

Dear members of the Maryland House of Delegates,

My name is Isabella Majarowitz (she/her) and I am a high school student in Montgomery County, Maryland. I am writing to you today to express my support for House Bill 1088, the Youth and Families Protection Act.

While Montgomery County already has some protections in place for LGBTQ+ students like myself, there is always more that can be done to ensure that every LGBTQ+ student in the state of Maryland has access to necessary resources and services.

LGBTQ+ students in foster care and those who experience homelessness often face discrimination and a lack of--often life-saving--resources. For LGBTQ+ youth of color this is often compounded with marginalization and discrimination based on their racial and/or ethnic identity. The interlocking systems of oppression that LGBTQ+ youth of color face has a direct connection to their overrepresentation in the foster care system and the juvenile detention system. Like any other person, LGBTQ+ youth deserve access to critical support systems and services that know how to care for their specific needs.

In my experience as an LGBTQ+ high schooler in Maryland, there is a definite lack in services and programs that specifically support LGBTQ+ youth. While many schools in Montgomery County have a Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA), that is not true for every county in Maryland, and the welcoming spaces offered by GSA's don't always extend past the school grounds. Some LGBTQ+ youth lack an affirming household and a support system, which contributes to higher rates of mental health issues among LGBTQ+ youth. I am very lucky to live in an affirming household, but I know that some LGBTQ+ youth don't get to experience that privilege. In some cases, that lack of support and acceptance becomes dangerous, leading some LGBTQ+ youth to be kicked out of their home and left without means to survive.

That's why passing HB1088 is so important. The Youth and Families Protection Act would provide equal access to programs, services and agencies that provide for LGBTQ+ people, and protect LGBTQ+ youth from discrimination by agencies, programs and services. It is not an exaggeration to say that this bill could save lives. Passing HB1088 will not end all discrimination against LGBTQ+ youth in the state of Maryland, but it provides a legal impetus to protect the rights and safety of LGBTQ+ youth in Maryland. Providing access to necessary support services and programs will benefit the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth. Oftentimes, just having a dedicated social worker or support system can make LGBTQ+ youth feel affirmed and

cared for. We shouldn't be treated differently or denied access to certain services because of our identities.

As I noted before, LGBTQ+ students of color are disproportionately represented in foster care systems, in juvenile detention facilities, and experience homelessness at higher rates than non-LGBTQ+ people. The Youth and Families Protection Act is especially necessary to ensure that LGBTQ+ youth of color are getting the support and resources they need to survive and thrive.

You have the power to improve access to resources for LGBTQ+ youth in Maryland, and ensure protection for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness or foster care. As an LGBTQ+ high schooler in the state of Maryland, I want to show my support for HB 1088--the Youth and Families Protection Act--and urge you to support this important and timely legislation.

Thank you,
Isabella Majarowitz (she/her)
Silver Spring, MD