

Bill: **HB0576 / SB0629 Primary and Secondary Education - Policies on Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation - Revisions**

Organization: GLSEN Maryland, chapter@md.glsen.org

Submitted by: Sandy Gold Raynes, Board Member

Position: **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

I am submitting this testimony in **FAVOR WITH AMENDMENTS** of **HB0576 / SB0629 Primary and Secondary Education - Policies on Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation - Revisions** on behalf of GLSEN Maryland, the statewide chapter of GLSEN National, a nonprofit organization centered on creating and sustaining inclusive K-12 education for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) students.

Research by GLSEN National (2021) finds that **LGBTQ+ students experience high rates of bullying, harassment, and intimidation**, with almost 82% reporting feeling unsafe at school. **LGBTQ+ students of color are most likely to experience bullying, harassment, and intimidation** at school.

Experiencing a hostile school climate is associated with greater rates of absenteeism, lower GPA, lower graduation rates, and being less likely to go on to college (GLSEN, 2021). Thus, **it is in the best interest of students and our broader community to create supportive school climates for LGBTQ+ youth.**

GLSEN Maryland supports the bill modifications which allows students experiencing bullying, harassment or intimidation on the basis of perceived sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity to have the *option* of notifying their parents/guardians. Many LGBTQ+ children lack supportive home environments and may remain closeted at home; for these students, notifying families of bullying, harassment, or intimidation on the basis of a perceived LGBTQ+ identity can lead to a home environment which is abusive, hostile, or which increases youth homelessness. **It is in students' best interest to leave the decision to notify parents/guardians of harassment on the basis of perceived sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity at their discretion.**

In contrast to stereotypes, research finds bullying is better characterized as cyclical patterns of relational violence in which many students are both bullies *and* victims of bullying; about **50% of youth who bully report also being victims** of bullying (Haynie et al., 2001). And, up to 80% of youth participate in bullying behavior as a bystander (Salmivalli et al., 1996).

Strong disciplinary policies, such as “zero-tolerance” policies, are not effective at curbing bullying (Borgwald & Theixos, 2013). This is because bullying is cyclical, and most students are hesitant to report someone and ‘get them in trouble.’ Disciplinary anti-bullying policies create perceptions that the school climate is unsupportive of students.

LGBTQ+ youth of color experience disproportionate school “push-out” due to harsh disciplinary policies (Brudge et al., 2021). Disciplinary school policies can work to turn students away from education

and onto a pathway towards juvenile detention (the school to prison pipeline). Disciplinary policies are disproportionately applied across youth, with LGBTQ+ youth of color being most subjected to school to prison pipeline experiences (Brudge et al., 2021). LGBTQ+ youth of color report experiences in schools of increased surveillance and of being blamed for their own victimization (Brudge et al., 2021).

In contrast, **schools experience less bullying when they work to foster a supportive, caring environment** in which students and teachers have meaningful, trusting relationships with one another (Konold et al., 2014; Thornberg, Wänström, & Pozzoli, 2017). **Restorative justice practices** which focus on healing and reconciliation with a victim, are effective at reducing bullying, particularly among school-aged juvenile populations (Palermo, 2013).

Given this, GLSEN Maryland is in favor of HB0576 / SB0629 but requests **amendments requiring restorative justice processes in response to incidents of bullying, harassment, and intimidation.**