



HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

MARCH 3, 2022

HOUSE BILL 850

SCHOOLS, PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS, AND COUNTY BOARDS OF EDUCATION – DISCRIMINATION OPPOSE

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.

House Bill 850 seeks to impose unprecedented restrictions upon the operations of these schools. By making any available state funding hinge upon admission and retention policies covering such a far-reaching range of categories puts the foundation of parochial education 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 House Bill 850 go far beyond those requirements and present insurmountable challenges that are not culturally or fiscally sustainable for nearly any of the 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. We urge you to report unfavorably on House Bill 850. Thank you.