

Bill: **HB0666 / SB0566 Family Law - Fundamental Parental Rights**

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

Submitted by: Michele Schlehofer, Board Member

Position: **UNFAVORABLE**

I am submitting this testimony **OPPOSING HB0666 / SB0566** (the “Fundamental Parental Rights” bill) 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. Not only is HB0666 / SB0566 unnecessary, the broad, vague language of the bill has the potential to undermine Maryland State Department of Education standards for K-12 education and to create a chilling environment in the classroom.

HB0666 / SB0566 is a broadly written “freedom to censor” bill which provides parents with large authority to select which components of the MDSE educational framework they want taught to their children. The vague language of the bill ensures that parents can unilaterally reject broad swaths of MDSE curricula. As such, **HB0666 / SB0566 undermines Maryland State Department of Education standards and undermines teacher’s freedom to teach.**

Children thrive in the classroom when parents and teachers work together to support their learning. However, **HB0666 / SB0566 undermines parent-teacher educational partnerships** by promoting parental involvement in a way that **undermines teacher’s training, expertise, and authority in the classroom.**

Educational content pertaining to sex, gender, and/or race is particularly likely to be that which parents attempt to censor under the guise of “parental rights.” All children deserve access to comprehensive, robust, and accurate educational curricula. Teaching about these topics sharpens young minds and enhances critical thinking skills. As HB0666 / SB0566 provides parents with broad opportunity to undermine their child’s education under the guise of parental authority, this bill is **potentially detrimental to children’s education.**

The broad and vague language of the bill is likely to have a **chilling effect on educational content around sex, gender, and/or race**, creating situations where teachers fear parental backlash for teaching core educational content. Democracy requires freedom of thought, expression, and inquiry, all of which this bill undermines by providing parents with broad “freedom to censor.” Research on the impact of similar broad, vague bills (such as Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill) have found that this type of legislation has an immediate chilling effect, reducing teacher’s support of marginalized students (Equality Florida, 2022). Research has also linked these types of broad censorship bills to an increase in targeted harassment of LGBTQ+ students and their families (Goldberg, 2023).

Additionally, **this bill is unnecessary** as there are currently many opportunities for parents to know the lesson plans and resources their children’s teachers use. Most Maryland public school districts use Schoology, Google Classroom, or other web-based programs on which the teachers post their lessons, books, and videos used in the classrooms. This became even more effective during the years of remote learning. Parents also have opportunities to meet directly in-person with their students’ teachers at family conferences scheduled multiple times over the year.

Given the broad, vague nature of the bill, the potential for the bill to undermine MDSE educational standards, the chilling effect HB0666 / SB0566 will have on classroom instruction, and that the bill replicates the existing access parents have to school materials, GLSEN Maryland opposes HB0666 / SB0566 and requests an **UNFAVORABLE** vote in committee.