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**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the
Maryland House Ways and Means Committee
For the Hearing on
Nonpublic Elementary and Secondary Schools –
Discrimination – Prohibition (HB 696)
February 28, 2017**

SUPPORT

Maryland PTA represents nearly 170,000 volunteer members in over 1000 public schools. For nearly 102 years, our mission has been to advocate on behalf of children and youth in the schools, in the community, and before government bodies and other organizations that make decisions impacting children. Maryland PTA is comprised of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children in Maryland. As the state's oldest and largest child advocacy organization, Maryland PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education.

Maryland PTA submits this testimony in support of Senate Bill 696, Nonpublic Elementary and Secondary Schools – Discrimination – Prohibition. This bill prevents a nonpublic elementary or secondary school that receives state funds from refusing enrollment of, expel, withhold privileges from or otherwise discriminate against any student or prospective students because of the individual's race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability. It also broadens the application of discrimination to an unlawful education practice. The Maryland Congress of the National PTA supports prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, national origin, language, religion, age, physical and academic ability, and sexual orientation. Hence, this bill is a direct reflection of adherence to school policies that build diversity and promote student success.

As champions for using public funds for public schools, Maryland PTA firmly believes that applying such anti-discriminatory legislation to nonpublic elementary and secondary schools is a proactive step to uphold standards that exhibits a quality and safe school environment conducive to learning and promoting student success. As such, the Maryland PTA supports the use of public funds for social and education services that are available to all people, and opposes the use of public funds to support institutions that may deny service to applicants, particularly where that denial of service may be based on discriminatory factors. To develop a stronger and more accountable system of education, schools must place priority on student performance and achievement. Schools must focus on what children know and are able to do and be held accountable for ensuring that all children succeed.

Because Maryland PTA supports educational programs designed to increase understanding of the U.S. Constitution and civil rights, civil liberties, and appreciation for those individuals who fought for them, we admonish any unlawful education practice promoted within, by or on the behalf of school administrators, students, teachers or otherwise employees within a school. While we recognize that this bill excludes ministerial employees, we do oppose government funding of pervasively sectarian organizations and other organizations and programs that discriminate based on religion in employment or delivery of services (including by making religious instruction, worship, or proselytization part of their services or programs).

Nonpublic schools should meet the same educational standards as public schools especially if they receive public funding. Therefore, as a constituent body of the National PTA, Maryland PTA promotes the establishment of and support for existing educational programs, policies and procedures that provide equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of race, gender, national origin, language, religion, age, disability, or sexual orientation.

For the reasons state above, Maryland PTA encourages your vote to SUPPORT Senate Bill 696.

Testimony is presented on the behalf of

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth Ysla Leight".

Elizabeth Ysla Leight, President
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