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Unfavorable Testimony on Bill HB0558: Primary and Secondary Education - Comprehensive Health Education Framework - Established

February 5, 2024

Chair Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Vice Chair Jheanelle K. Wilkins, and esteemed members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I write to you today as nonbinary adult invested in the well-being of Montgomery County's LGBTQIA+ community, and as a parent of two children aged 11 and 16. **My testimony is unfavorable, and I urge you to vote against bill.**

HB0558 is a bill that is has a great intention, but a potentially dangerous impact. I want to be able to trust my government to develop laws that ensure an equitable health education framework – but recent years in our country's wave of anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-reproductive rights legislation prove that we cannot. Grandstanding of powerful, conservative, and christian fundamentalist politicians can wreak havoc upon our country's disenfranchised residents.

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and our local and most of our local and county school boards have developed standards for health education, including family life and human sexuality that are already inclusive of gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as an opt out clause for parents to keep their children out of those specific lessons if they are contrary to their family's values. Let me say it again, this absolutely critical structure to our health education already exists.

What's so dangerous about codifying it into law? The answer is clear. Maryland's political environment changes every 4 years when we appoint a new governor. New appointees are made, and conservative politicians spread hate against both LGBTQ+ rights, reproductive rights, religious rights; and those same politicians work to enshrine white supremacy, misogyny, and classism in local, county, and state government policy.

By codifying the requirements of our health and sex education curriculum, we set a dangerous precedent. A revised law that excludes the comprehensive nature of the health, sex, and family live education described in this bill can be proposed - and it could become law. That newly passed law would then require the experts in our educational system at MSDE and our county and local school boards to gut their well-established , well-researched and age-appropriate curriculum.

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Even with great educational policy in place, our schools still struggle with implementation of state standards - with family life and human sexuality in particular. As my children were growing up, we had to purchase books that accurately described their family. Examples of the books we have purchased are Robie Harris's "It's Not the Stork," "It's Perfectly Normal," and "Sex is a Funny Word;" Cory Silverberg's "What Makes a Baby;" and Kacen Callendar's "Felix Ever After." But each of these books are indeed age appropriate and written by experts in their fields, and in some cases by the LGBTQIA+ community itself. They contain illustrations, and not photographs.

The state educational system standards can be hard to ensure the implementation of at the level of individual school teachers, or county curriculums. I can't deny that to be true, and I have seen it first hand. However, families and students can still hold these systems accountable by contacting the their local school boards, and the Maryland State Department of Education when those standards are not being adhered to.

Passing bill HB0558 out of committee and onto the house floor would take that power away from children and families. That may not be the intent of the bill, but it is the bill's impact.

I urge the Ways and Means committee to vote unfavorably on bill HB0558, preventing the bill from moving out of committee.

Sincerely,



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