



**Testimony in SUPPORT of
House Bill 649: Advancing Equal Educational Opportunities for All Students**

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Position: Favorable

April 1, 2026

At Strong Schools Maryland, we work to support the faithful implementation and full funding of the promises legislated through the landmark Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The Blueprint envisions a public education system where all students can feel safe and supported to learn and thrive in their school community. It was designed to specifically address systemic inequities that disproportionately impact historically marginalized communities. As a result, **Strong Schools Maryland offers favorable testimony in support of HB649 – Advancing Equal Educational Opportunities for All Students** which strengthens protections against discrimination in education and improves how Maryland enforces civil rights laws in schools. It helps ensure that all students in Maryland have equal access to education regardless of race, color, ethnicity, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, age, marital status, or disability.

Current state laws do not fully protect Maryland students and families. Maryland's existing education anti-discrimination law (Md. Code, Educ. §§ 26-701 to 26-705) is enforced by the Maryland State Department of Education and applies only to preK-12 students. Maryland law does not explicitly cover students in higher education. These students must rely on federal anti-discrimination laws. While federal laws have prohibited discrimination in education for decades, enforcement of these laws has become harder to access. Maryland families now have fewer practical options for filing complaints with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights because of staffing reductions, processing delays, and a high rate of complaint dismissals.

HB 649 creates a new state law to expand both protections and enforcement. The bill authorizes the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights, an independent state agency, to investigate and resolve complaints of discrimination involving public and private preK-12 schools and higher education institutions. The law would protect students from intentional discrimination and from policies or practices that have an unjustified discriminatory impact. It would also allow students and families to bring education discrimination claims in state court.

By strengthening protections against discrimination and ensuring meaningful enforcement at the state level, HB649 advances the core promise of the Blueprint: building an education system where every student has access to opportunity, support, and success. Ensuring safe, inclusive, and just learning environments is essential to delivering on the Blueprint's commitment to Maryland's students. **For these reasons, Strong Schools Maryland respectfully urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 649.**

For more information, please contact Kenzie Funk at kenzie@strongschoolsmaryland.org for additional questions.