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## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

### House Bill 515 – Education – Students Athletes – Uniforms and Modifications for Modesty (Inclusive Athletic Attire Act)

### Ways and Means Committee

February 17, 2022

## SUPPORT

**Background:** House Bill 515 (HB515) would require county boards of education, the Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association, governing bodies of public secondary schools, public institutions of higher education and community colleges to allow student athletes to modify their team uniform so that it may comply with the requirements or preferences of their religion or culture without pre-approval.

**Written Comments:** The state of Maryland was founded as a home for religious freedom. Today student athletes can be denied the right to play the sports they love because of their religion. No student should be denied the right to participate in school athletics because of what they wear or what religion they practice. For many student athletes, sports are the highlight of their high school or collegiate career, and for some it leads to scholarships and opportunities they would never have otherwise. Athletics should be a place of inclusion where anyone is allowed to participate, and the focus is on skill and competition. However, when students must obtain waivers for uniform modifications, or are forced to sit out altogether, they are unfairly disadvantaged. In many cases, girls are the ones that disproportionately face this hardship and embarrassment.

The Baltimore Jewish Council represents the Jewish community of the broader Baltimore area. Many of the religions commonly practiced in Maryland, including Judaism, call on followers to wear certain attire. This can include head coverings, long sleeves and/or skirts. Reasonable accommodations for religious practices already exist in countless other aspects of life and society, student athletics should not be any different.

With this in mind, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report of HB 515.

*The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.*

BALTIMORE JEWISH COUNCIL

5750 Park Heights Avenue, Suite 329 • Baltimore, Maryland 21215

410-542-4850 • fax 410-542-4834 • baltjc.org

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