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February 24, 2026

The Honorable Melissa Wells
Chair, Government, Labor, and Elections
145 Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr and members of the Appropriations
Committee,

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) respectfully
requests a favorable report on House Bill 649 – Advancing Equal
Educational Opportunities for All Students in Maryland Act.

House Bill 649 represents a significant step toward ensuring that every
student in Maryland can learn in an environment free from discrimination
and retaliation. The bill expands the authority of the Maryland Commission
on Civil Rights (MCCR) to investigate and enforce anti-discrimination laws
within educational institutions and establishes a clear, uniform statewide
standard of equity and accountability.

Under current practice, complaints of discrimination received by the
Maryland Higher Education Commission are referred to the U.S.
Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR). MHEC's
complaint procedures, published on the agency's website, specify that
certain types of complaints fall under the jurisdiction of other state or
federal entities. When discrimination-related complaints are received,
students are directed to the federal Office for Civil Rights, and contact
information is provided to ensure proper referral.

Between 2023 and 2025, MHEC received 222 student complaints. Of those,
eight were related to or referenced discrimination. While discrimination
complaints represent a small portion of overall submissions, ensuring a
clear and accessible process for those students remains critically important.

House Bill 649 provides several key benefits from an administrative and
postsecondary perspective.

First, it establishes streamlined jurisdictional clarity. By authorizing the
Maryland Commission on Civil Rights to investigate discrimination
complaints within the State, Maryland students would have a local, state-
based avenue for review, rather than relying exclusively on federal
processes.

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Second, the bill supports operational efficiency. Requiring MHEC and other governing bodies to refer discrimination complaints to MCCR allows each agency to focus on its core statutory responsibilities, such as academic oversight, institutional approval, and student financial aid administration, while leveraging the specialized investigative expertise of the Civil Rights Commission.

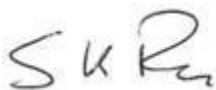
Third, the bill enhances accountability by ensuring that the protections established in law are enforceable. The creation of a private right of action reinforces that anti-discrimination protections are meaningful and accessible to students and families.

Should House Bill 649 be enacted, MHEC would update its published complaint procedures accordingly and refer discrimination-related complaints to the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights. MHEC believes this procedural adjustment can be implemented within existing resources.

House Bill 649 aligns with Maryland's longstanding commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equal educational opportunity. Ensuring that students have a clear and accessible process for addressing discrimination strengthens public confidence in Maryland's educational institutions and reinforces the State's dedication to safe, supportive learning environments.

For these reasons, the Maryland Higher Education Commission respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 649. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Meghan Music, Executive Director of External and Legislative Relations.

Yours in Service,

Handwritten signature of Sanjay Rai in blue ink.

Sanjay Rai, Ph.D.
Secretary
Maryland Higher Education Commission