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**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Maryland Senate  
Education, Education and the Environment Committee  
For the Hearing on Primary and Secondary Education – Title IX – Notice (Hear Our Voices Act) - HB0016  
March 22, 2023**

**SUPPORT**

Free State PTA represents over 50,000 volunteer members and families in over 500 public schools. Free State PTA is composed of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. As the state's premier and largest child advocacy organization, Free State PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education.

HB0016 would require each public school to provide information to students, faculty, staff, and parents regarding who serves as the Title IX coordinator for the school, the process for filing a sexual misconduct complaint, and the support measures that are in place for filing a sexual misconduct complaint and how to access the support measures. HB0016 aligns with Free State PTA's principle for legislative action which states that schools must provide a safe environment where all students, teachers and staff can thrive.

In a 2021 report<sup>1</sup>, the U.S. Government Accountability Office reported over 1,000 cases of rape or reported rape and over 7,000 cases of sexual assault not including rape annually among middle and high school students. With Maryland experiencing ongoing legal questions<sup>2</sup> surrounding sexting and online sexual harassment, these numbers may continue to grow, affecting students' personal and academic trajectories. All students, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation, deserve to feel safe and supported in school.

This legislation will ensure that any elementary or secondary student who may have experienced tragic sexual harassment, assault, or other forms of sex-based discrimination understands what their options are for formal or informal reporting, what supportive services may help them continue and succeed in their educational journey and how to access those supportive measures, encouraging them to persist in school. The bill does not impose any additional data collection or reporting requirements on schools, but simply asks them to live up to the spirit of the law so that student survivors of sexual harassment, assault, and discrimination can better understand and access the supportive measures they are federally obligated to receive. **Therefore, the Free State PTA urges the passage of HB0016.**

Testimony is presented on the behalf of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104341.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://mcasa.org/newsletters/article/safety-sync-fixing-the-sexting-laws-in-maryland>