



Working to end sexual violence in Maryland

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Testimony Supporting House Bill 161
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The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) is a non-profit membership organization that includes the State's seventeen rape crisis centers, law enforcement, mental health and health care providers, attorneys, educators, survivors of sexual violence and other concerned individuals. MCASA includes the Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI), a statewide legal services provider for survivors of sexual assault. MCASA represents the unified voice and combined energy of all of its members working to eliminate sexual violence in the State of Maryland. We urge the Education, Energy & Environment Committee to report favorably on House Bill 161.

House Bill 161 – K-12 Comprehensive Health Education

This bill will mandate a comprehensive health education for students in K-12. MCASA notes and appreciates that this specifically includes issues vital to preventing sexual assault and promoting health relationships, including:

(IV) FAMILY LIFE AND HUMAN SEXUALITY

(V) GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

(VI) SAFETY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

This bill is particularly strong because it approaches health education holistically and will permit educators to develop curricula that respond to the needs of students. By including the broad spectrum of topics, the Comprehensive Education Framework will help create a cohesive and sensible approach to related topics such as sexuality, consent, and abuse prevention.

As the Committee considers this important legislation, MCASA urges it to remember that some children are in abusive, violent, and unsupportive homes. Most parents are wonderful, but some are not. A full curricula, including topics addressing sensitive issues such as healthy relationships and sexuality, can be a life line for students who are in desperate need of help. Please also be mindful that some schools in Maryland are refusing to provide students with this important information and even banning emotionally supportive symbols like rainbows. Depriving children of support at school just makes them more vulnerable. HB161 will help support all of Maryland's children.

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