

To Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee Members,

I am writing to strongly urge you to give an unfavorable report on HB 119. This bill infringes upon long respected democratic processes by taking power from locally elected school boards and giving it to unelected and potentially ideologically motivated bureaucrats. It undermines the opportunity for Maryland's citizen to meaningfully affect change at the local level by working with their local school boards.

Even though the name of this bill has been changed to "County Boards of Education – Curriculum Guides and Courses of Study – Requirements", we all know what this bill is really trying to accomplish. You certainly should since you participated in the hearing for SB 199. The true purpose can be seen in all the items that have been crossed off in the bill. The purpose of HB 119 is to use the power of the state and economic coercion to force all Maryland counties to fully adopt a health curriculum framework that teaches ideological concepts related to sexuality and gender identity starting in pre-kindergarten.

As you know from the hearing for SB 199, many Marylanders opposed SB 199 and HB 119. During the HB 119 hearing, there were a total of 67 unfavorable testimonies to only 19 favorable testimonies. Since it is clear that the public does not support HB 119, it appears that Democratic members of the House of Delegates have decided to take a different approach. Yet, this cannot mask their true motive.

The goal of HB 119 is to financially coerce all Maryland school districts to adopt lessons similar to the following. The excerpt below is from a lesson titled "Pink, Blue, Purple", which is a **first grade** lesson developed by Advocates for Youth to align with the recently adopted state health curriculum framework. Advocates for Youth is one of the contributors and reviewers of the framework (see pg. 4 of the framework), so there is no doubt that these are the types of lessons that are envisioned by the authors of the framework. In this lesson, teachers are instructed to tell **first grade** students the following:

"Identify starts with an 'I'. That's how you can remember it. 'I' feel, 'I' know. Gender identity is that feeling of knowing your gender. You might feel like you are a boy, you might feel like you are a girl. You might feel like you're a boy even if you have body parts that some people might tell you are 'girl' parts. You might feel like you're a girl even if you have body parts that some people might tell you are 'boy' parts. And you might not feel like you're a boy or a girl, but you're a little bit of both. No matter how you feel, you're perfectly normal!"

This is an ideological message rooted in radical gender theory that is completely inappropriate for first grade students, yet this is exactly the type of lesson the framework was created to promote. Forcing these lessons on all counties in Maryland through financial coercion is the true motive of HB 119.

As stewards of our state's educational system, you must reject this bill. From 2016 to 2021, enrollment in Maryland Public Schools dropped from 854,913 to 853,307 even though the overall population increased by 2.6% over the same time period. If this bill is passed into law, I believe that even more families will leave public schools in favor of homeschooling or private schools that better fit their values. Not only will this impact school funding but it will cause some of the most active and supportive parents to pull back from their involvement in public schools. This will be a detriment to the overall success of Maryland's public schools. My wife and I are currently reconsidering our educational plans for our children and the passage of HB 119 would certainly impact our decision. I am certain there are

thousands of other families who are also reconsidering whether public schools are the best fit for their families.

Finally, I would like to point out what the Democratic delegates voted to approve through HB 119. They have voted to take power away from locally elected school boards and hand unprecedented power to unelected bureaucrats. It doesn't matter whether these officials were appointed by Democrats or Republicans. I stand with whoever supports freedom and the right of local and self-governance. School board meetings and elections are one of the foundational levels at which citizens of Maryland have the opportunity to influence local decisions. Yet, they have voted to remove this as a meaningful opportunity and instead empowered the state to force an ideological agenda on everybody. This is disgraceful for anyone who has taken a solemn oath to represent the people. Not only that, I guarantee you that a majority of Marylanders do not want young children learning these concepts in public schools, but the Democratic delegates still chose to support the bill.

For the past few years, conservatives have faced an onslaught of gas-lighting from left-leaning politicians and media that we are threats to democracy, that we are domestic terrorists, and that we are fascists and authoritarians. Yet, it was Democratic delegates who used their publicly vested power to weaken the political agency of local communities at the grassroots school board level. It is Democratic delegates who cannot allow any divergence of thought in Maryland's diverse counties. If Montgomery County wants to teach their children about gender identity, then their school board can make that decision, but don't force that on Maryland's more conservative counties. It was Democratic delegates who have voted to use economic coercion to force an ideological agenda related to sexuality and gender upon all of Maryland's public school families. That is a threat to democracy. That is authoritarianism.

As senators, you have an opportunity and duty to resist this authoritarianism regardless of your political party. It does not matter whether you are a Democrat or a Republican. You were elected to represent the people, not special interest ideologies. The people do not want this bill. They want the opportunity to engage in meaningful action and discussion at the local school board level. You must protect this grassroots level of democracy. Your colleagues in the House of Delegates have failed to do so, to their own disgrace and shame. You have the opportunity to set things right. Please reject authoritarianism and protect grassroots, local democracy by giving an unfavorable review on HB 119.

Sincerely,

Justin Kuk

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