



Secular Maryland

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HB 737 - OPPOSE

Alternative Education Options - Right to Learn and Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today Programs (Right to Learn Act of 2023)

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Schools and institutions that participate in government supported programs should be required to follow all of the applicable, well justified, government rules, regulations, and policies as a requisite condition for receiving the government support. This bill includes the following sweeping, insidious, and irresponsible provision: "NOTHING IN THIS SUBSECTION SHALL REQUIRE ANY SCHOOL OR INSTITUTION TO ADOPT ANY RULE, REGULATION, OR POLICY THAT CONFLICTS WITH ITS RELIGIOUS OR MORAL TEACHINGS." No well justified government rule, regulation, or policy advancing, defending, or protecting, the civil rights of individuals or promoting the goal of equipping future adults with the skills to productively participate and contribute to society should be set aside because some school or institution cites religious beliefs as their justification for their rejection of that rule, regulation, or policy. Secular Maryland agrees with Ahmed Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, when he said "... the right to freedom of religion protects individuals and not religions as such."

Political campaigns carried out by religious institutions and their followers sometimes invoke religious freedom to seek to rollback human rights at both national and international levels. We should not lose sight of, or disregard, the relevant fact that minorities, including those who reject or criticize particular religious beliefs, or who reject religions in general, along with women, LGBT+ people, etc., experience discrimination in the name of religion. Historically, slavery has been regulated, and supported, on religious grounds. Again quoting Ahmed Shaheed, "While religious organizations are entitled to autonomy in the administration of their affairs, such deference should be extended within a holistic conception of rights grounded in the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and inalienability of all human rights."

Religious and “moral” teachings are sometimes counter-factual, misrepresenting fictional stories as factual history, mischaracterizing modern knowledge as immoral, and divisively miseducating the students to promote loyalty towards narrow ideologically aligned institutional self-interests. Government laws should not, and need not, accommodate that. Government is not discriminating against religious believers when it imparts a secular education. Ideas that are germane to a subject under discussion in a classroom should not be censored because a student with particular religious or political beliefs might be offended. A free and vigorous exchange of ideas is necessary for genuine teaching and learning. Education should not be intended to make people comfortable, it is meant to make them think.

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