



**HB1536 Primary and Secondary Education – Title IX –
Policies and Procedures (Hear Our Voices Act of 2020)**

Presented to the Honorable Chair Anne Kaiser and Members of the Ways and Means Committee
March 4, 2020 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT With Amendment

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges the Ways and Means Committee a **favorable report on HB1536 Primary and Secondary Education – Title IX – Policies and Procedures (Hear Our Voices Act of 2020)**, sponsored by Delegate Jazz Lewis.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. We seek to protect and advance every individuals' power to make personal, life-affirming decisions and exercise control over their sexual and reproductive lives, including being free from sexual violence. We also strongly believe these rights extend to students in primary and secondary educational settings, who should not be subject to subordination or manipulation by adults or their peers for the purposes of engaging in illegal sexual misconduct.

Under Title IX, K-12 schools are given the discretion to establish their own policies and procedures for handling complaints of sexual misconduct. As a result, there is no uniformity in how Title IX sexual misconduct complaints are handled, leaving students vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse. This legislation seeks to promote the safety and security of K-12 students by providing clarity on what policies and procedures public schools must implement and abide by in the State of Maryland.

It is important to note that this legislation seeks to create a clear process on how students can file complaints regarding sexual misconduct to the proper authorities. It is not meant to replace the past work of the anti-bullying education statutes that the Maryland General Assembly put into place which includes reporting and important data analysis that helps to determine policy reform. Students, and too many adults working in school systems, have a firm grasp about Title IX protections and how they apply to publicly-funded school settings outside of the realm of athletics. They do not even know that each school district has a required Title IX coordinator, where to find that individuals, or whether there are personnel on their campuses who serve as liaisons to that particular administrator.

One to consider for this bill: it should not be mandatory that a parent or legal guardian be informed of a complaint filed without exceptions. Policies should take into consideration possible family dynamics of abuse, neglect, or significant dysfunction, and identify language that will allow the students to make the determination whether parental notification will be acceptable to them.

Our organization strongly believes laws should be enacted when it is necessary to preserve the bodily autonomy and safety of minors. Moreover, it is state public policy to protect students from sexual misconduct in schools. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on HB1536**. Thank you for your time and consideration.