

Testimony Favorable to HB0014

County Boards of Education - Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation - Information Collection and Reporting Requirements

January 26, 2026

Delegate Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Chair; Delegate Jessica Feldmark, Vice Chair; and esteemed members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Melinda Littell and I am writing to ask you to vote in favor of HB0014.

This House bill would improve upon the existing reporting process in Maryland public schools relating to alleged incidents of bullying, harassment, or intimidation occurring on school property, sponsored events, while traveling to or from school, or through electronic communication (Bullying Incidents).

The harmful effects of bullying are well-documented. Students have a right to learn in a safe, productive, and inclusive environment that is free from bullying and intimidation. In furtherance of this goal, the Maryland legislature has already adopted anti-bullying laws specifically requiring county state boards of education to use a standardized report form to collect information concerning Bullying Incidents, and to submit summaries of the report forms to the State Board of Education by January 31 each year.

Unfortunately, in many cases, the collection and reporting process lacks important information about the motivation behind the incidents, and each county school board decides what data to track. This information could provide insights to educators, parents, and policymakers interested in combatting bullying in our schools. One key data point that should be tracked is whether the Bullying Incident was believed to have been motivated by an actual or a perceived personal characteristic of the victim. Specifically, the standardized report forms should include whether the Bullying Incident was motivated by a person's race, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, ancestry, physical attributes, socioeconomic status, familial status, or physical or mental ability or disability. In turn, this categorized data should be included in the annual reports to the State Board of Education, and it should be made easily accessible to the public.

HB0014 would add this information about the reasons for bullying to the standardized report forms and require the annual report to the State Board of Education to the number of Bullying Incidents determined to be motivated by an actual or perceived personal characteristic of an individual or a group, disaggregated by the motivating personal characteristic. It would also require each county board to post this disaggregated information in a prominent location on its website.

We should not tolerate bullying, harassment or intimidation based on personal characteristics in any setting, least of all our public schools. Considering the current climate in which hate speech and discrimination are on the rise, it is important to stand up for vulnerable persons, including members of the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities, people all backgrounds and socioeconomic status. I believe these enhancements to the existing process for reporting and publicizing data on bullying in Maryland public schools would help inform parents, raise awareness about the reasons behind bullying, and document the prevalence of the problems in specific areas. Please help improve the process for combatting bullying by voting favorably on HB0014.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melinda Littell

Arnold, D33C