

January 27, 2025

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Distinguished Committee Members—

My name is Brandon Russell, and I am a life-long resident of St. Mary's County. I serve as Vice Chair of Pride Southern Maryland, a nonprofit responsible for hosting an annual LGBTQIA+ pride event. Additionally, I represent the Southern Maryland region as a Commissioner on the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs. My experience with these organizations provide unique insight, though I must stress these views are my own and I am not speaking on behalf of any organization.

I urge an **unfavorable** report on HB156: Fairness In Girls Sports Act.

Two resources are available on the website of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs. The first, "A Decade of Data: Meta-Analysis of Data and Insights on the Experiences of LGBTQIA+ People in Maryland" (1) covers relevant subjects including school bullying and youth risk behavior. The report cites a higher number of reports regarding bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity in more rural, conservative counties. Additionally, the report states the "average percent of youths at risk has been higher for gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals in each survey." Youth risks tracked include violence and tobacco/alcohol/other drug use. Though the data points do not specifically include transgender youth, it's safe to assume their experiences are similar.

The second resource available online is the "Post-Election LGBTQIA+ Community Insights Report" (2). The report is based on a survey, conducted between November 12 and December 6, 2024, with nearly 800 responses representing all 24 jurisdictions across the state. Results showed 94% of respondents strongly agreed they are concerned about the impact of political shifts on trans rights, they feel less safe in their communities, and they're concerned about a rise of hate or bias incidents.

HB156 is legislation without a problem to solve. Where trans athletes are participating in sports, rules and guidelines based on established medical science and other best practices are in place. Excluding trans athletes will contribute to further isolation from their peers while promoting and encouraging an openly hostile atmosphere in a place where all students should feel safe and welcomed.

Once again, I urge an **unfavorable** report on HB156.

Thank you for your consideration.

Brandon Russell
St. Mary's County, MD

(1) https://gocci.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/01/A-Decade-of-Data_-_Meta-Analysis-of-Data-and-Insights-on-the-Experiences-of-LGBTQIA-People-in-Maryland-1.pdf

(2) <https://gocci.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/01/Post-Election-LGBTQIA-Community-Insights-Report.pdf>