

SUPPORT HB1032 Prekindergarten Programs and Primary and Secondary Schools - Student Privacy Policy Requirements and Discrimination Reporting

Dear Chairperson Wilkins, Vice Chairperson Feldmark and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

We urge you to give a FAVORABLE REPORT to HB1032.

We represent the Coalition for LGBTQ+ Students and we strongly SUPPORT HB1032, which would standardize student privacy protections and increase transparency regarding discrimination incidents across all schools. Our Coalition's mission is to support LGBTQIA students through education, advocacy, and policy. We work to ensure that schools are safe and affirming environments for these youth, who often have had difficult and sometimes traumatic experiences in school because of their identity. This bill would provide important protections for these children who are already marginalized and vulnerable.

We support HB1032 because it requires all schools to implement written policies to protect student data in terms of their records, which makes it less likely that sensitive information about a child will be disclosed in ways that are risky. It is essential that personal identifying information about a child be kept private, so that schools cannot "out" a student to the public or to parents. Sadly, it is not always safe for LGBTQIA children to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to their families. Some families become punitive and rejecting and their children are then at risk for many terrible outcomes, including alienation from family relationships, homelessness, and negative physical and mental health outcomes. Research from Cornell University indicates that transgender youth experience much higher rates of depression, anxiety, suicidality, substance abuse and other mental health problems when they encounter family rejection (<https://whatweknow.inequality.cornell.edu › lgbt-equality>). No child should have to go through this, especially because a school has disclosed information that led to this outcome. HB1032 is critical because it aims to close reporting loopholes and strengthen privacy in ways that improve the safety, identity and autonomy of LGBTQIA youth.

We need HB1032 so that discrimination incidents in both private and public schools are reported to MSDE, thus improving accountability and ensuring that effective interventions to prevent discrimination are implemented. HB1032 would enhance safety for students in both public and nonpublic schools by requiring a uniform way of reporting discrimination, including discrimination based on gender identity. We know many LGBTQIA youth have undergone heartbreaking situations in school due to hate, bias and discrimination. ALL students have the right to be safe in school, but sadly, this is not the reality for some of our children. Please do what you can to help these youth.

For all these reasons we urge you to give a FAVORABLE report for HB1032.

Sincerely,

The Coalition for LGBTQ+ Students
(www.coalition4lgbtqstudents.org)

