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BILL: House Bill 558 - Primary and Secondary Education - Comprehensive Health Education Framework - Established

DATE: March 27, 2024

POSITION: FAVORABLE

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and Environment

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Annapolis Pride's mission is to advocate for, empower, and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community in Anne Arundel County to live fully and authentically. Our vision is a safe, equitable, and anti-racist community where people of all identities thrive.

As such, Annapolis Pride enthusiastically supports House Bill 558 which will require each Local Education Agency to have an age-appropriate, comprehensive, medically accurate, and unbiased health and sexual education curriculum that acknowledges and affirms students with a variety of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. All of Maryland's young people must have access to comprehensive, medically accurate, and age-appropriate health and sexual education beginning in kindergarten and continuing through high school.

Research indicates very few LGBTQ+ youth currently have access to inclusive health education, leaving them inadequately prepared to make informed and safe decisions regarding their health and well-being.¹ Without comprehensive education, specifically in the early years, students enter adolescence without the information they need to make responsible and safe decisions. The consequences of inadequate health and sexual education can lead to unhealthy relationships, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, bullying, sexual assault, and discrimination.² Comprehensive health and sexual education is vital for young people's overall educational achievement and future success.

Furthermore, the lack of a mandate requiring medically accurate, age-appropriate, comprehensive, and unbiased sexual health education puts Maryland students, and the public health, at undue risk. LGBTQ+ students deserve the same access to accurate, up-to-date information about their sexual health as any other student. Research shows that comprehensive health and sexual education leads to healthier teenage outcomes and encourages responsible sexual behaviors.³

¹ Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., & Menard, L. (2022). The 2021 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN.

² Breuner CC, Mattson G, AAP Committee on Adolescence, AAP Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health. Sexuality Education for Children and Adolescents. Pediatrics. 2016;138(2):e20161348

³ Haberland N, Rogow D, Sexuality Education: Emerging Trends in Evidence and Practice, Journal of Adolescent Health, Volume 56, Issue 1, Supplement, 2015, Pages S15-S21, ISSN 1054-139X, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2014.08.013>

Despite the belief that children are too young to understand gender identity and human sexuality, this assertion is false. From the moment they are born, children receive messages and stereotypes about how they are supposed to look and behave from peers, books, and media. Studies show how the messages kids receive about gender influence them at very early ages and place them into strict boxes, preventing them from reaching their full potential. Around age four, most children have a stable sense of their gender identity.⁴ This is a core aspect of one's identity that comes from within each of us and is an inherent aspect of one's makeup.

Accordingly, Annapolis Pride respectfully requests a favorable committee report on House Bill 558.

⁴ Graham P. Transgender children and young people: how the evidence can point the way forward. *BJPsych Bull.* 2023 Apr;47(2):98-104. doi: 10.1192/bjb.2022.3. PMID: 35177147; PMCID: PMC10063975.