



**Maryland Commission
on LGBTQIA+ Affairs**

Bill Title: Primary and Secondary Education - Comprehensive Health Education Framework - Established

Bill Number(s): [HB0161](#)

Position: FAVORABLE

Date: January 27, 2025

Submitted by: Jeremy Browning, Director of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

To:

House Ways and Means Committee

The Hon. Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
The Hon. Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Vice Chair

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

The Hon. Brian J. Feldman, Chair
The Hon. Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair

Testimony on behalf of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs:

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs, created by the Maryland General Assembly, works to serve LGBTQIA+ Marylanders by galvanizing community voices, researching and addressing challenges, and advocating for policies that advance equity and inclusion. The Commission envisions a Maryland where all LGBTQIA+ people can live full and authentic lives. As a vital resource, the Commission collaborates with public officials, agencies, and community partners to ensure the rights and dignity of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders are protected and respected.

On behalf of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs we strongly support House Bill 161 to create a comprehensive health education framework. This bill is a critical step towards ensuring that all students receive inclusive, age-appropriate and evidence-based education on various health topics, including gender identity and sexual orientation.

The Commission has extensively researched and analyzed the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in our state's education system. Reports such as the [2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey](#) and the [GLSEN 2021 Maryland State Snapshot](#) reveal distressing data regarding the safety and well-being of LGBTQIA+ students in Maryland's schools.

These reports consistently demonstrate that Maryland's K-12 schools are frequently unsafe and hostile environments for LGBTQIA+ students. They experience alarming rates of bullying,

harassment, assault, and discrimination from multiple sources, including peers, educators, administrators, and even family members. The consequences of this hostility are severe, leading to lower academic achievement, diminished mental health, and increased risk of suicidal ideation and behavior among LGBTQIA+ youth.

According to the [Maryland Department of Health 2021-2022 Youth Risk Behavior Survey and Youth Tobacco Survey](#) findings, students identifying as LGBTQ+ were more likely to report more risk behaviors measured on the survey compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts.

Providing comprehensive health education that includes topics such as gender identity and sexual orientation is essential for promoting the well-being and safety of all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. By requiring each county board of education to create an age-appropriate curriculum consistent with the comprehensive health education framework outlined in House Bill 161, we can ensure that students receive accurate and affirming information that reflects the diversity of our public schools and communities.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs strongly urges a favorable report on House Bill 161.

REFERENCES:

GLSEN. (2023). School Climate for LGBTQ+ Students in Maryland 2021 State Snapshot: Maryland):
https://maps.glsen.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/GLSEN_2021_NSCS_State_Snapshots_MD.pdf

GLSEN. The 2021 National School Climate Survey Executive Summary:
https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NSCS-2021-Executive_Summary-EN.pdf

Maryland Department of Health: 2021-2022 Youth Risk Behavior Survey and Youth Tobacco Survey: <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/Reports/Pages/YRBS-Main.aspx>