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March 30, 2026

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

**Committee:** House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

**Position:** FAVORABLE

**RE: Statement of Support**

Dear Honorable Members House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee, and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and Environment,

I am Alita-Geri Carter, the owner of Qualequity Access, LLC., a consultancy grounded in data-driven transformation that advocates for quality, equity, access, and accessibility in healthcare and education. I am the mother of two children with disabilities, a former practicing nursing practitioner, special education parent advocate, and public health servant.

I am writing from a public health and educational equity perspective to urge a **favorable report** on **House Bill 649**. Education is a fundamental **social determinant of health (SDOH)**; the quality of a student's learning environment directly dictates their lifelong economic stability and physical well-being, many call it the "great equalizer".

My family has had complaints without review for two years with the US Department of Education. One whereby a special education supervisor in Prince George's County Public School called disabled children "demonic curses" and another whereby my daughter was denied access to school lunch a minimum of four times due to her disability while attending Whitehall Elementary in Prince George's County Public Schools. Families cannot receive justice that is legally required due to failures with governance and oversight. Currently Maryland lacks the legal infrastructure and capacity to close this gap. After years of failed investigations by MSDE, blatant disregard for IDEA, Section 504, and title II of ADA by PGCPSS, we fled the school system out of desperation, sacrificing our support system, forever home, life savings in hopes of obtaining our legally guaranteed free appropriate public education.

**HB 649 is essential for the following reasons:**

- **Addressing the Federal Enforcement Crisis:** A recent GAO (2026) report highlights that civil rights enforcement at the [U.S. Department of Education is collapsing](#), leaving thousands of disability complaints unreviewed for years. Maryland can no longer rely on a backlogged federal system to protect our students.



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*“GAO reports the Office of Civil Rights received 9,269 complaints from March through September 2025 and resolved 7,072. Of those resolved, 6,353 were dismissed, roughly 90%.”*

- **Urgent Protections for Disabled Students:** This legislation is a lifeline for students with disabilities, specifically incorporating those with **Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)** or **§ 504 plans** into state-level protections. As federal oversight wanes, disabled students face increased risks of exclusion that derail their developmental trajectories.
- **Ending the "Retaliation Trap" for Families:** For families and disability rights advocates, fear of retaliation is a common and silencing experience. HB 649 explicitly prohibits educational institutions from **intimidating, threatening, coercing, or discriminating** against any individual because they made a complaint or participated in an investigation. This ensures that parents can advocate for their child's legal rights without fear of administrative blowback or loss of services. After my family filed state complaints and discrimination complaints the teachers and special education teams refused to respond to our email, would only call us to communicate to avoid providing documentation to us, refused us the right to review our students' records, and attempted to charge us \$101.50 to obtain our daughter's records which the central office also found to be astounding and overrode. The [American Bar Association \(2019\)](#) reports that retaliation is a common experience by families.
- **Strengthening Social Determinants of Health:** By prohibiting discrimination based on race, disability, and gender identity, this bill removes systemic barriers that lead to long-term health inequities such as low health literacy.
- **Accountability in Higher Education:** Extending these protections to postsecondary institutions ensures that the transition to adulthood is not derailed by unchecked discriminatory practices.
- **Restoring Power to Families:** The establishment of a **private right of action** allows families to bypass bureaucratic delays and seek immediate judicial relief in circuit court.

We cannot achieve true equity in Maryland while our educational institutions remain under-regulated in matters of civil rights. HB 649 provides the state-level "backstop" necessary to ensure every student has a safe, equal opportunity to thrive.

I respectfully request a **favorable committee report** on HB 649

In support of my children and all children's civil rights,



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Forced to flee for FAPE