



**Testimony for the House Ways and Means Committee
HB 50 - Commission on History, Culture, and Civics in Education
January 17, 2024**

FAVORABLE

For the reasons expressed below, the undersigned organizations respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 50 - 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. Further, the number of teenagers identifying as gay or non-heterosexual rose nationwide from 8.3% to 11.7%, between 2015 and 2019⁴.

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

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>

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>

Passing HB 50 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 50 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 ramp up funding for Maryland public schools by at least \$4 billion 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, the undersigned organizations respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 50.

Respectfully,

ACLU of Maryland
Baltimore Algebra Project
Antiracism for Maryland Schools
Southern Marylanders for Racial Equality
Educate the World
FreeState Justice
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
Racial Justice Now
Association of Nigerians in Frederick

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

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>