



House Bill 161
Primary and Secondary Education - Comprehensive Health
Education Framework - Established
March 20, 2025
Favorable With Amendment

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee,

The Trans Rights Advocacy Coalition (TRAC) is a Maryland-led group of organizations, health care providers, and advocates seeking to improve the wellbeing of transgender Marylanders and ensure health equity across the state. TRAC has led legislative efforts to enact bills to provide and protect gender-affirming care in Maryland. These bills, along with Governor Moore's executive order declaring Maryland a Trans Sanctuary State, demonstrate clear support for the health and well being of transgender Marylanders.

TRAC **strongly supports HB 161 with amendments** to create a comprehensive health education framework, inclusive of gender identity and sexual orientation. This bill is vitally important to ensuring LGBTQ+ youth are represented in school health education, which is why ***we require an amendment to remove the parental opt out of the human sexuality topic***. The opt out language is discriminatory and negates the framework's goal of providing health education on gender identity and sexual orientation to all students.

The State Department of Education established the health education framework in June 2021, intentionally including topics on gender identity and sexual orientation.¹ The following year, Carroll County's school board voted to remove this content from their health curriculum, which prompted the need to enforce the required content.² The opt out language defeats the intent of HB161 - to strengthen enforcement of the health education framework - and endangers the safety and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ youth in Maryland.

The hostile political environment created by the Trump administration has worsened the discrimination against LGBTQ+ students in Maryland. Research shows that LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculums have life-saving

¹[Maryland Comprehensive Health Education Framework](#) June 2021 *See Standard 1C Family Life and Human Sexuality*

² [New bill reignites debate over LGBTQ-inclusive school health curriculum](#) aired on WYPR March 12, 2024

impacts.³ The 2021 Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) Survey found that only 13% of schools discussed LGBTQ+ issues in assignments. LGBTQ+ students in schools with an LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum feel greater belonging, were less likely to miss school, and less likely to have considered suicide compared to students in schools without an inclusive curriculum.⁴⁵

The Trevor Project 2024 survey on the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth found that 39% of LGBTQ+ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including 46% of transgender and nonbinary young people. The study also found a direct correlation between accepting communities and decreased risk of suicide⁶

Health curriculums that include gender identity and sexual orientation are well studied and proven to positively impact the lives of LGBTQ+ students. For example, a study in the *Journal of School Nursing* found that sexual minority students who received decidedly heteronormative and exclusive sex education, demonstrate higher levels of anxiety.⁷ Another study published in *Journal of Adolescent Health* shows that students in states with a greater proportion of LGBTQ-inclusive sex education have lower odds of experiencing school-based victimization and adverse mental health. The authors suggest that the findings be used to guide intervention development at the school and state levels.⁸

Additionally, leading medical organizations also support inclusive health education. For example, the American Medical Association Health Education policy urges schools at all education levels to implement comprehensive, developmentally appropriate sexuality education programs that appropriately and comprehensively address the sexual behavior of all people, inclusive of sexual and gender minorities..⁹ The American Psychological Association advises that inclusive curriculums benefit all youth, including cis gendered and straight students, improving school climates and healthy relationships for everyone.¹⁰

It's essential for the health, well being, and academic success of LGBTQ+ students that they are included in the health curriculum in Maryland. **The Trans Rights Advocacy Coalition strongly urges a favorable with amendment report on HB 161.**

³ [APA statement on inclusive curriculum](#) American Psychological Association recommend LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum, including sex education.

⁴ [GLSEN National School Climate Survey Executive Summary](#)

⁵ [GLSEN School Climate for LGBTQ+ Students in Maryland](#)

⁶ Trevor Project [2024 US National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People](#)

⁷ Epps B, Markowski M, Cleaver K. [A Rapid Review and Narrative Synthesis of the Consequences of Non-Inclusive Sex Education in UK Schools on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Young People](#). *J Sch Nurs*. 2023 Feb;39(1):87-97.

⁸ Proulx CN, Coulter RWS, Egan JE, Matthews DD, Mair C. [Associations of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning-Inclusive Sex Education With Mental Health Outcomes and School-Based Victimization in U.S. High School Students](#). *J Adolesc Health*. 2019 May;64(5):608-614.

⁹ [AMA Health Education Policy \(2024\)](#)

¹⁰ [APA statement on inclusive curriculum](#) American Psychological Association recommend LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum, including sex education.