



**Maryland Commission
on LGBTQIA+ Affairs**

Bill Title: County Boards of Education - Volunteer Aides
- School Chaplain

Bill Number(s): [HB1395](#)

Position: UNFAVORABLE

Date: March 4, 2025

Submitted by: Jeremy Browning, Director of the
Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

To:

House Ways and Means Committee

The Hon. Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
The Hon. Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Vice Chair

Testimony on behalf of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs:

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs, created by the Maryland General Assembly, works to serve LGBTQIA+ Marylanders by galvanizing community voices, researching and addressing challenges, and advocating for policies that advance equity and inclusion. The Commission envisions a Maryland where all LGBTQIA+ people can live full and authentic lives. As a vital resource, the Commission collaborates with public officials, agencies, and community partners to ensure the rights and dignity of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders are protected and respected.

House Bill 1395 would authorize county boards of education to use chaplains as volunteer aides in schools to provide support services to students. While the intent may be to expand support for students, this bill raises significant concerns regarding church-state separation, student safety, and inclusivity within public schools.

Public schools serve students of all faiths and backgrounds, as well as those who do not adhere to any religious tradition. Authorizing school chaplains, even as volunteers, risks undermining the constitutional principle of separation of church and state. The Supreme Court has long held that public schools must remain secular spaces to ensure no religious favoritism or coercion.

The bill does not specify qualifications, training requirements, or guidelines for chaplains serving as volunteer aides. Unlike licensed school counselors and social workers, chaplains may not have appropriate training in mental health, trauma-informed care, or cultural competency, which are critical areas for supporting students from diverse backgrounds, including LGBTQIA+ youth who already face heightened risks of bullying, discrimination, and mental health challenges.

LGBTQIA+ students, students of religious minorities, and nonreligious students may feel pressured or alienated if chaplains are present in a school setting. There is no safeguard in the bill preventing religious proselytization or bias from influencing interactions with students. The

[American Civil Liberties Union \(ACLU\)](#) and numerous civil rights and faith-based organizations strongly oppose the introduction of chaplains in public schools, citing several critical concerns.

Schools already have trained counselors, psychologists, and social workers who operate under professional and ethical guidelines to provide evidence-based support for students. Instead of introducing unregulated religious figures, resources should be directed toward expanding mental health services, particularly for vulnerable student populations.

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs urges an unfavorable report on HB1395. Allowing school chaplains as volunteer aides presents constitutional, ethical, and practical concerns that could harm LGBTQIA+ students and undermine the inclusivity of Maryland's public education system. Schools should remain safe, affirming environments for all students free from religious influence and potential discrimination.

For these reasons, we respectfully request the committee to reject HB1395.

References:

American Civil Liberties Union. (2024, March 6). *Chaplains, civil rights, and faith groups oppose public-school chaplain programs*. ACLU. Retrieved from <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/chaplains-civil-rights-and-faith-groups-oppose-public-school-chaplain-programs>