

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL HB0495 - FAVORABLE

Education – Antidiscrimination Policies – Policy and Notice Requirements

TO: Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Wendy Novak, Carroll County, Maryland

I am grateful Maryland has protections for our students, that almost three years ago, the protections were reinforced to include sexual orientation and gender identity in addition to prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, or disability. It also provided a mechanism for complaints. This is one of the better kept secrets in my county. I am not even sure Carroll's BOE is aware of this, they certainly do not act in a manner that is non-discriminatory, and they never share there is a method for reporting discrimination to the state. Students in Carroll are consistently being harassed and bullied for their identity. Members of the BOE often make discriminatory comments, referring to certain identity groups as something others need to be protected from and passing discriminatory policies. Discrimination complaints go to someone that indirectly reports to the BOE which makes investigating claims against them to be a conflict. I have begged for years for schools to allow teachers to at least tell students the policy that bullying and harassment based on someone's identity is wrong. They refuse. It is not allowed to be in the classroom syllabus, or any sort of age-appropriate classroom rules. When a local nonprofit shares information about sexual harassment and assault, they have been told that they are not allowed to leave the students with any handouts or anything to provide resources to students. Carroll does the minimum required to be compliant with Title IX. A legal statement with no action or policies to go with it. No acknowledgement of any state protections provided.

Carroll's anti-discrimination policy seems to be another secret in this county. I could not find it other than the legal statements in emails signatures and on their website. An anti-discrimination policy needs to be more than just a sentence. A non-discrimination statement is not a policy, it needs to have actions to go with it, otherwise it is just words. The policy requirements in this bill would be immensely helpful in my county. Students of all ages would benefit from a policy written in plain language that is age appropriate. I am not sure the policy is printed anywhere, much less in a manner that enhances readability or in frequently encountered languages. Students do not receive information on how to report discrimination. The requirement for students to receive training is wonderful. Currently, the only way a student would learn about discrimination is at home, either from parents that teach it is wrong, or unfortunately the ones that model hateful behavior.

Laws that protect our students should be known to everyone, not kept secret. Anti-discrimination policies are more than a statement, they require a list of actions to be taken, accessible to everyone. I recommend local committees to help develop the policies made of stakeholders in the county and the state to provide checks and balances. The committees would be familiar with local issues, and members outside of the community could help provide proper context. Committees made up of people dedicated to preventing discrimination, not finding ways to do a little as possible. Legal statements about nondiscrimination is not enough, our students need policies with actions.

I request a favorable report on HB495.