



**Testimony for the House Ways and Means Committee
HB 890 - Commission on History, Culture, and Civics in Education
March 1, 2023**

FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

The ACLU of Maryland, Antiracism for Maryland Schools coalition, Baltimore Algebra Project, Southern Marylanders for Racial Equality, Educate the World, PRISM, Brown and Gold PAC of the Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Charles County Moms of Color, Maryland Moms of Color, Asian American Center of Frederick, Lower Shore Progressive Caucus, Charles County Rise, and Racial Justice Now support HB 890 - Commission on History, Culture, and Civics in Education, which would establish a commission of diverse educators and experts to examine the history, culture, and civics of various ethnic and underrepresented populations in Maryland and the United States. The commission would make recommendations to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) regarding the adoption of standards and programs in the aforementioned areas of study.

The time to overhaul the public school curriculum in Maryland is now. The demographics of Maryland's public school enrollment have changed drastically over the past decade. Of the roughly 900,000 students in public schools statewide, Latine¹ students now make up 22% of the enrollment², which represents a 100% increase from 2010³. Over that same time period, students of Asian descent have increased by 1% and now represent almost 7% of the public school enrollment in Maryland. The population of the Black students in Maryland has been declining slightly over the past decade but still represent approximately 33% of the Maryland school population. Enrollment of white students has experienced a steeper decline over the past 10 years and now make up approximately 33% of the student body in Maryland as well. Further, the

¹ "Latine" is a gender-neutral term used to describe a person of Latine American origin or descent.

² Maryland State Department of Education (2023, January 24). Accountability Update. Maryland State Board of Education. <https://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2023/0124/AccountabilityUpdate.pdf>

³ Maryland State Department of Education (2010, September 30). Maryland Public School Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender and Number of Schools. Maryland State Board of Education. <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/DCAA/SSP/20102011Student/2011EnrollbyRace.pdf>

number of teenagers identifying as gay or non-heterosexual rose nationwide from 8.3% to 11.7%, between 2015 and 2019⁴.

Passing HB 890 represents the long overdue need to recognize and embrace the rich histories and cultures of our diverse student body in our classrooms. The commission will have the opportunity to delve deeply into the contributions of not just people of color, but also those of women, the LGBTQ+ community, and differently abled community. Studies have shown that a multicultural curriculum has a strong and positive impact on the educational outcomes of students of color and their white peers⁵. Promoting multicultural awareness increases a students' ability to empathize with students that are ethnically and culturally different from them, which subsequently leads to improved relations among students and overall improved school climate. For children who are Black or Brown, or LGBTQ+, inclusive and life-affirming curriculum will help them develop a strong sense of belonging and self-worth.

HB 890 has many provisions to ensure that the commission is representative of the various ethnic groups and cultures that are present in Maryland. However, our organizations are asking for the following to be amended into the bill:

- Ensure that the teacher appointed to the commission is certified
- Ensure that the Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs can nominate candidates for the two seats allotted for Indigenous Americans
- Expand the commission's membership to ensure that Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Maryland can nominate candidates for at least one appointment
- Ensure that the process includes opportunities for the public to provide input and engage authentically with the commission

HB 890 does not make changes to the decision-making powers of the Maryland State Department of Education and local school districts on curriculum. Instead, it establishes a democratic process that will bring a diverse group of experts and members of our diverse communities together throughout the state, to study and develop recommendations on curriculum content for consideration by MSDE.

The *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* is projected to invest at least \$4 billion in education reforms over the next decade. However, the Blueprint does not ensure that the curriculum maximizes learning and student development, especially for underserved populations. Let's make sure that this education reform initiative includes the transformation needed to ensure that our classroom lessons are inclusive and uplifting for all of Maryland's families.

For the foregoing reasons, our organizations ask for a favorable report on HB 890 with the aforementioned amendments. Thank you.

For more information or to connect with any of the organizations in this testimony, please contact Frank Patinella, Senior Education Advocate, ACLU of Maryland, patinella@aclu-md.org

⁴ (2021, June 15). *Big Rise in US Teens Identifying as Gay, Bisexual*. WebMD. <https://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/news/20210615/big-rise-in-us-teens-identifying-as-gay-bisexual>

⁵ Zirkel, S. (2022). *The Influence of Multicultural Educational Practices on Student Outcomes and Intergroup Relations*. *Sage Journals*, 110(6). <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810811000605>