

Bill: HB850
Title: County Boards and Public and Nonpublic Prekindergarten Programs and Schools – Discrimination – Prohibition
Date: March 3, 2022
Committee: Ways and Means Committee
Position: **Favorable**

To Members of the Committee:

Today I submit testimony in support of House Bill 850, the Inclusive Schools Act. My name is Charlie Wedderien, I am bisexual and nonbinary. I am a recent graduate of Richard Montgomery High School, and am attending my first year of college in California. While at Richard Montgomery, I was both in my school's Gender & Sexuality Alliance (GSA) and was the president of a county-wide student LGBTQ organization called MoCo Pride. Across these two groups, there was one thing in common: these organizations were formed by LGBTQ students, for LGBTQ students, to support each other, because we did not receive support from our schools or the adults in our lives.

High school is often referred to as care-free days of our lives, free from adult responsibilities. For the most part this is true. Students generally do not have to worry about rent, bills, and the challenges of our world. But high school can be terrifying and filled with worry for different reasons. Many student members of MoCo Pride complain of verbal attacks, sexual harrasment, and threats of physical assault. I myself have heard slurs yelled across our hallways with no repercussions. Students do not have confidence to report it to staff, because it does not seem like our faculty is not equipped to support us, and sometimes even join in on the abuse. They misgender and dead name us, make excuses for other students when incidents are reported, and appear to be either ignorant or inconsiderate of our vulnerability as LGBTQ students. Our education and high school experience worsens as a result. It is difficult to learn when you are afraid of you cllasmatesand worried that your teacher will not help. This fears transforms schools from places of learning and excitement of the future, to places of trauma.

We are still students of your schools. We want to spend our time worry about homework, tests, and if our crush will go to prom with us. We do not want to worry that if we bring our crush to prom, we will be banned from participating. We need to know that there is policies protecting us and that there is recourse we can take to regain the feeling of safety and belonging that is ripped away in that moment. We are citizens and Marylanders too, and should be afforded basic protections, including access to safe and quality education.

In order for policies to be effective and enforceable, they need to be written down and made available to all students and their families. Without our schools commitment, in writing, to not tolerating discrimination in schools, LGBTQ students have little to no assurance of their safety and protections.

Students are doing our best to make our schools better from the ground, like our creation safe spaces for LGBTQ students, but you have the power to make real change across the state and for students who, by no fault of their own, are in schools that do have similar support groups. I ask you, to honor the trust placed in you as our parents and leaders, to protect all students of your state. Please vote in favor of House Bill 850.

Sincerely,

Charlie Wedderin (they/them)
Richard Montgomery High School, '21
Former President of MoCo Student Pride