

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL HB1055 - FAVORABLE

Commission on Nondiscrimination – Establishment

TO: Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Wendy Novak, Carroll County, Maryland

There is a lot of uncertainty right now. For many families, the presidential executive orders are negatively impacting them on multiple fronts, from financial to safety. There has been an attempt to undo all the civil rights' progress that has been made to ensure that all are included and protected.

Nondiscriminatory policies are not only the right thing to do, there are numerous benefits. Research shows that diverse teams are more flexible and adaptable, leading to better results. Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that people are better able to reach their full potential when basic needs are met. Discrimination keeps those needs from being met.

People need to belong, to be included. This is true for our children as well. All parents want their children to be safe and welcomed in schools. Currently, there is so much confusion over what rights students and parents have in school. Teachers and administrators are uncertain how or if they can show support to students. Our LGBTQ students are significantly more likely to miss school out of concern for their safety or be threatened or insured with a weapon on school property. Students and parents reach out for help when they witness discrimination, such as the exclusion of a book in the family life curriculum because it recognizes that some families have two moms or dads, and struggle with where to go for assistance. The county school system does not notify parents that there is an option to report discrimination to the state, or even that the state has a nondiscrimination policy.

To often, civil rights are considered politics and left to interpretation and ignored. Many institutions would rather deal with the consequences, than do the right thing initially. This leaves people with the burden of knowing their rights and pushing institutions to be accountable. It is often difficult to know who to go to for help when you are discriminated against.

The composition of the committee is well thought out. In particular, I think it is very helpful that members of all three branches of government are included. I am hopeful that this will help eliminate any gaps in protection. The workgroups to solicit input from stakeholders will be helpful to keep the public informed and engaged.

I urge a favorable report on HB1055.