



**TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE GOVERNMENT, LABOR, AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
HB 649 – Advancing Equal Educational Opportunities for All Students in Maryland**

Position: Favorable

By: Linda T. Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland is a nonpartisan organization that believes that it is the responsibility of the government to provide equality of opportunity for education and protect against discrimination in education. Accordingly, the League strongly supports *House Bill 649—Advancing Equal Opportunity for All Students in Maryland*.

HB649 aims to ensure equal opportunity for Maryland’s students from pre-K through postsecondary education. The bill authorizes the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR) to investigate and resolve complaints alleging discrimination and retaliation in pre-kindergarten through postsecondary educational institutions, based on protected characteristics including race, color, national origin, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, age or marital status.

HB649 expands Maryland’s anti-discrimination law and the agencies that can enforce the law. It establishes the power of the MCCR in enforcing the anti-discrimination provisions, including the adoption of regulations and the process for handling complaints. Importantly, the bill also creates a private right of action, allowing individuals who believe they have experienced discrimination in education to file civil actions in court, in addition to, or instead of, pursuing a complaint through the MCCR.

Notably, the bill extends protection to students in higher education institutions, clarifying that the prohibition applies to public or nonpublic educational settings from prekindergarten through postsecondary education. Maryland’s current anti-discrimination law protects elementary and secondary students through enforcement by the Maryland State Department of Education. However, students in postsecondary institutions are not protected under state law, and must rely on federal education and anti-discrimination laws.

HB649 strengthens legal protections against discrimination in education by expanding Marylanders’ ability to enforce provisions at the state level. The bill creates a new state anti-discriminatory education law at a time when limited enforcement at the federal level leaves Maryland students and their families without protection.

For these reasons, the League of Women Voters of Maryland strongly urges a **favorable report** on HB649.