



NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF THE BLIND
MARYLAND

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From: Ronza Othman, President
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To: Senate Energy, Education, and the Environment Committee

The members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge you to vote favorable on HB0649. This bill gives the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights jurisdiction to examine discrimination in all educational practices, from Pre-K through higher education. This expansion of the Commission on Civil Rights is necessary because it gives people another, more efficient option if they feel their rights have been violated. With the federal government receding from enforcing prohibition against educational discrimination, including the efforts to shutter the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights and data reflecting that more than 90% of complaints in 2025 were administratively closed with no review whatsoever, the need for state action is critical.

The bill also establishes a private right of action permitting complainants to go directly to court if they feel their rights have been violated or if the Commission has not been able to mediate the problem. This is an important remedy for the aggrieved party because the court can order the defendant to end the discriminatory practices, order appropriate affirmative relief including awarding compensatory damages, or order any other appropriate equitable relief, particularly providing the student the special education supports they need.

For those reasons, we ask for a favorable report on HB0649. For questions, please contact me at President@nfbmd.org or at 443-426-4110.