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Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Monday, February 3, 2025

HB0457 – Primary and Secondary Education - Educator Professional Development - Course on Student Well-Being and Flourishing

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 am here to express strong support for **HB0457**, which mandates the development of a professional development course on student well-being and flourishing for school personnel and administrators.

HB0457 addresses a critical need in our education system by focusing on the comprehensive well-being of students, particularly those from marginalized communities. Data indicates that LGBTQ+ students in Maryland face significant challenges:

- Approximately 50% of LGBTQ+ students in Maryland report being verbally harassed due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- In 2021-2022, 69.3% of transgender high school students in Maryland reported feeling sad or hopeless for two weeks or more during the past 12 months.

These statistics underscore the urgent need for educational initiatives that promote inclusivity and support the mental health of all students.

HB0457 proposes the creation of a professional development course centered on the eight dimensions of well-being as identified by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): social, environmental, physical, emotional, spiritual, occupational, intellectual, and financial.

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By educating school personnel on these dimensions, the bill aims to:

1. **Enhance Understanding:** Equip educators with the knowledge to recognize and address the diverse needs of students, fostering a more inclusive environment.
2. **Promote Mental Health:** Provide strategies to support students' emotional and mental well-being, which is crucial for LGBTQ+ youth who experience higher rates of mental health challenges.
3. **Encourage Holistic Development:** Support the overall development of students by addressing various aspects of well-being, preparing them for success beyond the classroom.

In my role at FreeState Justice, I have witnessed the profound impact that supportive educational environments can have on LGBTQ+ youth. Educators who are informed and empathetic play a pivotal role in mitigating the adverse effects of discrimination and harassment, contributing to the flourishing of all students.

I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report for **HB0457**. This legislation is a vital step toward creating an educational framework that acknowledges and supports the multifaceted well-being of Maryland's diverse student population. Thank you for your consideration.

Best,



Ronnie L. Taylor

Sources:

1. [Recommendations-to-Support-LGBTQIA-Students-APPROVED.pdf](#)
2. [YRBS/YTS Overview Statewide 2021-2022](#)
3. [Creating a Healthier Life: A Step-By-Step Guide to Wellness | SAMHSA Publications and Digital Products](#)