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# **TESTIMONY PACKET: (A)**

## **SENATE BILL 116**

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TESTIMONY FROM: MSC Board of Directors



**MARYLAND STUDENT COALITION**

2022 Legislative Session

[marylandstudents.org](http://marylandstudents.org)

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**TESTIMONY**

**BILL:** Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts - Development of Content Standards and Implementation

**SPONSOR:** Senator Ellis

**POSITION:** **FAVORABLE**

**FROM:** Jonathon DiPietro, *Director of the Maryland Student Coalition*  
([marylandstudents.org](http://marylandstudents.org))

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Friday, January 27, 2022

**SB116: Favorable**

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and honorable members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. My name is Jon DiPietro, I am a K-12 product of the Howard County Public School System, and a second-semester first-year student at American University. I am writing to you all today as Director of the Maryland Student Coalition.

*The Maryland Student Coalition is an entirely student-led, advocacy group that serves to bring students together to promote education policy reform. Founded in 2020 as a vehicle for advocating for students' right to demonstrate, our scope has since expanded to include more educational advocacy initiatives. You can learn more at [marylandstudents.org](http://marylandstudents.org)*

**Background**

This legislation is an addition to §7-205.5 of the Education Article, Annotated Code of Maryland. The general goal of this legislation is to diversify English/Language Arts (“ELA”) curriculum, to include authors with the perspective of various defined demographics. This legislative initiative has been supported by various student groups, representing secondary school students from across the state, and spearheaded by the Maryland Student Coalition.

There are countless examples of comparative legislation, enacted by various state legislatures and several Maryland public school systems. For the record, these include: HB1192-2019 (Colorado); HB7082-2020 (Connecticut); HB 198-2021 (Delaware); 101-0227-2020, SB648-2021 (Illinois); A4454-2021 (Massachusetts); SB739-2013 (Oregon); SB5044-2021 (Washington); HB0076-2018 (Wyoming). This legislation had been passed with support from

both Democratic and Republican-controlled legislatures. Four counties are specifically brought to the fore in terms of policies and resolutions that are either similar or adjacent, to the goals of the DELAC bill. The counties are Baltimore, Harford, Montgomery, and Prince George's.

### **What The Bill Does**

The purpose of this bill is to reform current Maryland State English/Language Arts curricula in grades six through twelve in a cohesive and targeted manner statewide. Specifically, this bill pushes for the mandating of the substantive inclusion of racial minority, LGBT, and woman/gender non-conforming authors in the current literary requirements. This bill also seeks to redress the injustice of decades of underrepresentation of racial minorities, LGBT, and women/gender non-conforming authors in literature and curricula. To further the quality of a Maryland public school education, it is of the utmost importance that English/Language Arts curricula be diversified along the lines of authorial identity in a standardized and consistent manner.

### **Concerns expressed<sup>1</sup>**

*Why does this bill take on race, gender, and sexuality, instead of focusing on a single minority group?*

Race, gender, and sexuality have been selected as the focal points in terms of minority representation for this bill because of their widely recognized importance in influencing perceptions, lived experiences, and societal/institutional interactions. The Yale University Department of History identifies race, gender, and sexuality as “powerful axes of social difference that have structured social hierarchy and inequality, from regimes of slavery and apartheid to legal and cultural criteria for immigration, employment, inheritance, and citizenship.” Moreover, the department identifies these three characteristics as being the most influential sources of self-identity, collective belonging, and social organization both historically and contemporaneously.

*Why is this being set as a state standard as opposed to allowing local Boards of Education to implement this bill?*

Allowing local BOE's to develop this curriculum leaves it up to them to ‘interpret’ this how they see fit, allowing for political biases to permeate literature selection. This bill is not politically motivated but rather socially and statistically motivated: Giving students a more diverse curriculum should not be up for interpretation. Students deserve literature that connects them

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<sup>1</sup> For further detail view our “Legislative Brief On: Diverse ELA Curriculum” at <https://www.marylandstudents.org/our-work/2022-session>

with the current society they are living in where people of color, LGBT people, and gender non-conforming peoples are increaisngly more visible.

*How does this bill follow through on effective implementation?*

This bill will follow the implementation procedures developed by the Maryland State Department of Education for the development and implementation of curriculum changes.

**For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 116.**

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## TESTIMONY

**BILL:** Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts - Development of Content Standards and Implementation

**SPONSOR:** Senator Ellis

**POSITION:** **FAVORABLE**

**FROM:** Hunter Craig, *Deputy Director of the Maryland Student Coalition*  
([marylandstudents.org](http://marylandstudents.org))

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### SB116: Favorable

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and honorable members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. Today, I am writing in favor of SB 116.

Across the nation, states and local jurisdictions have responded to calls of change by beginning to diversify their schools' English and social science curriculum. This is happening for two reasons; first, to account for the millions of students who have long been part of underrepresented groups in our nation's society and second, to provide all students with a more holistic understanding of the relative subject matter. Studies show that when students are taught real world perspectives, they become well-suited for diverse workplaces, know how to respond in multicultural environments, and most importantly, leave implicit biases behind. Adopting diverse and inclusive content standards into our state English language arts (ELA) curriculum will deliver fair, accurate, and responsive material for our educators to cover during the 180-day school year.

As a K-12 product of Maryland public schools, I know firsthand the potential that lies in broadening our ELA curriculum. I recall from high school that some of the most memorable books we ever read were by authors of underrepresented groups. Two in particular were *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie. Unfortunately, most of our current standards revolve around Euro-centric lenses of study. My classmates and I could've been afforded even more enlightening and thought provoking readings if it wasn't for certain content quotas. In short, we need to embrace our contemporary culture and align with the 21st century by diversifying our state's English language arts curriculum.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 116.

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**TESTIMONY**

**BILL:** SB116 - Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts -  
Development of Content Standards and Implementation

**SPONSOR:** Senator Ellis, Charles County

**POSITION:** **FAVORABLE**

**FROM:** Christopher Lidard, *Associate Director of the Maryland Student Coalition*  
([marylandstudents.org](http://marylandstudents.org))

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Sunday, January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**SB116: Favorable**

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee: I am writing in favor of SB 116.

When I was in fifth grade, I participated in an event called “Battle of the Books” - a program partly administered by my school system. I had just barely started to read novels, and all of a sudden I had only a few months to become an expert on the content of 16 of them. One of the books that was placed into my hand was *Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lai. A memoir, the book details the author's migration from Vietnam to Alabama after the Fall of Saigon during the Vietnam War. This was the first book I ever read that even began to discuss topics of race and discrimination, and the content stays with me today as a college student. In the book, the author recounts encounters with someone she dubs “pink boy,” a fellow student that embodies the bullying, discrimination, and isolation the author dealt with from white students after her relocation. As a white male who had lived in America his entire life, I realized at that time that I was much closer to the background of “pink boy” than I ever would be to the author. And though I didn’t have the vocabulary to express these concepts at that age, I learned valuable lessons about racism, xenophobia, and the power to hurt others that I possessed as someone with privilege in our society. From that moment on, I was much more aware of ensuring that my role was that of allyship.

Senate Bill 116 ensures that the opportunity to have this experience will be accessible to all public school students. By ensuring that texts in the English Language Arts curriculum are more representative, students will have access to a variety of perspectives in a very uniform way.

While Maryland is a very diverse state, simply being in the presence of diversity does not always enable students to be appreciative of it. Literature, which is often the gateway to complex and gritty subject matters, can provide a deeper look at the background of different identity groups.

Being exposed to literature by a diverse set of authors was an incredibly formative experience for me in building tolerance and inclusion for others. Other students in Maryland need to be provided with similar opportunities.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a **favorable** report on SB 116.

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**TESTIMONY**

**BILL:** SB116 - Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts -  
Development of Content Standards and Implementation

**SPONSOR:** Senator Ellis, Charles County

**POSITION:** **FAVORABLE**

**FROM:** Vinay Khosla, 42B  
Vinaykhosla13@gmail.com  
*\*Submitted in Association with the Maryland Student Coalition*  
([marylandstudents.org](http://marylandstudents.org))

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Friday, January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**SB116: Favorable**

Chair Pinsky, and honorable members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. Today, I am writing in favor of SB 116.

The diversity in curriculum which SB 116 advocates for is not only desirable but necessary. By increasing the authorial diversity of required texts for English Language Arts classes, in turn both representation and inclusivity are affected. The diversification of required texts to include those written by people of color, marginalized gender identities, LGBT people, disabled people and more, students who similarly identify with these groups see a path forward in a world that is not necessarily made for them. But more than just being able to relate to minority authors, these identities are often reflected in the characters and themes of the literature written. Finally, disabled students will get to read a book with a disabled hero; students of color can read a book where someone they can identify with is a CEO; and the list goes on. The diversification of literature not only creates a learning environment that fosters the dreams and aspirations of the many instead of the few, but also allows students of all backgrounds who *don't* identify with authors or characters to broaden their world view and understanding. It has been shown that consistent exposure through literature to characters unlike yourself increases empathy and decreases discriminatory tendencies. In these ways, the diversification of literature must be seen not only as a priority but as a necessity by the state of Maryland.

As a former Baltimore County Public Schools student for thirteen years, I have a commanding understanding on the state of representation in ELA curriculum that can generally be extrapolated across counties bar few. And the state of representation is very poor indeed. Having taken the highest-level English courses offered to me throughout my educational career, I only ever encountered 2 female



authors, 1 Jewish author, 1 Black author, and 1 Hispanic author of substantial required texts. The remainder of required texts I read—and also the vast majority—were written by straight, white men. As a person of color who identifies as gay, I never in my thirteen years of schooling encountered an author or character who I could relate to as a gay man or racial minority. I am unable to speak to whether or not this representation would have made me feel more comfortable in my own skin, but I can say that for me, and many people of color, and many members of the LGBTQ+ community, coming to terms with your identity in predominantly straight or white institutions was a challenge. By diversifying literature from middle school onwards, we as a state can take the crucial and revolutionary steps to cultivating an educational environment that is inclusive not only in name but in practice. Moreover, it is the responsibility of this body and of the state of Maryland to strive for such an environment irrespective of political agenda or affiliation—a responsibility that must be realized.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a **favorable** report on SB 116.