

HB14 Written Testimony - Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee (4/1 at 1:00 p.m.)

County Boards of Education - Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation - Information Collection and Reporting Requirements

Baltimore County Student Councils

Saan Rhyne - Eastern Technical High School Student

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

My name is Saan Rhyne and I am a student from Baltimore County. I write to you on behalf of students in Maryland to request a favorable report on House Bill 14.

House Bill 14 alters the statewide mandated bullying and harassment reporting form to require documentation of personal characteristics, such as race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or disability, which could have motivated the incident. This will allow school administrators to find trends and other factors influencing harassment incidents.

Comprehensive reporting data enables educators and policymakers to develop evidence-based anti-bullying programs and implementations that are responsive to student experiences. Bullying and harassment makes students feel unsafe and unwelcome at their own schools, especially when motivated by personal characteristics. To prioritize education, we must first prioritize ensuring students are in classrooms and ready to learn.

This bill will have no fiscal effect on the state, but will have an incredibly beneficial impact on Maryland students. Discrimination has no place in our state, and especially not in our schools. Young minds are impressionable, and bullying and harassment is linked to doubling rates of anxiety and depression among youth. Every child deserves an educational environment in which they feel respected for their culture and beliefs.

While concerns have been expressed regarding the publication of this data and potential for manipulation of this data to target school systems, it is still important to publicize this data. Transparency and accepting areas to improve is a key component of improving our school systems. Data can be shared on the same page as information regarding methods school systems are taking to mitigate bullying incidents.

It is imperative that all students feel safe in their schools and classes. By analyzing underlying patterns behind bullying, school systems can better remediate these issues and create safer learning experiences for all students. Accordingly, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB14 from the committee. Thank you for your time.