



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**

SALISBURY PFLAG SUPPORTS THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS ACT

I am submitting this testimony in FAVOR of HB 0850/SB 0666 on behalf of PFLAG Salisbury, the Salisbury, Maryland Chapter of PFLAG National.

Salisbury is located in the Wicomico County Public Schools (WCPS) district, which contains 24 schools and serves more than 15,000 students. WCPS has zero policies, guidelines, or procedures established for the safety of LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) youth. The insufficient protections for, and inequities in the treatment of, LGBTQIA+ learners enrolled in Maryland schools contributes to a climate that is unsupportive, and even often hostile, to LGBTQIA+ learners. 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, and less likelihood of attending an institution of higher education.

HB0850/SB0666 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. It also prohibits retaliation against a student or guardian who files a discrimination complaint, establishes a remedy process to resolve discriminatory action, and requires schools and school Boards to develop written policies for students and employees regarding civil rights protections. Ultimately, this legislation seeks to codify existing MSDE guidance and prohibit discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.

HB0850/SB0666 is a major step forward to ensuring the civil rights of LGBTQIA+ youth enrolled in Maryland's schools. Therefore, PFLAG Salisbury Inc. supports this legislation and recommends a FAVORABLE report in committee.