

March 10, 2022

SB 666

Schools, Prekindergarten Programs, and County Boards of Education – Discrimination

FAVORABLE

Testimony by Alyssa Dangel

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee. My name is Alyssa Dangel and I am a 6th Grader in Western Howard County. I am here in support of SB666, which bans discriminatory behavior towards students in schools.

This issue matters to me because I have a friend who is LGBTQIAP+, and many people intentionally use the wrong pronouns, and use slurs to be cruel, and demeaning. When people were like this, we needed help, but there was no easy or reliable way to get the help we needed. The few teachers we were able to ask undermined the situation, they said that people were just getting used to it, and if we gave them some time, they would get the pronouns right. But it had been two years, and nothing had improved. If there was this law in place, we would have gotten the support we needed and we would have been able to know what the best next steps were. With this bill many people could get adequate and reliable help. I am testifying for this bill to help people, if they are discriminated against for their race, ethnicity, religion, for being disabled, or if they are discriminated against for being LGBTQIAP+.

These actions are caused by some gaps in the Maryland education law system because of patchwork laws that don't protect all students from harassment. There just aren't strong enough Maryland laws to cover this use of cruel language. Even staff members can be discriminatory. There are neither state wide protections, nor a good help system and the effect is lower academic performance, lower GPA, increased absences, increased likelihood of school dropout, more psychological distrust, and a decreased likelihood of attending higher education.

This bill is needed now. Third time has to be the charm because some students need help immediately. Ninety-eight percent of LGBTQIAP+ students hear gay or other homophobic-based slur words used in a negative manner, fifty percent have heard these remarks from teachers and other staff members, ninety-six percent have received harassment or assault based on gender expression, sex orientation, race or ethnicity, and fifty-nine percent feel unsafe at school, yet this bill has not been passed. We need to pass this bill now to help students who need it, and to stop the discriminatory comments before they hurt more students. I am here speaking for students who need this bill, because if all students who would benefit from this bill were here, there wouldn't be enough seats. Please pass Senate Bill 666.