

March 26, 2024

Opposition to HB558

Please oppose HB558, which would require every school district to teach the Maryland Health Framework (“the Framework”) in its entirety.

As a mom of five, the religious aspect of this bill hits the hardest for me as a parent. My husband and I will love our children no matter what, but while they are in our care we will raise them up with our fundamentals stemming from the teachings of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. We are accountable to only him. I am accountable to my Lord on how I raise my children. First and foremost we teach them to love and show kindness to everyone. However, the idea of gender fluidity and bouncing between genders is not something we are teaching our children as truth. It is an extremely dangerous concept that will have and has had disastrous consequences. Especially since it is near impossible to show the “sincerity” of how someone self identifies.

A parental opt out was the bare minimum that I would accept and now that is being taken away. I have one out of my four school age kids in the public school system. The top down authoritarian leadership that pushes their ideologies on our youth is why more and more will withdraw and homeschool.

Risk of First Amendment Implications

Gender and sexuality are closely connected to religious and moral decisions that implicate the First Amendment. For example, the Framework requires that high school students differentiate between sexual orientation, sexual behavior, and sexual identity (see standard 1c.HS2.6). These distinctions are contrary to major religious creeds. Should a student who subscribes to such a creed be required to complete assignments in which he must distinguish between sexual orientation, sexual behavior and sexual identity, in order to receive adequate marks, this could be considered compelled speech (see West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette, 319 U.S. 624 (1943)).

Loss of Autonomy for Local Boards of Education

HB558 would take control away from local Boards of Education. This is an unwise choice because local Boards are best equipped to meet the challenges of their individual localities.

Lack of an Opt-Out Option for Parents

The requirement that issues such as gender identity, sexuality and mental health be taught extensively in every public school infringes upon the parent's fundamental right to direct the upbringing of the child (see *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510 (1925)). Among other subjects, the Framework requires extensive teaching regarding sexuality, gender identity and mental health. Decisions in these personal arenas deeply affect a child's life. As such, these subjects should be discussed in the home by parents, rather than in the public school system. As HB558 now stands, there is no opt-out option for parents, which is a matter of deep concern.

Loss of Instructional Time on Core Subjects

I am concerned about the loss of instructional time on core subjects, should school districts be required to teach the Framework. In the 2022-2023 school year, forty-seven (47%) percent of Maryland students from grades 3-8 were proficient in language arts. Twenty-five percent (25%) of students in grades 3-8 were proficient in math. Twenty-six percent (26%) of students in the eighth grade were proficient in science (see full report [here](#)). These statistics show that more time on core subjects, not less, is required to prepare Maryland students for graduation and productive careers.

I ask that you consider opposing this bill in its entirety. Thank you for the service you render to Maryland.

Sincerely,

Victoria Millsaps

Calvert County, MD



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