



2601 N HOWARD ST
BALTIMORE, MD 21218
TEL 410) 625-LGBT (5428)
FAX 410) 625-7423
www.freestate-justice.org

Ways and Means Committee

130 Taylor House Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Wednesday, January 29, 2025

**HB0324 – County Boards of Education – Antibias Training for Members
– Requirement (County Board Member Antibias Training Act)**

Position: **FAVORABLE**

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

My name is Lauren Pruitt, and I am the Legal Director at FreeState Justice, a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving LGBTQ+ Marylanders from diverse backgrounds. I am writing in support of **HB0324**, which seeks to require county board of education members to complete antibias training during their terms.

HB0324 addresses a critical gap in training for those working in the education system that affects students across Maryland. A lack of antibias training for county board members leaves students from marginalized groups, including LGBTQ+, students of color, those with disabilities, and others, susceptible to discriminatory policies, perpetuating an intolerant educational environment. Research indicates that supportive educational environments reduce the rates of suicide and symptoms of depression among LGBTQ+ youth.

Specifically, **HB0324** would:

- **Promote Inclusive Educational Environments:** Awareness of the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students may encourage county board members to implement policies promoting more inclusive and safe educational environments.
- **Reduce Implicit Bias:** Antibias training may support county board members in identifying and reducing personal implicit biases, which may influence policy decisions affecting LGBTQ+ students.

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This bill is essential to address and mitigate harm to LGBTQ+ students. For example, LGBTQ+ youth face disproportionately high rates of bullying and discrimination. Studies show that supportive environments reduce bullying and improve mental health outcomes for students, particularly those from marginalized groups. Subsequently, LGBTQ+-affirming schools report significantly lower rates of bullying and mental health challenges among all students. Antibias training for county board members is critical to addressing these disparities and fostering supportive, safe spaces for LGBTQ+ students.

As an advocate, I recognize the systemic barriers faced by students in Maryland, particularly those from marginalized communities who do not have access to supportive and affirming environments in school. A lack of antibias training only exacerbates the harm faced by these students, especially for those who do not have supportive spaces away from school.

HB0324 fills a critical gap in training for educational leaders, equipping them to address biases and create equitable policies for all Maryland students. I urge the committee to issue a favorable report for **HB0324**. By requiring antibias training for county board members, Maryland will take a significant step toward ensuring equity, safety, and inclusion for all students, regardless of their identity or background.

Sincerely,

Lauren Pruitt, Esq.
Legal Director
FreeState Justice

Sources:

1. Anti-LGBTQ+ School Policies and LGBTQ+ Young People, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/anti-lgbtq-school-policies-and-lgbtq-young-people/>
2. Bullying and Suicide Risk among LGBTQ Youth, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/bullying-and-suicide-risk-among-lgbtq-youth/>
3. School Climate for LGBTQ+ Students in Maryland, https://maps.glsen.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/GLSEN_2021_NSCS_State_Snapshots_MD.pdf