
TESTIMONY PACKET: (C)

SENATE BILL 116

TESTIMONY FROM: Students



MARYLAND STUDENT COALITION

2022 Legislative Session

marylandstudents.org

TESTIMONY

BILL: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts - Development of Content Standards and Implementation

SPONSOR: Senator Ellis

POSITION: **FAVORABLE**

FROM: Shalin Bahl, Legislative District 9A, shalinbahl@icloud.com
**Submitted in Association with the Maryland Student Coalition
(marylandstudents.org)*

Saturday, January 29, 2022

SB116: Favorable

Chair Pinsky and honorable members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs committee. I am writing in favor of SB 116.

I firmly believe that the state of Maryland should institute a stronger and more diverse curriculum for students in the ELA curriculum. First, I believe the representation of minority races as well as LBGTQ+ Individuals in literature read in classes should be more equalized. The underrepresentation of African Americans, South Asians, East Asians, Muslims, and Latinos should immediately be resolved as well as the diminished representation of LBGTQ+ and disabled individuals.

Second, it is important that ELA teachers share stories created by diverse authors from diverse backgrounds. It is important to share stories about different cultures and from one's experiences. Reading stories and influencing diversity from different backgrounds within the language arts classroom can open up minds to different ideas and spark interest towards a stronger diversity.

Third and finally, studies have shown that diversity can lead to greater awareness, understanding, and most of all, acceptance of differing beliefs and customs. Through diversifying the English curriculum throughout the state, students can learn to have a better understanding of the world around them. The positive impacts of diversifying the ELA curriculum outweighs the negative impacts and will have a lasting effect on the future of students.

As a student attending public school in Maryland, I have clear examples and experiences proving why the English curriculum should be better diversified. The majority of books assigned in my English class

specifically are written by authors without a focus on diversity. For example, Edgar Allen Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and more are classic literature books.

Some books may shed light on racism, but having more of a focus on diversity should be incorporated in the curriculum and addressed as a main concept. Why does the English curriculum promote non diversified content? All in all, by diversifying the English curriculum, we can not only rid of prejudice and racism generated by non diversified stories, but we can build better acceptance and understanding of cultures.

Furthermore, for the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 116.

Thank you.

TESTIMONY

BILL: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts - Development of Content Standards and Implementation

SPONSOR: Senator Ellis

POSITION: **FAVORABLE**

FROM: Christian Thomas, District 6, Christian.Thomas@bcps.org
**Submitted in Association with the Maryland Student Coalition (marylandstudents.org)*

Tuesday, January 18, 2022

SB116: Favorable

Chair Pinsky, and honorable members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. Today, I am writing in favor of SB 116.

As a current Board of Education member for Baltimore County, the 2021-2022 Student Member of the Board, and member of our Curriculum Committee, I greatly understand the immense value in expanding our English, Language, Arts Curriculum to become more diverse. So much so that in August, I sponsored an LGBTQ+ Inclusivity Resolution to do just that, extending the diversity in our curricula to include representation for our LGBTQ+ students in the same way Baltimore County has progressed to provide other culturally diverse curriculum material. Without a diverse curriculum, the issue of a single narrative capturing one's identity is often portrayed. With a diverse curriculum, literature creates a more tolerant youth, ultimately creating a more tolerant society.

As a current high school senior, I can say that I have often not been represented in the literature read in classrooms. From my multi-racial background to being a member of the LGBTQ+ community, our representation in the ELA curriculum has been lacking. While some counties have been able to become more progressive with regard to this issue, others are lagging far behind. Thus, I charge you, the Senate Committee on Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs to rectify this issue and prepare our students to honor and respect the diversity of this day and age.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 116.

TESTIMONY

BILL: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts - Development of Content Standards and Implementation

SPONSOR: Senator Ellis

POSITION: **FAVORABLE**

FROM: Paige Plater, Calvert County, platerp@outlook.com
**Submitted in Association with the Maryland Student Coalition
(marylandstudents.org)*

Friday, January 27, 2022

SB116: Favorable

Chair Pinsky, and honorable members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. Today I am writing in favor of SB 116.

Diversifying our language arts curriculum is important because it introduces students to different ideas at an early age. Introducing diverse ideas, in the beginning, prompts students to understand and learn more about other cultures. An inclusive mindset is vital to the growth and development of young children. Students need to not only see inclusivity practiced in their schools but also in the things they're taught. If we prioritize teaching our students about our differences and acceptance early on, it won't be an uncomfortable conversation later. Early in school, we read, "Esperanza Rising" and "Inside Out and Back Again." They told the stories of a Mexican and a Vietnamese girl who both fled their homes and came to America. Before reading these books, I didn't have any knowledge about these cultures or their experiences. Their stories stick with me in my day-to-day life because I can recognize and understand the experiences of those like them. It opened up my eyes to the prejudice and racism immigrants often face in America. Most importantly, it made me decide that I wouldn't want to act the way some people acted towards the characters.

I think every student would benefit from learning how to love those who are different from us. What better place to do this than the classroom? Our schools value students coming up with new ideas. Why not prompt us to listen to and understand different ideas? In the end, it will make a better future for all of us.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 116.

TESTIMONY

BILL: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts - Development of Content Standards and Implementation

SPONSOR: Senator Ellis

POSITION: **FAVORABLE**

FROM: Jonathon DiPietro, *Director of the Maryland Student Coalition*
(marylandstudents.org)

Friday, January 27, 2022

SB116: Favorable

Hello, my name is Heera and I am an 11th grader at Poolesville High school, and a proud member of the LGBT+ community. I am non-binary. For me to write this so openly has been the result of a long journey of both finding and accepting myself, in a world where my identity has been either tucked away for nobody to see or openly ridiculed for everyone to judge. For centuries, my existence has been deemed inappropriate. My existence has been deemed invalid.

My existence has been deemed unworthy of respect. And I have felt this every day. I have had to sit quietly as the people around me have berated and debated my identity. But today I choose to take a stand and demand respect. Chair Pinsky, and honorable members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, today I am writing in favor of SB 116.

Making sure our curriculum is diverse and representative of all students is a value that is near and dear to not only me, but so many around the county. Year after year, assignment after assignment, thousands of students go unrecognized by the curriculum. Our stories are neither told nor heard, despite having centuries of untapped and beautiful history. Instead we are made to read text after text featuring violence against women and minorities. We must then hear students make jokes about violence against women and minorities. And then we must experience that violence.

Just a few months ago, my transgender friends and I were being targeted and harassed by someone that did not want to respect our identities. This harassment included but was not limited to: asking invasive questions, loudly misgendering us, pointing laser pointers at us from across the room, locking us outside of the school on cold winter days, and more. Every day when I came to school, I no longer felt safe.

TESTIMONY

BILL: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts - Development of Content Standards and Implementation

SPONSOR: Senator Ellis

POSITION: **FAVORABLE**

FROM: Etana Heda, District 20, etanaheda1234@gmail.com
**Submitted in Association with the Maryland Student Coalition
(marylandstudents.org)*

Friday, January 27, 2022

SB116: Favorable

Great strides have been made in the state of Maryland when it comes to improving our curricula. Students are now able to engage with topics that interest them, apply their knowledge practically, and learn lifelong skills that can change the world. Recognizing these advancements is important, but it is even more important to acknowledge that there is still progress to be made, especially surrounding the diversity of our ELA curricula. Chair Pinsky, and honorable members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. Today, I am writing in favor of SB 116.

In grades 6-12, students in English/Language Arts classes spend a lot of time reading and examining literary texts, but they're often written by people they can't relate to. Being able to relate to the writers and characters in literature is now more important than ever given the incredible diversity within our classrooms, as this makes learning more engaging, and allows students to personally connect with texts. As a high school student myself, I have experienced firsthand how much better learning in my English class can become when I can stay engaged and connect with what I'm reading. Keeping learning engaging motivates students to want to learn more, and diversifying our ELA curriculum is a crucial step towards building lifelong learners.

Being an African American student from Eastern Montgomery County, all of my classes are incredibly diverse, and my IB English teacher reflects this through the text she chooses to explore in our class. This year we've read novels and short stories from various black authors, and this has exposed me to perspectives I've never been able to discover in my previous classes. I'm truly lucky to have had this experience, but I understand that this isn't the case across the state. It is unfair that some of us in certain counties get to connect with our identity through learning while others can't simply because of where they

live. Just as we should work towards achieving universal education, we should strive to reflect diversity in our ELA curricula.

Maryland is a great state filled with driven students who deserve an inclusive education, and for the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 116.

TESTIMONY

BILL: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts - Development of Content Standards and Implementation

SPONSOR: Senator Ellis

POSITION: **FAVORABLE**

FROM: Trevor Eric Norton, District 9A, cryontrev@gmail.com
**Submitted in Association with the Maryland Student Coalition
(marylandstudents.org)*

Sunday, January 16, 2022

SB116: Favorable

Chair Pinsky, and honorable members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. Today, I am writing in favor of SB 116.

As a citizen living in the state of Maryland and a product of the Howard County Public Schools, I believe that it is imperative to create a more diverse curriculum as we enter a more diverse society. If we fail to bring to attention the importance of writers such as Frederick Douglass and Maya Angelou, the students of the state of Maryland will fail to understand the diversity of the English language and the Arts. I cannot stress enough the importance of introducing a further diverse curriculum in the state of Maryland.

As a former student and graduate of the Howard County Public Schools, I have been fortunate enough to read diverse books by authors such as Frederick Douglass and Maya Angelou. However, I write this testimony to highlight that many students are not as fortunate. If we do not give all students the right to explore the diversity of the great literature writers, we will undoubtedly be doing an injustice to the students in the State of Maryland.

TESTIMONY

BILL: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts - Development of Content Standards and Implementation

SPONSOR: Senator Ellis

POSITION: **FAVORABLE**

FROM: Nick Dimitriades, District 42, nickdimitriades1@gmail.com
**Submitted in Association with the Maryland Student Coalition (marylandstudents.org)*

January 15, 2022

SB116: Favorable

Chair Pinsky, and honorable members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. Today, I am writing in favor of SB 116.

Comparable to our state’s student population, English literature is diverse in origin and purpose. I’ve witnessed firsthand the wide-ranging emotional and academic impact of diverse literature on my classmates and I within the Baltimore County Public School system. From A Raisin in the Sun, to I Am Malala, to Hell-Heaven, among countless other works, a diverse ELA curriculum has enriched my understanding of both the world in which I live and literary analysis. Unfortunately, however, I know there are thousands of students across our state who have not had the same experience, which is why I urge you to support this legislation. Empathy, creativity, and tolerance should be fostered within each school across our state—and an increasingly diverse ELA curriculum would allow for it.

I’ve seen firsthand the insight diverse literature brings to my generation; these works have often served as catalysts for new understandings and opened minds. Moreover, texts published by a myriad of diverse writers have often allowed for collective recognition of the imperfections and injustices rooted within our communities. This legislation would assist Maryland students in becoming globally collaborative members of society while also amplifying the voices of marginalized authors and creative writers—and while great work has been done across our state in an effort to do so, there is certainly more to be done. SB 116 is a comprehensive solution to promoting the importance of literature among students while working alongside local governments and educational jurisdictions.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 116.

TESTIMONY

BILL: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts - Development of Content Standards and Implementation

SPONSOR: Senator Ellis

POSITION: **FAVORABLE**

FROM: Nainika Kadabha, 7th Congressional District of MD
**Submitted in Association with the Maryland Student Coalition
(marylandstudents.org)*

Saturday, January 14, 2022

SB116: Favorable

Chair Pinsky, and honorable members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. Today, I am writing in favor of SB 116 in order to advocate for prioritizing diversity in the English curriculum.

Despite increasing diversity in American public school systems, the English curriculums fail to reflect the diversity of the student body. Restricting particularly the AP English Literature and AP English Language curricula to solely “classics,” which are overwhelmingly written by upper class, white, male, cisgendered, heterosexual authors, implies that prestigious books are only written by authors who fit such a description.

I am a senior at Centennial High School, and every single book in our AP English Literature curriculum is written by a white person. When I asked my teacher about the lack of racial diversity, she told me not to worry since there was a character of color in Jane Eyre– this character ended up being a racist caricature of a Black woman written by Charlotte Bronte, a white author. Children of all races deserve accurate, anti-racist representation in both authors and characters. Not only does it facilitate a deeper connection to the literature, but it allows them to gain a more accurate perspective on other cultures and on systems of racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism and classism.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 116.

TESTIMONY

BILL: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts - Development of Content Standards and Implementation

SPONSOR: Senator Ellis

POSITION: **FAVORABLE**

FROM: Mikko J. Parker, District 13, Mikkoparker568@gmail.com
**Submitted in Association with the Maryland Student Coalition
(marylandstudents.org)*

Thursday, January 13th, 2021

SB116: Favorable

Chair Pinsky, and honorable members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. Today, I am writing in favor of SB 116.

On this piece of legislation, I appreciate the ability of creating an inclusive English Language Arts curriculum that will be representative of all students from all different backgrounds. Not only showing the ability of being able to be inclusive of those students, but also preventing inflicting biases upon their peers and members of their community. Maryland has beautiful diversity in it's schools and in my opinion, it's time that our curriculum reflects this rich diversity.

Myself as an individual, I constantly see the lack of representation in our curriculum of people that do look like me and students that do not look like me. This bill would change that and ensure that moving forward our school system is respectful and is inclusive of all students and ths bill further ensures that we are non-discriminative of all students. It's time that on a state level, we take action to promote diversity.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 116.

TESTIMONY

BILL: Public Schools - Inclusive and Diverse English Language Arts - Development of Content Standards and Implementation

SPONSOR: Senator Ellis

POSITION: **FAVORABLE**

FROM: Saachi Aggarwal, 09A, saachia11@gmail.com
**Submitted in Association with the Maryland Student Coalition
(marylandstudents.org)*

Friday, January 27, 2022

SB116: Favorable

Chair Pinsky, and honorable members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to submit a written testimony in favor of SB 116.

Because our current school curriculum is structured to include books that fail to include marginalized groups, it prevents certain students from feeling like they belong. It paints an incomplete narrative that can prevent us from understanding the whole story and leads us to make false assumptions. Whether it be skin color, hair style, family structure, or sexual orientation, students should have the ability to read literature that include characters and themes that reflect their identities and experiences, or allow others to broaden their outlook and learn about people who are not like themselves. Additionally, these diverse stories allow students, even at the elementary level, to form deeper connections with books that focus on voices that aren't traditionally heard. By doing so, it helps change students' attitude towards those differences, or learn from them. Although some argue that some issues/topics addressed in these books are inappropriate and/or controversial, students should have the autonomy to educate themselves on these topics, rather than being forced to follow a societal construct.

As a junior at Marriotts Ridge High School, the majority of my school career has encompassed books like Romeo and Juliet, The Great Gatsby, and Macbeth. The common theme: they're all written by white, male authors. Although these books are influential, good literature mirrors human experience and it's essential for students from all backgrounds to see their lives represented and have role models that resemble themselves. Books that are multi-faceted, depict people of color, highlight lesser-known historical events, and feature characters with different experiences are crucial to help students see things from different perspectives. As a female, second-generation Asian-American, I've failed to see this

happen for the past seven years that I've been attending school in Maryland. Moving away from "classics" towards more diverse books can help expand one's horizons and promote pedagogy, something I wish I had the chance to experience at a young age. Reading about the experience of a family that immigrated to America, the story of hundreds of students, is something we should promote, not hinder. All students should have the chance to resonate with the literature they read.

In conclusion, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 116. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions. I thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.