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Ways and Means Committee

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Monday, March 2, 2026

Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Ronnie L. Taylor, and I am the Community Impact Director at FreeState Justice, a Maryland nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing legal and systemic inequities that affect LGBTQ+ Marylanders. Our work involves providing direct legal services, policy advocacy, and statewide training for public institutions, including schools.

I strongly support **HB1011**, which establishes a Workgroup on Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Maryland public schools. This legislation creates a formal, cross-sector process to explore how Maryland can better support transgender and gender-diverse students and to provide recommendations for statutory and regulatory changes.

Transgender and gender-diverse students face documented disparities in safety, mental health outcomes, and school climate. According to The Trevor Project's 2024 U.S. National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, 41% of LGBTQ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, with transgender and nonbinary youth reporting even higher rates.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that transgender students face higher rates of bullying, violence exposure, and poor mental health outcomes compared to their cisgender peers.

In Maryland, school systems operate under a patchwork of local policies that address issues like name and pronoun use, participation in activities, privacy, and student records. This inconsistency results in students and families facing uneven protections depending on their location. **HB1011** directly tackles this issue by establishing a statewide workgroup responsible for studying ways to support transgender and gender-diverse students and recommending changes to laws and regulations.

This bill does not impose mandates. It creates a structured, representative forum to review current practices and suggest evidence-based recommendations. That is an appropriate first step in a complex policy area impacting student safety and educational fairness.

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At FreeState Justice, we envision a Maryland where LGBTQ+ people live openly with the dignity they deserve. Facing discrimination shouldn't keep anyone from being themselves. Through pro bono legal services, policy advocacy, resource connections, and community support, FreeState works to break down those barriers so all Marylanders can thrive.

HB1011 establishes a Workgroup on Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students, composed of legislators, education stakeholders, a representative from the State Department of Education, mental health professionals, labor representatives, parents, a student member of a county board of education, and executive branch appointees.

This structure is critical for several reasons:

- Cross-branch collaboration: Involving legislative, executive, and education stakeholders ensures recommendations are both legally sound and practically feasible.
- Student representation: Including a student member of a county board of education brings lived experience into policy development.
- Mental health expertise: Representation from the Maryland School Psychologists' Association recognizes the mental health impact of school climate on transgender students.

The Workgroup is tasked with identifying ways to support transgender and gender-diverse students and providing recommendations on statewide statutory and regulatory policies. This emphasis on both statutes and regulations is crucial. Many of the most urgent issues involve interpreting federal law, privacy standards under FERPA, Title IX implementation, and state nondiscrimination protections.

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, 590 U.S. 644 (2020), confirmed that discrimination based on transgender status is discrimination because of sex under Title VII, strengthening the broader legal understanding of gender identity discrimination.

Maryland law already bans discrimination based on gender identity in public accommodations and education. However, clarity in enforcement, training, and consistent statewide guidance still varies. A formal workgroup helps Maryland align practices with existing civil rights protections and reduces legal risks for school districts.

Finally, the reporting requirement to the State Department of Education, the Governor, and the General Assembly by December 1, 2026, guarantees accountability and a clear policy deliverable within a set timeframe.

As a transgender Marylander and policy advocate, I have collaborated with families navigating school systems that lack consistent guidance. Some districts have detailed policies, while others leave decisions to individual administrators. The result is uncertainty for students whose ability to focus on learning depends on being recognized and respected in their school environment.

When policy gaps exist, children and their families are left to educate institutions. That is not a sustainable model.

HB1011 is measured, time-limited, and focused on study and recommendations. It brings stakeholders together, centers expertise, and establishes a clear reporting pathway to this body.

Maryland has a chance to lead with transparency and data instead of conflict and inconsistency.

I respectfully request that the Committee issues a favorable report on **HB1011**.

In Community,

Ronnie L. Taylor

Ronnie L. Taylor

Sources:

1. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024/>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/yrbs/index.html>
3. https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/17-1618_hfci.pdf