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NEWS RELEASE

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SALISBURY PFLAG SUPPORTS THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS ACT

PFLAG Salisbury, the Salisbury, Maryland Chapter of PFLAG National, supports SB0933/HB1204 The Inclusive Schools Act.

Salisbury is located in the Wicomico County Public Schools (WCPS) district. The WCPS contains 24 schools and serves approximately 14,953 students during the 2018-2019 school year. Applying representative statistical assumptions on the demographic that 8% of youth are LGBTQ+, this equates to over 1,000 LGBTQ+ youth in the WCPS district.

WCPS has zero policies, guidelines, or procedures established for the protection of LGBTQ+ youth. The Inclusive Schools Act would ensure that MDSE guidelines are followed in the WCPS school district.

Over the past 5 years of PFLAG Salisbury's operation, we have witnessed a revolving door of LGBTQ+ youth and their families reach out to us with complaints about the treatment of LGBTQ+ youth in WCPS. These complaints include, but are not limited to:

- Harassment and bullying of LGBTQ+ youth by other students, as well as by teachers and school staff.
- Disregarding or downplaying complaints of anti-LGBTQ+ harassment.
- School administrations which actively work to discourage the formation of high school level GSAs (Gender and Sexuality Awareness or Gay-Straight Alliance clubs), discourage the activities of already-formed GSAs, and/or discourage GSAs from advertising their existence in the school.
- A lack of GSAs at the middle school level, despite the fact that this age group is most likely to be in the process of "coming out" as LGBTQ+, and despite the fact that bullying peaks in middle school.
- Transgender students are "deadnamed" (referred to by their former name) both verbally and on school systems (e.g., attendance rosters and computer log-ins), a practice which contributes to poorer mental health.
- Guidance counselors, teachers, and other school staff who "out" LGBTQ+ youth to their parents, a practice which can place LGBTQ+ youth at risk.

- School teachers, staff, and administrators who recommend that LGBTQ+ youth receive counseling, solely as they are LGBTQ+.
- School administrators who suggest to parents of LGBTQ+ youth that they move to urban areas or homeschool their children, in response to parent requests for a supportive school climate.
- A general lack of education that is inclusive of LGBTQ+ people, their contributions, and their perspectives.

These instances pervade schools in the district, across all levels of the WCPS (high school, middle school, and elementary school). Together, these types of instances contribute to an overall school climate that is at best unsupportive and at worst openly hostile. This school climate is devastating for LGBTQ+ youth, with data suggesting such environments contribute to lower academic performance, lower GPA, increased absences, increased likelihood of school dropout, and less likelihood of attending an institution of higher education for LGBTQ+ youth.

The Inclusive Schools Act is a much-needed piece of legislation which will greatly improve the school experiences of WCPS students. We encourage you to support and pass this legislation.