

Opposition to House Bill 649

On behalf of the Association of Christian Schools International

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to House Bill 649.

The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) is the largest Protestant school association and one of the largest accreditors of Christian schools in the United States. We serve over 2,250 member schools, including 50 in Maryland, and have long-established headquarters in the state. ACSI exists to strengthen Christian schools and equip Christian educators worldwide as they prepare students academically and inspire them to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Let me be clear: protecting individuals from unlawful discrimination is an important and shared value. However, HB 649 represents a significant and concerning expansion of state authority into the internal governance of private, faith-based schools.

Religious schools operate according to sincerely held beliefs that shape every aspect of their communities—including their mission, curriculum, employment standards, and student conduct expectations. HB 649 would subject these institutions to heightened investigation and litigation risk, effectively forcing schools to choose between compliance with state mandates and fidelity to their religious convictions.

This raises serious constitutional concerns. The First Amendment has long protected the autonomy of religious institutions, including their ability to operate in accordance with their faith. The U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed that religious organizations do not forfeit these protections when they serve the public. Policies that blur the line between public institutions and private religious schools undermine this foundational principle.

Additionally, this bill poses a direct threat to the ability of Christian schools to teach and uphold their beliefs regarding marriage and human identity—core components of their religious mission. Maryland has a responsibility to respect and protect the rights of religious institutions to operate in accordance with their faith. HB 649 fails to meet that standard.

Maryland's educational landscape is strengthened by its diversity. Private and religious schools serve families across the state by offering distinct missions and communities of belief. HB 649 risks eroding that diversity by expanding state oversight into areas historically protected by religious liberty and institutional independence.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue an unfavorable report on HB 649.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Autumn Elkins Faulkner

Director for State Policy Engagement

Association of Christian Schools International