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April 01 2026

## **HB 0649 - FAV**

Advancing Equal Educational Opportunities for All Students in Maryland

Dear Chair Brian J. Feldman, Vice-Chair Cheryl C. Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

Invidious discrimination hurts us as a society, it divides people and impedes people from realizing their potential. The government sector in particular has a responsibility to not participate in, or otherwise facilitate, invidious discrimination. There should be no exception for government education policy. This bill requiring elementary and secondary schools operating in Maryland to uphold non-discrimination standards, with strengthened enforcement procedures, is welcome. Secular Maryland recommends this bill for approval by the General Assembly despite our ongoing opposition to the continued state funding of religious schools that discriminate based on religious belief.

Maryland subsidize education at schools that only admit students who profess the religious beliefs of the religious institution sponsoring the school. This bill makes the best of this unfortunate situation by limiting such discrimination to only that particular context. Everyone wants their children to be safe. Too often people who are unlike ourselves are seen as threatening, triggering misdirected fear. Minorities can be vulnerable to negative stereotyping. Some theists deem non-theism to be peculiar, unreasonable, or threatening. They misunderstand non-theism and may associate non-theism with negative behavior. The metaphysical naturalism underlying non-theism is an intellectual conclusion that nontheists (deists, agnostics, atheists) sincerely consider to

be more compelling than the competing conclusions.

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