

SUPPORT SB0293

County Boards of Education - Antibias Training for Members - Requirement (County Board Member Antibias Training Act)

Hearing in the House Ways and Means Committee on 3/19/25

Requiring each member of a county board of education to complete certain antibias training at least once during the member's term; and requiring that the antibias training be conducted separately from certain other required public school employee training.

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

I reside in Anne Arundel County and I am writing on behalf of the Coalition for LGBTQ+ Students. **We strongly SUPPORT SB0293 and urge you to give it a favorable report.**

The mission of the Coalition for LGBTQ+ Students is to provide support to youth in the LGBTQIA community in Anne Arundel County. Our Coalition believes that all representatives who serve on Boards of Education in Maryland should be required to undergo anti-bias training so they can do their job effectively and objectively.

Board of Education (BOE) representatives have a huge impact on our children's education. Maryland children deserve to have the best education possible. All members of Maryland Boards of Education need to be self-aware and reflective about how their personal assumptions and cultural backgrounds affect their decision-making. Like all of us, BOE representatives can be negatively influenced by beliefs they are not aware of. Anti-bias training would enable BOE representatives to become more self-aware and thus ensure that prejudiced and inaccurate beliefs do not adversely affect their work.

Anti bias training has been shown to reduce implicit bias and increase cultural awareness. It improves our understanding about the biases that contribute to discrimination of marginalized groups. Some people want to deny the existence of implicit bias and they dismiss anti-bias training as liberal, woke ideology. These beliefs are uninformed and harmful.

Without anti-bias training, many youth from marginalized groups including LGBTQIA students are vulnerable to school policies that will harm them. In too many districts, Boards of Education have passed (or tried to pass) policies that would create unwelcome, unaccepting and intolerant school environments for LGBTQIA children. This is dangerous. Research demonstrates that LGBTQIA children greatly benefit from attending schools with supportive policies and climates. Conversely, they suffer negative mental health and academic outcomes when school environments are intolerant.

In our country's history we have countless examples of how prejudice has harmed children. Obvious examples include school segregation during the Jim Crow era, the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families and placement in Native American boarding schools, and the lack of public education for children with disabilities until federal mandates were passed in 1973. Today there continues to be huge disparities in public education, such that public schools in lower income communities have far fewer resources than schools in wealthier neighborhoods. These examples illustrate the terrible impact of bias and prejudice on our children.

Our Coalition asks you to make a clear statement that Maryland is fully committed to eradicating bias in our school systems and ensuring that all children receive the best education possible.

Please SUPPORT SB0293.

Sincerely,
Abbie M. Ellicott
Representing the Coalition for LGBTQ+ Students
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