

## **OPPOSE SB903 Education - Engagement Policies and School Compact (Maryland Public Education Parental Partnership Act)**

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee:

We represent the Coalition for LGBTQ+ Students; our mission is to support LGBTQIA youth through advocacy, education and policy. **We strongly OPPOSE SB903** because it is a bill that is likely to harm children.

In our Coalition work, we have seen the importance of allowing children to have some degree of control and privacy over their activities in school. We are keenly aware of the risks these students face when they have no say over how and when personal information (like their use of pronouns and their exploration of their gender identity and sexual orientation) is disclosed to parents. We have seen terrible situations where children are deeply harmed by rejection and punishment by their family after others have disclosed this type of information.

Our children's education should not be micromanaged by parents. This would severely limit children's exposure to important information they need to be prepared for adulthood. Public schools aim to prepare students by teaching essential skills, fostering critical thinking, encouraging personal growth and promoting respect for diversity. Children benefit from learning about a range of perspectives and ideas. By requiring excessive parental oversight, SB903 would hinder public schools from achieving these goals.

If a high school child thinks they might be LGBTQIA, they should be able to attend a GSA club without obtaining parents' permission. Research from GLSEN emphasizes the importance of GSAs as places of support and acceptance for these youth (<https://glsenmd.org>). School activities give children age-appropriate opportunities for exploring their interests and talents. They encourage children to take responsibility for their own development and growth. Requiring parental consent for school activities could stifle children's development. Finally, our school systems already have mechanisms to address any parental concerns about their child's school activities. Parents are already encouraged to be involved in their child's education; they should not be allowed to control all aspects of it.

LGBTQIA youth are under increased attacks. It can be disastrous for some LGBTQIA youth to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity at home. Many LGBTQIA children are keenly aware of the risks in their family and they wisely choose to not share this information until they are older. Some families are not accepting and react in ways that are rejecting and punitive. This can be dangerous for the physical and psychological well-being of their LGBTQIA child. It can be traumatizing in multiple ways. If schools are required to disclose information about a child's preferred pronouns or gender identity to parents, more children will be at risk of being harmed.

Growing up is challenging for many children, and LGBTQIA youth have to navigate additional hurdles due to societal stigma, lack of understanding, disinformation and outright attacks. Let's not make life riskier or more difficult for them. **Please oppose SB903.**

Sincerely,

The Coalition for LGBTQ+ Students [www.coalition4lgbtqstudents.org](http://www.coalition4lgbtqstudents.org)

