

**Testimony Unfavorable to SB 948:
Children--Parental Rights--Educational Rights**

February 28, 2025

Senator Brian Feldman, Chair, Senator Cheryl Kagan, Vice-Chair, and esteemed members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

My name is Heather Borsum and I have been a resident of Maryland for most of my life. I am in my 28th year as a teacher in Montgomery County Public Schools; the past eleven of those years have been in high school. I have a frontline view of many issues that affect Maryland's students and that view leads me to ask for an unfavorable report on SB 948. Some of my students also oppose this bill and their stories will follow this letter.

High school is a time of growth, change, and exploration for all kids. Some of them are wrestling with feelings about their sexuality and gender. It is extremely difficult to come to terms with these ideas for yourself and then it is even more difficult to "out" yourselves to authority figures and ask for things such as a change in pronoun usage. Typically children agonize over the issue for months before mustering up the courage to tell their teachers. However, telling a teacher is often not the most difficult disclosure they have to make--discussing it with their families is. Some students (thankfully not all) face a home environment that is at best dismissive of their gender or sexuality issues and at worst is so unaccepting that it would be emotionally or physically dangerous for the child to confide in their family.

In those cases, the school can and should be a safe haven. Students cannot learn when they are worried about their safety and some kids would be at risk because of parts of SB 948. Perhaps they use pronouns at school that they are afraid to use at home, or perhaps they are part of a group or club that supports and uplifts them but they know their parents would disapprove.

Attached are stories from some of these kids in their own words. They were afraid to submit testimony under their own names so I am sharing them on their behalf. The fact that they are so afraid demonstrates how destructive this bill could be. I respectfully ask that you read their stories and that you report unfavorably on SB 948.

Thank you for your consideration,
Heather Borsum
Rockville, Maryland

Dear members of the Maryland Senate Education, Energy, and Environment committee, I am a high school junior in MCPS and a co-lead of my school's Pride Alliance. I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 0948.

My school's pride club has been an immensely important place for me and many of my friends to explore our own identities and form our own understanding of ourselves. The fact that it is a safe space, independent from any other groups at school, both outside of school and at home, makes it invaluable to many club members. Pride clubs are also very important in building community and helping members feel less alone. By providing a support system, other students can help answer questions, suggest solutions to issues people are facing, and simply be there as emotional support.

For me personally, the ability to go by pronouns at school that do not match my biological sex has been very important in discovering my identity and feeling seen. For many of my friends, their only option for exploring identities is at school. A classmate of mine in PE uses different pronouns at home and at school. By requiring parental permission, this bill would be denying my classmate the safe space they have found at school.

One of my closest friends told me that for her, the only options were either transition or suicide. The ability to independently socially transition at school and find support in community through extracurricular groups are of the utmost importance to her, to me, and to all queer students.

Dear members of the Maryland Senate Education, Energy, and Environment committee,

I am a senior at a public high school in Montgomery County, Maryland. I love creative writing, reading, and music, and as a trans and non-binary student, I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 0948.

For students outside the gender binary, school can be one of the only safe spaces for us to be ourselves. I'm lucky to have parents who support me as LGBTQ+, but I'm

taking my coming out process slow. If SB0948 passed, it would prevent me and other trans and non-binary students from expressing ourselves at our own pace. I don't know if I'm fully ready to come out to my parents, and I don't know if they're ready for that, either. In the meantime, school is a place for me to explore how it feels to be out and give me time to get used to it.

And not every student is that lucky. Not every student has supportive parents, and even fewer have parents that understand how complex gender can be. Please help to keep every LGBTQ+ student safe and let us come out when we're ready instead of when others think we should.

Thank you for your time, and I urge you again to vote against SB0948 and preserve all students' rights to be who they are, as privately or as publicly as they need to be.

Dear Members of the Maryland Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee,

My name is Alba. I am 15 and in my sophomore year of high school at a public school in Montgomery County, Maryland. I love science and Music and this is my sixth year taking choir. I participate in various extracurricular activities, such as the Biomedical club and one of the student-run acapella groups at my school. I am writing today to urge you to oppose Senate Bill 0948.

If Senate Bill 0948 had passed as a law merely one year ago, when I first started high school and was looking for clubs I would enjoy, I would not have been able to join the Pride Club at my school as my mum would have stopped me from attending. While my mum has come to terms with my queerness, it took a while for that to happen and her being able to hear from me what actually went on during pride club definitely helped her to accept me and the LGBTQ+ community. If my parents could have seen the extracurricular activities I was in and removed me from them, it would have taken much more time for her to come around to my queerness, continuing to strain our relationship. Many LGBTQ+ people are like my freshman self and don't have the most supportive parents, but having real examples of queer people would open their eyes and make

them more accepting. It is important for children to have a strong relationship with their parents, and having accepting parents is a necessary part of having a strong parent-child relationship.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this, and please, oppose Bill 0948.

Dear members of the Maryland Senate Education, Energy and Environment committee,

I am a teenager from a high school in Maryland. I'm on the way out, so much of what is about to be implemented will not directly affect me, but there are many in my school, and many more throughout my community who do not feel safe currently with the way things are.

I have siblings, friends, acquaintances, and overall know numerous people who are attempting to come to terms with an aspect of themselves that is difficult for anyone to talk to others about, especially parents due to the sense of uncertainty over to what extent that will be accepted.

So to that end, I'd implore you to reject this bill, with the knowledge that sending it out will no doubt cause lots of emotional and physical harm to people who will be unable to reconcile, discuss or truly embrace that side of themselves. I ask you this as a brother, as a friend, and just as someone who lives in this state.

Sincerely,

Anonymous Student