

LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

Bill: **HB0850 Inclusive Schools Act**

Individual Submission: Haleigh LaChance, resident MD-001, Wicomico County

Position: **Favorable**

I am submitting testimony in FAVOR of HB0850, as a parent and resident in Wicomico County.

The current MSDE guidelines on protection of students on the basis of sexual or gender identity are not codified into law, and as such, they are not uniformly applied across the state. In our Wicomico County Public Schools (WCPS) these guidelines are not used or enforced, and no other written policies or procedures exist to protect LGBTQ+ students.

I serve on the Board of Directors for PFLAG Salisbury, our local PFLAG chapter. We receive regular reports from local middle- and high-school students of teachers and administrators acting contrary to the MSDE guidance, and *not* supporting the education and development of LGBTQ+ students. This includes discouraging or being hostile to GSA (Gender and Sexuality Awareness or Gay-Straight Alliance) clubs, downplaying reports of harassment or bullying, notifying parents of a students' sexual orientation, referring to students by a former name, and suggesting that LGBTQ+ students move to a more accepting district or homeschool. These behaviors contribute to a hostile environment for LGBTQ+ students, and increase the barriers these students face in receiving their education.

This law will extend protections to all students at our public and Federally-supported private schools, so these behaviors are not acceptable in our county, or anywhere Maryland. The law will provide a remedy process to resolve discrimination complaints, prohibit retaliation against individual students, and require school districts to develop written policies on protecting LGBTQ+ students.

This law will ensure that the values and civil rights protections for which Maryland is known are extended to our youngest residents, even those in counties far-flung from Annapolis. I urge a favorable report in committee.