

Maryland General Assembly passes inclusive schools bill

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By Tinashe Chingarande

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The Maryland Statehouse (Photo Credit: State of Maryland)

ANNAPOLIS – The Maryland General Assembly voted Monday to ban state-funded schools and county boards of education from discriminating against students on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity race, nationality, disability, and other identity markers.

The House of Delegates passed the Inclusive Schools Act, also known as House Bill 850, by a 96-36 margin. It is now headed to Republican Gov. Larry Hogan's desk and the governor has 30 days to either sign or veto the legislation. If he takes no action, the bill will take effect July 1.

“After five years of introduction, me and [Sen. Cory McCray’s] prohibition on discrimination in schools has reached final passage,” said state Del. Jheanelle K. Wilkins (D-Montgomery County) in a Twitter post Monday evening.

After FIVE YEARS of introduction, me & [@SenatorMcCray](#)'s prohibition on discrimination in schools has reached final passage! Thank u to the House leadership for making this a priority each year as well as [@FreeStateLGBTQ](#) [@MSEAeducators](#) [@disabrightsMD](#) for their undeterred advocacy! pic.twitter.com/Vd2j3pVzeA

— Jheanelle Wilkins ([@JheanelleW](#)) [April 12, 2022](#)

Wilkins was one of the bill's sponsors.

Should state-funded schools — pre-kindergarten, primary and secondary — and boards of education not adhere to nondiscrimination policies, they risk losing part of all their financing. The bill also prohibits retaliatory actions against students, parents and individuals who file complaints alleging discrimination.

“There is an important message in this legislation, as well, that taxpayer money should never fund those engaging in discrimination, bias, and hate,” said FreeState Justice Executive Director Jeremy LaMaster in an online [press release](#) Tuesday morning.

The Maryland State Department of Education will increase general fund expenditure by \$42,100 in fiscal year 2023 to accommodate provisions for the bill, according to the bill's fiscal and policy note.

The passing of the Inclusive Schools Act follows years of documented discrimination in schools around the state.

The Baltimore Sun [reported](#) in 2020 that Black students in the Carroll County Public Schools District were subjected to harassment that included being called racial slurs, bullied, caricatured when classmates asked to touch their hair, and being perceived as unsafe to be around.

“We all have to live by these certain rules and regulations in order to avoid the speculation [that] we're doing something bad,” student Kelechukwu Ahulamibe told the Baltimore Sun, referring to the “rules of survival” his mother taught him to maneuver his surroundings.

Black people comprise 3.9 percent of the county's population, according to [Census data](#). This has translated into a lack of Black students in its school system that has left some feeling like outsiders in their community.

To remedy this, public schools in the area have created student cultural organizations where marginalized children and allies can congregate and support each other. The Carroll County Public School District also has an Equity and Inclusion Outreach program available for parents and students as a resource for educational programming and accountability.

— Joe Vogel ([@JoeVogel_](#)) [February 16, 2023](#)