

MARYLAND COALITION TO REFORM SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

**House Bill 649: Advancing Equal Educational Opportunities for All Students in
Maryland**

April 1, 2026

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline (CRSD) brings together advocates, service providers, and community members dedicated to transforming school discipline practices within Maryland's public school systems. For more than a decade, CRSD has worked to ensure that school discipline is responsive to students' behavioral needs, fair, appropriate to the infraction, and designed to keep young people engaged in school and on track to graduate.

HB 649 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. The Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline strongly supports HB 649.

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 long prohibited discrimination in education, enforcement has become increasingly difficult to access. Families face significant barriers when seeking relief through the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, including staffing shortages, delays, and high dismissal rates.

HB 649 addresses these gaps by creating a robust, state-level enforcement mechanism. By authorizing the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights to investigate and resolve complaints across both K-12 and higher education, the bill provides an accessible and independent avenue for accountability. Importantly, the bill recognizes not only intentional discrimination, but also policies and practices that have a discriminatory impact.

CRSD views this as an essential protection given the well-documented discipline disparities in Maryland's schools. Black students, students with disabilities, and other historically marginalized groups are disproportionately impacted by exclusionary discipline and unequal treatment in schools. Too often, families lack meaningful recourse when discrimination occurs. HB 649 would provide a critical tool to address these inequities, promote transparency, and ensure that all students are afforded the protections they deserve.

For these reasons, the Maryland Coalition to Reform School Discipline respectfully urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 649.

For more information contact: CRSDMaryland@gmail.com

- ACLU of Maryland
- Citizens Policing Project
- League of Women Voters of Maryland
- Making Changes
- Maryland Office of the Public Defender
- Progressive Maryland
- Project HEAL at Kennedy Krieger
- Public Justice Center
- The Choice Program at UMBC
- The Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts at the University of Baltimore School of Law
- Strong Schools Maryland
- University of Baltimore School of Law Center for Criminal Justice Reform