



**Maryland Commission
on LGBTQIA+ Affairs**

**TESTIMONY OF JEREMY BROWNING
DIRECTOR, MARYLAND COMMISSION ON LGBTQIA+ AFFAIRS
FAVORABLE STATEMENT ON HB0558
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION - COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH
EDUCATION FRAMEWORK**

March 27, 2024

Environment, Energy, and the Environment Committee

The Hon. Brian J. Feldman, Chair
The Hon. Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Environment, Energy, and the Environment Committee, my name is Jeremy Browning(he/him), and I am the Director of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs. The Commission was created by the 2021 Maryland General Assembly, and later altered in 2023, to assess challenges facing our LGBTQIA+ communities, establish best practices and recommendations for LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and provide testimony to legislative and administrative bodies.

On behalf of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs we strongly support House Bill 558 to create a comprehensive health education framework. This bill is a critical step towards ensuring that all students receive inclusive, age-appropriate and evidence-based education on various health topics, including gender identity and sexual orientation.

The Commission has extensively researched and analyzed the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in our state's education system. Reports such as the 2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey and the GLSEN 2021 Maryland State Snapshot reveal distressing data regarding the safety and well-being of LGBTQIA+ students in Maryland's schools.

These reports consistently demonstrate that Maryland's K-12 schools are frequently unsafe and hostile environments for LGBTQIA+ students. They experience alarming rates of bullying, harassment, assault, and discrimination from multiple sources,

including peers, educators, administrators, and even family members. The consequences of this hostility are severe, leading to lower academic achievement, diminished mental health, and increased risk of suicidal ideation and behavior among LGBTQIA+ youth.

According to the Maryland Department of Health 2021-2022 Youth Risk Behavior Survey and Youth Tobacco Survey findings, students identifying as LGBTQ+ were more likely to report more risk behaviors measured on the survey compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts.

Providing comprehensive health education that includes topics such as gender identity and sexual orientation is essential for promoting the well-being and safety of all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. By requiring each county board of education to create an age-appropriate curriculum consistent with the comprehensive health education framework outlined in HB558, we can ensure that students receive accurate and affirming information that reflects the diversity of our public schools and communities.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs strongly urges a favorable report on House Bill 558.

REFERENCES:

GLSEN. (2023). School Climate for LGBTQ+ Students in Maryland 2021 State Snapshot: Maryland):

https://maps.glsen.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/GLSEN_2021_NSCS_State_Snapshots_MD.pdf

GLSEN. The 2021 National School Climate Survey Executive Summary:

https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NSCS-2021-Executive_Summary-EN.pdf

Maryland Department of Health: 2021-2022 Youth Risk Behavior Survey and Youth Tobacco Survey: <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/Reports/Pages/YRBS-Main.aspx>