



## Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education

### Testimony for the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee March 8, 2022

#### SB 666 - Schools, Prekindergarten Programs, and County Boards of Education - Discrimination

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#### FAVORABLE

The **Maryland Alliance for Race Equity in Education (MAREE)** is a coalition of education advocacy, civil rights, and community-based organizations that are committed to eliminating racial disparities in Maryland's education system. We also work to eliminate policies and practices that are rooted in structural and systemic oppression. To that end, we strongly support the passage of SB 666 to ensure that any school receiving public dollars — public, private, or religious — cannot discriminate against or penalize students and families on the basis of their race, ethnicity, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. The bill would also establish a process for schools to address allegations of discrimination by students and families, without the fear of retribution.

Advocates, legislators, and public officials have made significant progress over the past decade to ensure that public school students in Maryland can attend school without being bullied, shamed, or oppressed because of their race, gender identity, or sexual orientation. However, these protections are not codified for students attending private or religious schools — including the ones receiving public dollars. People who identify as gay, bisexual, or transgender experience significant discrimination and harassment in public life, including in public school settings<sup>1</sup>. Students who are gay or bisexual are more than twice as likely to report experiencing persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness than their heterosexual peers. The impact is worse for transgender students as they are twice as likely to experience depressive symptoms and seriously consider or attempt to commit suicide. These mental health stressors have been correlated with a negative student outcomes<sup>2</sup>.

The *Blueprint for Maryland's Future* plan deepens the state's commitment to education for all public school students and families in the state. As we all work to transform Maryland's education system into a "world class" model, let's make sure that equity, inclusion, cultural competency, and accountability — core tenets of the *Blueprint* — are applied to all schools that receive public funding.

For these reasons, we ask for a favorable vote on SB 666. Thank you.

1. Medley, G., Lipari, R. N., Bose, J., Cribb, D. S., Kroutil, L. A., & McHenry, G. (2016, October). *Sexual orientation and estimates of adult substance use and mental health: Results from the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. NSDUH Data Review.* Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/>

Health. 2020. <https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Identity-and-Cultural-Dimensions/LGBTQI>

2. National Association of School Psychologists. (2021). *Comprehensive School-Based Mental and Behavioral Health Services and School Psychologists [handout]*. Author. <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/mental-health/school-psychology-and-mental-health/comprehensive-school-based-mental-and-behavioral-health-services-and-school-psychologists>