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MAJORITY WHIP

Appropriations Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Oral Testimony of Delegate Jazz Lewis
HB16 Primary and Secondary Education – IX – Policies and Procedures
(Hear Our Voices Act of 2023)
Before the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan,

I am here today in strong support of House Bill 16 The Hear Our Voices Act, which requires that Title IX resources and procedures be readily available and provided to students and parents for their awareness. This includes providing the necessary information to students and parents on who serves as the school's Title IX coordinator, what the procedures are for filing a complaint, and what support resources are available to students who are in crisis.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is a federal civil rights statute that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity. The foundational objective of Title IX is to avoid the use of federal spending to support sex discrimination in education programs and provide individual citizens effective protection against those practices. However, Title IX also protects students against sex-based discrimination in admissions, counseling, athletics, as well as sex-based harassment and sexual harassment.

This bill is necessary in Maryland schools at this moment to protect children. Shocking statistics display a disturbing trend for our schools. Between the 2015-2016 school year, we rose from the 6th highest-ranking state for sexual assault to the 4th. Then, in the 2017-2018 school year from the 4th highest-ranking state for rape or attempted rape to the 3rd.

The lack of information about Title IX resources and procedures puts children in danger, and as they are often unaware of these measures, it is likely that the number of sexual assaults in schools is higher due to cases that go unreported.

This bill passed unanimously in the House, both this year and last. This bill is necessary as many students have reported not knowing of the Title IX resources that are available to them at some of their worst moments, this is unacceptable. Although this bill on its own will not curb this disturbing trend, it is a major step in the right direction in giving our students and families the information they need to protect themselves and seek needed accountability in our education system.

For these reasons I urge a favorable report.