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Appropriations Committee

120 Taylor House Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Tuesday, February 4, 2025

HB0086 – Institutions of Higher Education and Elementary and Secondary Schools – Title VI Coordinators

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Esteemed Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Lauren Pruitt, and I am the Legal Director at FreeState Justice, a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving LGBTQ+ Marylanders from diverse backgrounds. I am writing in support of **HB0086**, which seeks to require higher education institutions and local school systems to designate a Title VI Coordinator to ensure compliance with Title VI of the Federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, and to allow persons alleging discrimination under certain provisions to file a complaint with the Title VI Coordinator of a local school system.

HB0086 addresses a critical area of compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that affects students across Maryland. Title VI Coordinators serve as a necessary accountability check on educational institutions, which remain hostile environments for LGBTQ+ students. It is imperative that these coordinators advocate for change and foster inclusivity, creating a climate where every student feels valued and respected.

Specifically, **HB0086** would:

- **Promote Access to Education:** Title VI Coordinators may address current and potential barriers at educational institutions that disproportionately affect LGBTQ+ students of color.
- **Promote Upward Mobility:** By removing barriers to education, students can focus on their education, leading to better job opportunities and higher incomes.
- **Advance Social Justice:** Title VI Coordinators may investigate and dismantle institutional discrimination and systemic bias.

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This bill is not only essential to address and prevent discrimination in Maryland's educational institutions, but to mitigate harm to vulnerable populations. By expanding access to Title VI Coordinators and facilitating the filing of Title VI complaints, students may be more likely to seek support for discriminatory experiences.

As an advocate, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges that unequal access to education imposes on LGBTQ+ students. A lack of support for marginalized communities facing discrimination pushes them away from educational institutions, restricting their chances of upward mobility.

HB0086 serves an important goal in ensuring compliance with Title VI in educational institutions. I urge the committee to issue a favorable report for **HB0086**. By requiring the designation of Title VI Coordinators in all educational institutions, Maryland will take a step toward dismantling institutional discrimination and promoting access to education for all Maryland students.

Sincerely,

Lauren Pruitt
Legal Director
FreeState Justice

Sources:

1. Discrimination and Barriers to Well-Being: The State of the LGBTQI+ Community in 2022, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/discrimination-and-barriers-to-well-being-the-state-of-the-lgbtqi-community-in-2022/>
2. Suicide Risk and Access to Care Among LGBTQ College Students, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/suicide-risk-and-access-to-care-among-lgbtq-college-students-sept-2022/>