



HB 649: Advancing Equal Educational Opportunities for All Students
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
April 1, 2026
Position: Favorable

The Maryland Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition (MDAC) is a coalition of the five Down syndrome organizations in Maryland as well as individuals with Down syndrome and their family members who have come together to advocate for improved quality of life for all individuals with Down syndrome throughout the state of Maryland. MDAC works in coalition with other disability and advocacy organizations across the state and supports many legislative and policy efforts.

MDAC strongly supports HB649, which would strengthen civil rights protections for Maryland's students, including students with disabilities.

While current law invests the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights, an independent agency, with the authority to investigate and resolve discrimination complaints for K-12 students, HB649 would expand the Commission's purview to include students enrolled in higher education. As more and more students with intellectual disabilities are able to take advantage of postsecondary educational opportunities, ensuring their civil rights are protected in these settings is important to our community.

Further, against the backdrop of the dismantling of federal civil rights enforcement at the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, HB649 will provide a more accessible, state-level enforcement framework for Maryland families of students with disabilities, who are disproportionately affected by civil rights violations in education.

This bill is in alignment with one of MDAC's guiding principles: *Students with Down syndrome and other intellectual disabilities are lifelong learners, and should have access to high quality public education throughout elementary and secondary school and postsecondary education.* Students with Down syndrome and other intellectual and developmental disabilities should have equitable access to high quality educational opportunities and reliable protection of their civil rights in educational institutions. HB649 is critical to ensure that the rights of Maryland's students with disabilities are protected.

For these reasons, MDAC respectfully urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 649.

Respectfully submitted,

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