



## LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

Bill: **HB 0850/SB 0666 Inclusive Schools Act**

Organization: PFLAG Salisbury Inc., PO Box 5107, Salisbury Maryland 21802

Submitted by: Nicole Hollywood, President of the Board

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Good afternoon committee, and thank you for your time. My name is Nicole Hollywood. I am a resident of Maryland's Eastern Shore residing in district 37. I am a Professor at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, a volunteer with Salisbury PFLAG, and a parent to multiple LGBTQIA+ children.

While a handful of counties have taken pro-active measures, there remain no State-wide anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ learners. These insufficient protections for and inequities in the treatment of LGBTQIA+ learners enrolled in Maryland schools contribute to a climate that is unsupportive and even often hostile. Because of the lack of protections, LGBTQ+ youth continue to face bullying, exclusion, and discrimination in school, putting them at physical and psychological risk and limiting their education.

Research conducted on LGBTQIA+ youth in schools has found that an unsupportive educational climate contributes to lower academic performance, lower GPA, increased absences, increased likelihood of school dropout, psychological distress, and a decreased likelihood of attending an institution of higher education.

According to the most recent GLSEN School Climate Survey, 98% of LGBTQ+ students have heard the term gay used in a negative way or other homophobic remarks; more than 1/2 of students have heard homophobic remarks from teachers or school staff; 86% of students have experienced harassment or assault based on their actual or perceived gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, race, or ethnicity; and 59% of LGBTQ+ students feel unsafe at school.

As a parent of children in Wicomico County Schools, I can affirm the hostile environment and the bombardment of homophobic remarks my kids have faced. Further, teachers and administrators are often the worst perpetrators. In fact, I was called to come to my middle son's middle school when he was in 8th grade and cornered by three teachers who felt compelled to out my wonderful high, performing child and request that I gender police his behavior because they considered an openly gay

student to be a distraction to the learning environment in their STEM honors program and they could not guarantee his safety. These educators did not know me and were not aware of whether I was a supportive parent or whether their actions could have put my son in danger. One of the teachers repeatedly told me that he is a Christian and a Sunday School teacher, which I perceived as a formal declaration of his hostility towards my child. He further added that he had been speaking to my sons classmates about my son and the discussion revolved around their discomfort regarding his sexual orientation.

I left that encounter, and after crying in my car in the school parking lot for a half-hour, I realized that I needed to do everything in my power to initiate change. I now sit here in front of you as a parent and activist, asking for a favorable report out of committee for HB0850/SB0666, which would codify anti-discrimination protections for all students, pre-k through 12, who are enrolled in our public schools and in any other schools receiving public funding.