

April 2, 2021

The Honorable Senator Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
The Honorable Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair
and Members of the EHE Affairs Committee

Re: HB377 Commission on Student Behavioral & Mental Health - IN FAVOR w/AMENDMENT

Dear Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chairwoman Kagan, and Committee Members,

I am writing to pledge my support of a favorable report from your committee regarding HB377. This legislation would create a commission focusing on studying the behavioral and mental health of racial and ethnic minorities. However, I believe it should be amended to include specific study on the LGBTQ+ community.

Our school systems are incredibly underprepared to adequately address the specific issues the LGBTQ+ student population and their families face. It is more important than ever to ensure their safety and wellbeing is considered. Many educators in my local school system routinely turn to members of the LGBTQ+ community both in and out of the system for advice or direction on how to address mental health of LGBTQ+ youth. Their interventions would be far more effective with professional assessments of current practices and direction on how to improve.

The Trevor Project's National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health (link below) completed in 2020 unearthed some concerning statistics:

- 40% of respondents seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months
- 68% of respondents reported symptoms of generalized anxiety
- 48% of respondents reported engaging in self-harm in the past 12 months
- 46% of respondents reported that they wanted counseling but were unable to receive it
- 61% of transgender and non-binary respondents were prevented or discouraged from using a bathroom corresponding with their gender identity

These numbers are hardly surprising given the enormous strain caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The isolation faced due to quarantine has only further affected the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth. As students increasingly return back to school our educators will need to be prepared to handle the various mental health needs of all students, but especially those of students most impacted by the combination of social and political stigma.

I urge the EHE Committee to amend this bill to include the LGBTQ+ community in the study of the proposed Commission. Our LGBTQ+ youth cannot afford to be left out of this targeted action to improve the educational experience, and overall well-being of the student population throughout the state of Maryland.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposed amendment.

Sincerely,

Brandon Russell
he/him/his
2nd Vice Chair, SMCDCC
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Resource Link: [The-Trevor-Project-National-Survey-Results-2020.pdf](#)