSEA believes that every individual must be protected from all forms of discrimination and stereotyping based on race, religion, ethnicity, immigration status, age, occupation, disabilities, gender, gender identification, and sexual orientation. MSEA members have long fought to recognize, protect, and defend the rights of all citizens. We have advocated for the dignity and inclusion of all members of our human family and have sought to ensure that everyone has a voice to both tell their stories and to advocate for their needs and those of their respective communities. It is in keeping with this that we wholeheartedly support the establishment of the Commission on LGBTQ Affairs.

The educators who make up MSEA and the children and communities we serve reflect the wide diversity of our state. This diversity makes our union stronger. By establishing a formal entity representing the LGBTQ community within the COGI, Marylanders take a significant step toward ensuring our state reflects and realizes the value inherent in us all. In short, as we have seen in our union, we believe having this commission within our state government’s structure ultimately makes our great state stronger.

MSEA enthusiastically urges a favorable report on House Bill 706.