



Maryland Youth Advisory Council
c/o Governor's Office Children
45 Calvert Street,
Annapolis, MD 21401

Graham Snyder, *Chair*
Joyce Yun, *Vice-Chair*
Lucia Zaklin, *Secretary*

Re: HB 14 | County Boards of Education - Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation - Information Collection and Reporting Requirements

Dear Chair Jheanelle K. Wilkins and the Ways and Means Committee:

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council prides itself on being a coalition of diverse young advocates and leaders who serve as a voice for youth in the state of Maryland. As leaders in our communities, and as appointees of the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, Maryland Association of Student Councils, Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the University System of Maryland, we take every opportunity to address relevant issues by influencing legislation, spreading public awareness, and serving as a liaison between youth and policymakers regarding issues facing young people.

HB 14 mandates counties to record the motivation of bullying incidents in Maryland public schools if it is partially or wholly connected to the actual or perceived characteristics of the victim. Moreover, the legislation mandates that the number of identity-related bullying incidents be accessibly reported on the county's website. This legislation is a meaningful step towards reducing bullying and increasing educational transparency in our state.

It is important to note that nearly 20% of students in the United States have reported experiencing bullying, and over half of those who have experienced bullying report feeling as though their bully "had the ability to influence what other students think of them"¹. Moreover, the Center for Injury Prevention and Control has found that bullying behavior and suicide-related behavior in a student are closely related.² Bullying is a significant subject which must be continuously reviewed and addressed.

First, the recording of motivation for bullying incidents will increase school and county awareness of motivation behind bullying. Classroom, school, and county-level interventions must be informed and purposeful. By utilizing data that will be collected by this bill, it will inform educators, administrators, and staff of how to best reduce identity-based bullying incidents in schools.

Beyond the internal informational benefit, the public display of statistics is meaningful from a transparency perspective. Guardians and students should have as much information as possible about the institutions which they may attend. Wellness in schools is indicative of overall community flourishing, and capturing the extent of identity-related bullying incidents will provide insight into the wellbeing of

¹ US Department of Health and Human Services, "Facts about Bullying," StopBullying.gov, October 9, 2024, <https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/facts#bullying-research>.

² National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (U.S.). Division of Violence Prevention., "The Relationship between Bullying and Suicide : What We Know Ad What It Means for Schools," *Cdc.gov* (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U.S.), 2014), <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/34163>.

schools, communities, and counties which contain them. By requiring that data collected be publicly displayed and available, prospective and current families, as well as administrators, will have more information to evaluate the success of schools.

Finally, this bill further incentivizes reducing bullying in Maryland public schools. The collection of new information on bullying and the insight it may provide will drive schools and counties to more deliberately reduce bullying occurrences and severity. As future anti-bullying interventions are implemented, it is imperative that we utilize new data gathered with this bill to focus on inclusion and community building in schools. In this, HB 14 advances student wellbeing, educational and personal outcomes, and school success.

The Council has voted in favor of endorsing HB 14, as it aligns with the Council's Legislative Platform supporting:

- Training for educators and school staff, among other measures that improve instruction and quality of life for students
- Policies and programs intended to prevent bullying, harassment or violence;

For these reasons, the Maryland Youth Advisory Council respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 14. We thank you for considering this essential legislation and for your commitment to improving the lives of youth and all residents across Maryland.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Snyder', with a large, stylized initial 'G'.

Graham Snyder
Chair, Maryland Youth Advisory Council