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SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 916

EDUCATION - CURRICULUM STANDARDS - REQUIREMENTS

(EDUCATE TO STOP THE HATE ACT)

MARCH 5, 2025

FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Agudath Israel of Maryland speaks on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish communities across Maryland, on behalf of the 10,000 students attending 30 Jewish day schools in our great state, and on behalf of the many but dwindling number of survivors of the Holocaust and their families, who are such an important part of our communities.

We are fully supportive of the intent of the sponsors of this bill and applaud their great sensitivity to these issues. We fully concur with the statements in the preamble to this act, that “hate, bigotry, and prejudice undermine the very fabric of our society,” and we share the deep concern voiced in the preamble that “hateful sentiment is reaching unprecedented levels in contemporary society.” As an attempt to combat this alarming trend, Senate Bill 916 would require various curriculum standards focusing on the teaching of the historical context of prejudice and persecution, especially in the context of the impact on marginalized groups.

In its current, revised form, SB 916 would require some, but not all, nonpublic schools to follow the curriculum requirements. Based on amendments from last year’s legislation, the bill includes nonpublic schools holding a Certificate of Approval from the Maryland State Department of Education in its requirements, but exempts nonpublic schools that are operated by a bona fide church organization, commonly referred to as “church exempt” schools.

We share the concern about the rise of hate, and support efforts to combat it. At the same time, we do wish to voice the following perspective: the state should not dictate the particulars of curriculum to its nonpublic schools. Very many of our students are themselves from historically marginalized communities. Our students do receive proper historical education on the subjects of the historical contexts leading to discrimination and prejudice, on the Holocaust and other horrific crimes of history, and on the contributions of minorities (in addition to education opportunities outside of school); other nonpublic school students in Maryland do so as well. The value of allowing Maryland’s nonpublic schools to craft their curriculum independently (while ensuring they meet State licensing, approval, and institutional requirements) is long recognized, and should not be compromised, admirable as the intent may be. Many of our schools hold a Certificate of Approval from the Department of Education but are not classified as “church exempt,” and it is important that these schools too are allowed to retain their educational integrity.

As such, we respectfully ask that the bill be amended to preserve the autonomy of nonpublic schools, either by changing the language to “encouraging” nonpublic schools to include these units in their curriculum, or simply by striking the nonpublic school language entirely. Thank you.

Amendment to Senate Bill 1058

Amendment No. 1

On Page 6, line 19, strike: “and all nonpublic schools in the State that hold a Certificate of Approval issued by the State Board of Education under § 2–206 of the Education Article”

Amendment No. 2

On Page 6, line 24, strike: “A nonpublic school that is operated by a registered bona fide church organization or that has not been approved by the State Board under § 2–206 of the Education Article, is” and insert: “NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE”