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Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
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Monday, February 10, 2025

HB0495 – Education - Antidiscrimination Policies - Policy and Notice Requirements

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Esteemed Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Ronnie L. Taylor, and I serve as the Community Advocacy Manager at FreeState Justice, a nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing legal and systemic inequities affecting Maryland's LGBTQ+ community. I advocate in strong support of **HB0495**, which mandates comprehensive anti-discrimination policies and notice requirements in educational institutions across Maryland.

HB0495 addresses the pervasive issue of discrimination in Maryland schools, particularly against LGBTQ+ students. Data from GLSEN indicates that 93% of LGBTQ+ students in Maryland regularly hear "gay" used in a negative way, and 80% frequently hear other homophobic remarks. Additionally, 76% of these students regularly hear negative comments about transgender individuals.

This hostile environment leads to significant challenges:

- **Verbal Harassment:** Approximately 50% of LGBTQ+ students in Maryland report being verbally harassed due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Discriminatory Policies:** Only 16.6% of LGBTQ+ students attend schools with comprehensive anti-bullying policies that include protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

These statistics underscore the urgent need for standardized antidiscrimination policies in our educational institutions.

HB0495 proposes several key measures to combat discrimination:

FreeState Justice, Inc. is a social justice organization that works through direct legal services, legislative and policy advocacy, and community engagement to enable Marylanders across the spectrum of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities to be free to live authentically, with safety and dignity, in all communities throughout our state.

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1. **Comprehensive Policy Requirements:** Schools must develop antidiscrimination policies that include clear reporting options for victims, designated points of contact, and detailed descriptions of investigation and disciplinary processes.
2. **Accessibility:** Policies must be written in plain, age-appropriate language, available in frequently encountered languages, and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
3. **Mandatory Training:** Schools are required to provide training on anti-discrimination policies for students and employees, ensuring widespread awareness and understanding.

These provisions aim to create a safer and more inclusive environment for all students, particularly those from marginalized communities.

In my role at FreeState Justice, I have worked with numerous LGBTQ+ students who have faced discrimination and harassment in Maryland schools. **HB0495** represents a critical step toward ensuring that no student must endure such challenges simply because of their identity.

I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report for **HB0495**. This legislation not only addresses a critical gap in our educational system's protections but also reinforces Maryland's commitment to equity and inclusion. By enacting **HB0495**, we can ensure that all students can learn in a safe and supportive environment.

Best,



Ronnie L. Taylor

Sources:

1. [Maryland-Snapshot-2019.pdf](#)
2. [Recommendations-to-Support-LGBTQIA-Students-APPROVED.pdf](#)