



STATEMENT TO THE
SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 98

COUNTY BOARDS AND PUBLIC AND NONPUBLIC PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS AND
SCHOOLS – DISCRIMINATION – PROHIBITION

OPPOSE

JANUARY 28, 2021

Agudath Israel of Maryland speaks on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish communities across Maryland and on behalf of the 10,000 students attending 30 Jewish day schools in our great state.

As it is the key to the future of society, the education of our children is the item held in the highest regard by our citizenry. Among certain groups, *where* one goes to acquire an education may be just as important as the education itself. Many communities whose members share a religious, cultural, or social bond, are compelled to educate their children within the atmosphere created to maintain the traditions of their beliefs. It is upon this foundation that Jewish day schools operate within our state, as well as the hundreds of other faith-based nonpublic schools.

The Jewish day school community, and the broader nonpublic school community, strongly supports the continuous record-setting funding of Maryland's public education system, and applaud its great success and historic accomplishments educating Maryland's youth. However, nonpublic schools serve as a vital option for those who choose an education provided within their religious or cultural community.

We are ever grateful for the funds allocated over the last many years by the Maryland General Assembly to provide a small measure of support to eligible and participating schools and to the families who choose them. The requisite tuition is a great burden to the majority of the families (a high percentage of whom are FARMS eligible), but they are willing to make sacrifices in order for their child to have an education that allows for them to maintain their cultural and religious identity.

Senate Bill 98 seeks to dissolve and undo the identity of these schools. By making any available state funding hinge upon the dismantling of admission, retention, and employment policies that have been in existence since time immemorial, the foundation of parochial education is under serious and unprovoked threat. In order to participate in any of Maryland's state funded programs, nonpublic schools already sign assurances put into place to ensure that discrimination on grounds of race, color, national origin, sexual orientation, and gender identity does not take place. The additional anti-discrimination policies presented in Senate Bill 98 go far beyond those requirements and present insurmountable challenges that are not culturally or fiscally sustainable for any participating nonpublic schools.

We ask you to please consider the nonpublic school community and the 120,000 students that are educated within it, to maintain the previously accepted anti-discrimination language in the state budget that does not allow discrimination on the aforementioned grounds of race, color, national origin, and sexual orientation, and report unfavorably on Senate Bill 98. Thank you