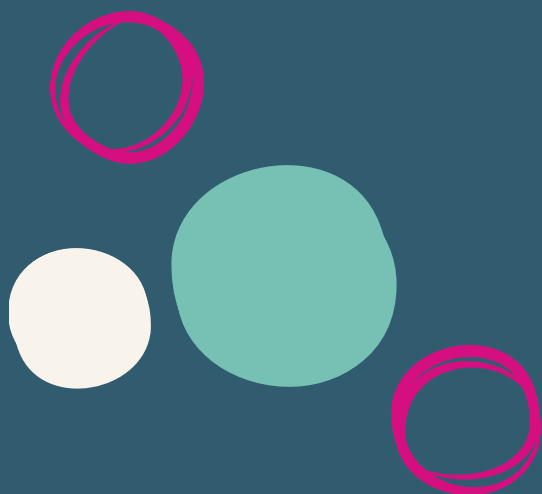




# INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS TOOLKIT



# Table of Contents

- 3     Toolkit Overview**
- 4     LGBTQIA+ 101: Overview & Key Terms**
- 7     Understanding & Mapping Gender & Sexuality**
- 8     Know Your Rights: Policies & Procedures to Protect  
LGBTQIA+ Youth in Schools**
- 9     State Level Protections: The Inclusive Schools Act**
- 11    Local Level Protections: Baltimore City Public Schools**
- 13    Baltimore City Public School Board Policies**
- 15    Improving School Climate for LGBTQIA+ Youth**
- 20    Mental Health Resources**
- 21    Acknowledgements**



# TOOLKIT OVERVIEW

This toolkit was created with and for Baltimore City Public School students, teachers, and staff. Through meetings, focus groups, and interviews, FreeState staff and City School partners identified a three distinct needs for teachers and staff: 1) Education surrounding LGBTQIA+ communities, 2) information about inclusive and affirming school policies in Maryland, and 3) recommendations on how to improve school climate for LGBTQIA+ youth.

It is our hope that educators and school staff use this toolkit to promote the inclusion and wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ youth in Baltimore City schools. Still, resources and recommendations outlined in the toolkit are relevant to LGTBQIA+ youth themselves. In other words, the toolkit is for everyone in or involved with Baltimore City Public Schools!



**As our political landscape rapidly changes, so too will this toolkit. We will consistently aim to provide the Baltimore City community with up-to-date information regarding their public schools.**

# LGBTQIA+ 101: OVERVIEW

Adolescence is a complex and confusing time in one's life, filled with new experiences and identity exploration. It is also filled with promise. Supportive and affirming adults are critical to youths' positive development. By educating yourself on key terms and concepts related to sexual orientation and gender identity, you will show all youth that you care about understanding and supporting them, especially those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, or asexual (LGBTQIA+).

Research shows that LGBTQIA+ youth feel supported by teachers or staff at their school, they are less likely to experience depression or suicidal ideation. Suicide rates among LGBTQIA+ youth are a public health issue, so it is of critical concern that school leaders take steps to make school an affirming and inclusive space.

Vocabulary and terms are updating and changing rapidly—it can be difficult to know what they all mean or where to learn more. While it is tempting and easy to ask students to educate you on their identities, to them it can feel overwhelming or an unfair responsibility.



Remember, each individual represents themselves alone and cannot speak on behalf of a whole community—especially when they are still trying to figure themselves out! Be sure to listen, respect a student's preferred terminology, and do research before starting a dialog to understand students identity. On the next few pages, we provide you with a glossary of terms (provided by the Human Rights Campaign) to help. This is by no means a comprehensive list, and will be updated regularly.

# LGBTQIA+ 101: IMPORTANT TERMS\*

## **ALLY**

A term used to describe someone who is actively supportive of LGBTQ+ people. It encompasses straight and cisgender allies, as well as those within the LGBTQ+ community who support each other (e.g., a lesbian who is an ally to the bisexual community).

## **BISEXUAL**

A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with pansexual, though typically indicates gender is a factor in attraction.

## **GENDERQUEER**

Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.

## **GENDER-EXPANSIVE**

A person with a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system. Often used as an umbrella term when referring to young people still exploring the possibilities of their gender expression and/or gender identity.

## **ASEXUAL**

Often called "ace" for short, is an umbrella term wherein asexual refers to a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum, and asexual people may experience no, little or conditional sexual attraction.

## **DEADNAMING**

Referring to a trans or gender expansive person as a name that they were assigned at birth or used prior to transitioning.

## **GENDER AFFIRMING CARE**

Medically or socially necessary pathways that trans or gender expansive individuals take to live comfortably and authentically within their gender identity. This can include, but is not limited to, changes in name and/or pronouns, legal changes in identification, medical procedures, etc.

## **GENDER EXPRESSION**

External appearance of gender, though it this can be set or fluid, usually through behavior, clothing, body characteristics or voice, and which may or may not conform to social definitions of gender and/or an individual's gender identity.

## **BIPHOBIA**

The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who love and are sexually attracted to more than one gender.

## **DEMISEXUAL**

Falling within the umbrella of asexuality, demisexual refers to a person who experiences sexual feelings and attraction typically only after developing a close emotional relationship and rather than on the basis of first impressions, physical characteristics, etc.

## **GENDER BINARY**

A system in which gender is constructed into two strict categories of male or female. Gender identity is expected to align with the sex assigned at birth and gender expressions and roles fit traditional expectations.

## **GENDER DYSPHORIA**

Clinically significant distress caused when a person's assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify.

## **GENDER-FLUID**

A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender or has a fluid or unfixed gender identity.

## **GENDER IDENTITY**

A person's deeply held internal sense and understanding of their personal gender.





# LGBTQIA+ 101: IMPORTANT TERMS\*

## **HOMOPHOBIA**

The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex.

## **INTERSECTIONALITY**

The ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage, based around each individual's multiple axis of identity, compound themselves and create obstacles.

## **LESBIAN**

A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women. Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

## **PANSEXUAL**

Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with bisexual, though typically indicates gender is not a factor in attraction.

## **SAME-GENDER LOVING**

A term some prefer to use instead of lesbian, gay or bisexual to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

## **SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH**

The sex- typically male, female or intersex- that a doctor or midwife uses to describe a child at birth based on their quick assessment of external anatomy.

## **INTERSEX**

Intersex people are born with a variety of differences in their sex traits and reproductive anatomy. There is a wide variety of difference among intersex variations, including differences in genitalia, chromosomes, gonads, internal sex organs, hormone production, hormone response, and/or secondary sex traits.

## **NON-BINARY**

An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid.

## **SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to other people. Note: an individual's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity, and may or may not evolve over time.

## **TRANSGENDER**

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc. Transgender individuals may also identify as non-binary.

## **OUTING**

Exposing someone's lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender or gender non-binary identity to others without their permission. Outing someone can have serious repercussions on employment, economic stability, personal safety or religious or family situations.

## **QUESTIONING**

A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

## **QUEER**

term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur, but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ+ movement.

## **TRANSITIONING**

A series of processes that some transgender people may undergo in order to live more fully as their true gender. This may include social transition, such as changing name and pronouns, medical transition, which may include hormone therapy or gender affirming surgeries, and legal transition, which may include changing legal name and sex on government identity documents. Transgender people may choose to undergo some, all or none of these processes.



# UNDERSTANDING & MAPPING GENDER & SEXUALITY

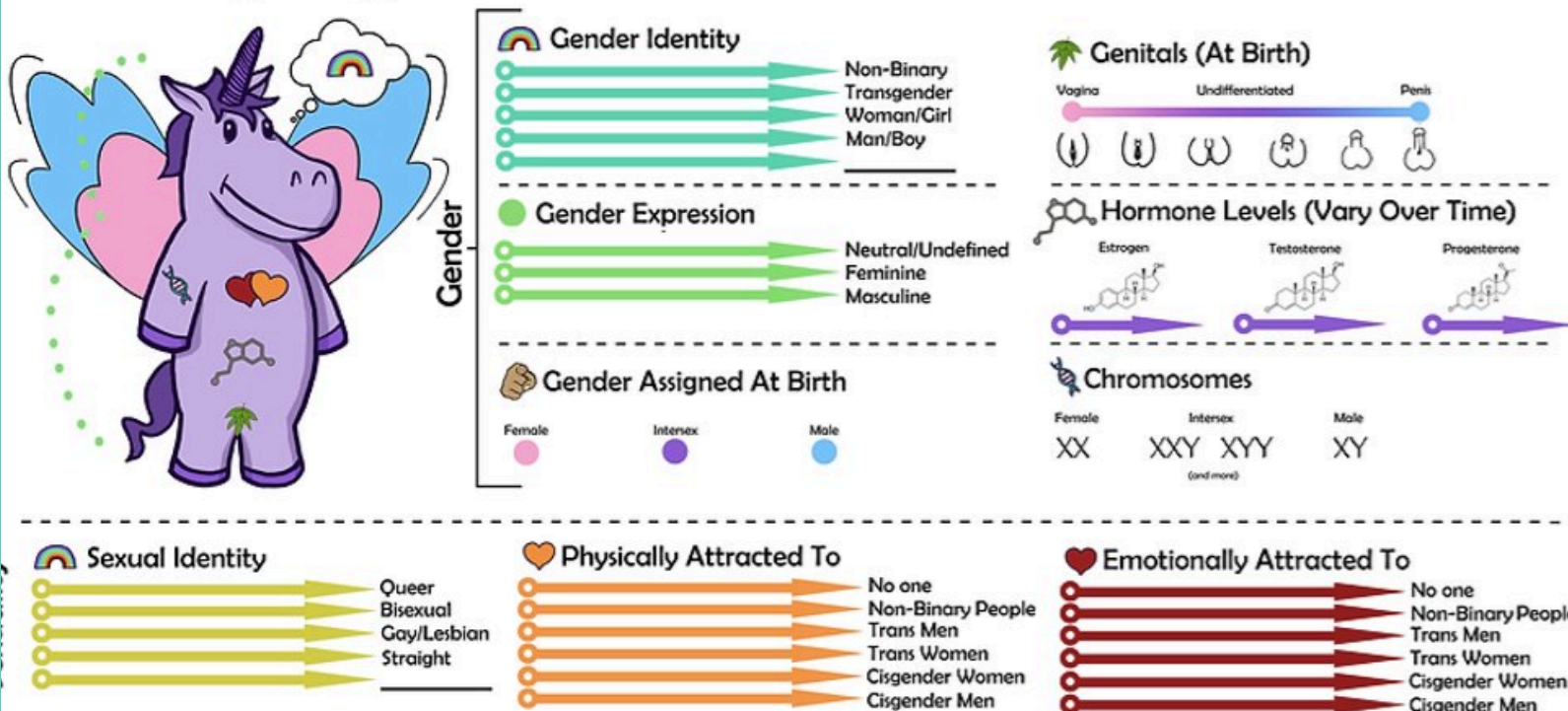


**SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH AND GENDER ARE TWO DISTINCT YET OVERLAPPING CONSTRUCTS!**

**Sex assigned at birth** refers to physical anatomy, hormone levels, and chromosome patterns that are assumed at birth based on external characteristics, while **gender** is the psychological and social understanding of oneself that informs the core and personal identity of a person.

Below is a visual aid developed by **TSER** to help show these different constructs and the many ways in which they connect and differ from one another:

## The Flying Gender Unicorn



# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS:

## POLICIES & PROCEDURES TO PROTECT LGBTQIA+ YOUTH IN SCHOOL

SCAN THIS  
CODE FOR OUR  
**LEGAL INTAKE  
FORM**



All students have the right to a safe and equal education, no matter what their identity is. For students who attend public school, this right is legally protected at the local, state, and federal levels. Gender identity and sexual orientation are recognized as “protected classes.” LGBTQIA+ students have the right to live as their true gender, date who they want, and attend school without being harassed for who they are. Regardless of enacted legal protections, some LGBTQIA+ students will still experience discrimination, bullying, or other forms of harassment. Teaching students and school staff about their local, state, and federal legal rights can help empower students and trusted adults to advocate for themselves and each other in the face of mistreatment.

The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) provides excellent resources on how to take legal action if one experiences discrimination in school. In addition, FreeState Justice is here to help. If you have questions or want to take action, fill out our intake form.

Create a **POSITIVE**  
and **INCLUSIVE**  
*Learning*  
**ENVIRONMENT**



# STATE-LEVEL PROTECTIONS

## THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS ACT

### WHAT IS THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS ACT?

The Inclusive Schools Act (HB850/SB666) is a state-level non-discrimination policy. Overall, it aims to hold public and federally funded non-public school systems accountable if they do not uphold their legal obligation to investigate reports of discrimination at the local level. It also provides local school systems with a non-discrimination system that schools must adopt and maintain in their school handbooks. Each school must also distribute these policies to students and their families in a way that is easily accessible to them.

### WHAT DOES IT DO?

Most instances of discrimination are handled at the local schoolboard level. However, some students or families may feel as though their complaint was not handled properly or that their complaint was ignored. That is where the Inclusive Schools Act comes in. This legislation allows students, their families, or those who witnessed discrimination to file a complaint with the state superintendent. It is not a court proceeding. Instead, the Maryland State Department of Education will first try to mediate the situation with all parties involved. If agreement is not reached, the state superintendent will ultimately decide if a school or local school system is liable for discrimination.

### WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES OF FILING A COMPLAINT?

Typically, the situation is resolved in mediation between the school and the individual filing the complaint. If mediation does not occur, the comptroller may withhold funding from the school in question. If an agreement is not reached through mediation, students and their families may appeal the decision or seek out legal counsel separate from this process. Judicial remedies can be sought only after all administrative remedy processes are exhausted.



# STATE-LEVEL PROTECTIONS

## THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS ACT



### HOW DO I FILE A COMPLAINT?

The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) is regularly reviewed, evaluated, and updated to reflect the diverse needs of students across the state. The review process is conducted by school board officials and commented on by the public.

Currently, COMAR regulations related to the Inclusive Schools Act are under review. As it stands now, the process for filing a complaint under this non-discrimination legislation requires the individual to send the complaint either by mail (address) or electronically (address) to the Maryland State Department of Education. This should be done within 60 days of the local school agency failing to meet a resolution to the alleged discrimination. After COMAR regulations are finalized, this number may change.

The complaint should be a maximum of 15 pages and include the person filing the complaint's name, mailing address, email address, phone number, and signature. The same information should be included for the person or parties the complaint is against, except for their signature. Additionally, the date, a statement describing any alleged discriminatory acts, and the outcome the person filing the complaint is requesting should be included. You may also include any supporting documents or additional information relevant to the case.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the complaint filing process, the attorneys at FreeState Justice would be happy to help answer them. Here is a link to our [intake form](#), or you can scan the code below.

SCAN THIS CODE  
FOR OUR **LEGAL**  
**INTAKE FORM**



# LOCAL-LEVEL PROTECTIONS

## REPORTING DISCRIMINATION IN BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

If a student has experienced discrimination within Baltimore City Public Schools, they, their families, or other school personnel may decide to file a formal report with the school board. The instructions for filing this report can be found at <https://www.baltimorecityschools.org/notice-nondiscrimination> under the title “student discrimination reporting form.”

**Before making a report, there are some things everyone should know:**

### 1 GET INFORMED

Before entering into this process, it is crucial to learn about your school’s and Baltimore City’s anti-discrimination policy. Under the Inclusive Schools Act, your school should have a clear policy in your student handbook. You may also visit Baltimore City’s “[Student Fair Practices](#)” website or contact FreeState Justice ([resources@freestate-justice](mailto:resources@freestate-justice)) for more information.

### 2 TRY TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE WITH YOUR PRINCIPAL OR TRUSTED SCHOOL OFFICIAL FIRST

Sometimes, reporting discrimination does not have to reach filing a formal complaint. There are policies in place that your principal is legally obligated to enforce. Ensure to note any and all attempts to report an incident of discrimination to individuals within your school. Remember, if they do not investigate your claim or reach a resolution, you may be able to file a report with the State Superintendent.

### 3 DOCUMENT EVERYTHING

Save any communications, take notes during conversations, use your personal email when communicating virtually, and make sure to record the dates and times of all interactions. The goal is to establish a credible timeline of the events and how the school responded to those events. You will file a much stronger report if you take these incredibly detailed notes.

### 4 BE PREPARED FOR ANY OUTCOME

Filing a report can help students or their families feel relieved after experiencing discrimination. Still, the resolution someone wants may only sometimes be the resolution they achieve. Even after reaching a positive resolution, students or those helping them may feel emotionally exhausted. The choice to report is brave and we hope to help people prepare. Mental health resources and ways to best support or advocate for students are included at the end of this toolkit.

# LOCAL-LEVEL PROTECTIONS

## REPORTING DISCRIMINATION IN BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



All reports start with completing the Student Discrimination Reporting Form. The form contains instructions on how to fill out the form based on whether you are a student, parent or caregiver, or Baltimore City Public school teacher or staff member. For your convenience, we list them below:

- ✱ If you are a student, the parent/guardian or family member of a student, a City Schools staff member, or a bystander and wish to report that a City Schools student has experienced discrimination (other than bullying, harassment, or intimidation), please carefully complete this form in its entirety.
- ✱ If you need assistance completing the form, please see a City Schools staff member.
- ✱ The completed form should be submitted to the principal of the school that the complainant attends. The principal will forward this form to the City Schools Equal Educational/Employment Opportunity and Title IX Compliance Manager (“EEO Manager”).
- ✱ If the allegation of discrimination is against the school principal, please send this completed form directly to the EEO Manager at: 200 East North Avenue, Room 208, Baltimore, MD 21202, (410) 396-8542, or via email to [EEO-TitleIXCompliance@bcps.k12.md.us](mailto:EEO-TitleIXCompliance@bcps.k12.md.us).
- ✱ Complaints of alleged, suspected, or observed bullying (including cyberbullying), harassment, or intimidation against a student by another student, employee, or other individual should be submitted using JICK-RA Form 1.
- ✱ In most cases, the investigation will be completed within 45 calendar days from the date the complaint is received. If the investigation cannot be completed within this timeline, notice will be sent to all parties.

### STUDENT DISCRIMINATION REPORTING FORM



- ✱ Notice of the results of the investigation will be made in writing to all parties. Appeals may be pursued with Board Policies KEA and BLA and Administrative Regulation KEA-RA.
- ✱ For more information, please see Board Policy JBA – Discrimination-Students and Administrative Regulation JBA-RA, and Board Policy JBB – Sex-Based Discrimination-Students and Administrative Regulation JBB-RA. For complaint procedures that apply to employees and third parties who experience discrimination, please see Board Policy ACA – Nondiscrimination – Employees and Third Parties, Board Policy ACB – Sexual Harassment – Employees and Third Parties, and the associated administrative regulations.

# LOCAL-LEVEL PROTECTIONS:

## BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES



### **BOARD POLICY JBA (NONDISCRIMINATION - STUDENTS)**

This policy broadly prohibits discrimination based on race, ethnicity, color, ancestry, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, marital status, pregnancy, parental status, disability, veteran status, genetic information, age, or other legally or constitutionally protected attributes or affiliations in City Schools. It ensures that Baltimore City complies with federal and state non-discrimination laws and policies. This policy provides direction for students, employees, and third parties in recognizing, reporting, remedying, and, ultimately, preventing discrimination against students in per federal, state, and local requirements, this policy, and the accompanying administrative regulation.

### **BOARD POLICY JBB (SEX-BASED DISCRIMINATION - STUDENTS)**

This policy protects students from sex-based discrimination in education and school-related programs. It extends to discrimination and harassment based on a student's actual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, marital status, and/or pregnancy/parenting status. Sex-based stereotyping, based on conformance or nonconformance to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity, is also a form of sex-based discrimination. This policy also covers sexual harassment or violence as outlined in Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, its implementing regulations, and other civil rights laws, including 42 U.S.C. Section 1983

### **BOARD POLICY JICK (BULLYING, HARASSMENT, OR INTIMIDATION OF STUDENTS)**

This policy applies to bullying, harassment, or intimidation committed against any student whether perpetrated by any other student or any Board member, employee, or third party. This includes bullying, harassment, or intimidation that occurred on school property, at school-sponsored activities, or substantially disrupts the orderly functioning of schools, including cyberbullying.

### **BOARD POLICY ACA (NONDISCRIMINATION - EMPLOYEES & THIRD PARTIES)**

This policy primarily aligns with the definitions and goals of Board Policy JBA above, but is intended to provide protections for employees and third parties (i.e., any person, other than a City Schools employee or student, who participates in activities of City Schools or is present on City Schools grounds or premises and is under the authority or control of City Schools.

### **BOARD POLICY ACB (SEX-BASED DISCRIMINATION - EMPLOYEES & THIRD PARTIES)**

This policy primarily aligns with the definitions and goals of Board Policy JBB above, but is intended to provide protections for employees and third parties.



# IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR LGBTQIA+ YOUTH



## SCHOOL POLICIES RELATED TO NAME & PRONOUN CHANGES

For many trans, non-binary, and gender-expansive youth, an essential step in socially transitioning involves changing their name and pronouns to reflect their gender identity. At an individual level, teachers and staff should try to use students' names and pronouns correctly. As of June 2023, school personnel may face legal repercussions if they fail to do so. The "willful and repeated use" of incorrect names or pronouns will be considered discrimination under a new Baltimore City bill titled, Unlawful Practices - Discrimination Based on Characteristics or Status.

This is further supported by the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners Policy JBB, which recognizes a student's right to be referred to by the name and pronouns reflecting their gender identity. Regardless of whether a student has changed their name on legal documents, it is a city-wide policy to allow and respect a student's decision to use their chosen name and pronouns.

Suppose a student has legally changed their name or would like to update their recognized gender on their permanent record. In that case, the student's name should be changed after a request and supporting documentation has been provided (see link below). City Schools cite the following as sufficient evidence for name changes on a student's permanent record:

- A court order signed and dated by a magistrate or judge changing the student's name;
- A new or amended birth certificate;
- State- or federally-issued identification; or
- A statement signed under penalty of perjury, by a licensed healthcare practitioner, who treated or evaluated the student for health issues related to their gender identity, requesting that name/gender change be made on the "official school record" and explaining the health-related reasons for the request.

After a student has provided this documentation, it is also the legal obligation of the school to protect the student's previous name or identity. In other words, it is against the law for a school to share that a student went by a different name or identity at any point after the legal change has been made.

Formal guidance on how to update a student's name and gender markers on their permanent records can be found [here](#).



For instructions on how to ensure names are correct in a virtual learning space, follow [this link](#).



**HAVE A STUDENT WHO WOULD  
LIKE TO LEGALLY CHANGE THEIR  
NAME OR GENDER MARKERS?  
FREESTATE JUSTICE CAN HELP!**



# IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR LGBTQIA+ YOUTH

## GENDER INCLUSIVE RESTROOMS & CHANGING ROOMS

Students are legally entitled to use the restroom or changing room that aligns with their gender identity. If a trans or gender expansive child is not allowed to do so, it is an example of sex-based discrimination. Schools defines sex-based discrimination as,

“Actions that unlawfully subject a person—based on the person’s actual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, marital status, and/or pregnancy/parenting status—to exclusion from participation in, denial of the benefits of, or unfavorable differential treatment with respect to any educational program or activity of City Schools.”

Other examples of sex-based discrimination include refusing to use a child’s pronouns, not allowing students to dress in a way that aligns with their gender identity, or anything that has an impact on a student’s ability to receive an equal education based on their actual or perceived sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, marital status, and/or pregnancy/parenting status.

According to the Fairness for All Marylanders Act, gender neutral facilities must also be available for non-binary and gender expansive students. This legislation, which has been in effect since 2014, prohibits discrimination related to public accommodations on the basis of one’s gender identity and expression. In other words, failure to provide students with appropriate gender inclusive facilities is against the law in Maryland.

If you would like to report an incident of sex-based discrimination, page # contains instructions on how to do so. Additionally, FreeState Justice is here to help. If you would like to speak to one of our lawyers, fill out our legal intake form.



# IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR LGBTQIA+ YOUTH

## AVOID UNINTENTIONAL OUTING

Student's initial self-disclosure of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, also known as "coming out," is a process. A student may only sometimes feel comfortable sharing their identity immediately. Creating a space where students feel safe to come out in school is one way to make this process less complicated. However, we cannot assume that a student who is out at school is out at home. Some students may live in homes where they feel unsafe sharing their identity or are simply not ready to tell their families. No matter their situation, it is up to the supportive adults in a child's life to respect their privacy.


There are many ways that a call home could unintentionally out a child. These commonly include using a trans or non-binary student's name or pronouns before confirming with the student that they are out at home, explaining a bullying incident that involves homophobic or transphobic bullying, telling parents about a student's involvement in a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) or Rainbow Club, or even casually mentioning a romantic partner that a parent may not have known about. Before calling home, make sure you have a conversation with the student and only disclose what is absolutely necessary. Make it clear that you will not keep secrets from the child's parent or caregiver, but you will give them the space to come out when and if they are ready.

Finally, the coming out process can be extremely stressful, even for children who live in affirming homes. In addition to creating a safe and inclusive space at school for students, it can also be beneficial to connect students to mental health resources, both inside and outside of school. See the end of this toolkit for a list of resources.

## STARTING A GENDER & SEXUALITY ALLIANCE OR RAINBOW CLUB

The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) provides teachers, staff, and students with excellent resources to start a gender and sexuality alliance (GSA) or rainbow club at any school. Research consistently demonstrates that having a GSA or other student-led LGBTQIA+ club helps foster an inclusive school climate and helps LGBTQIA+ youth feel safer and more like they belong in school. If your school is looking to create a GSA or would like to increase membership of an existing GSA, follow [this link](https://www.glsen.org/support-student-gsas): <https://www.glsen.org/support-student-gsas>





# BEING AN ALLY TO LGBTQIA+ YOUTH

Adolescents spend most of their time in school, making it a great place to build friendships, form resilience, and learn foundational skills to help them in their future careers. Unfortunately, schools can also be a space where students encounter bullying or other negative experiences. LGBTQIA+ youth in Maryland are significantly more likely to be bullied than their straight-cisgender peers, and also experience negative mental health outcomes as a result. **Being an ally to LGBTQIA+ youth, both inside and outside of schools, can help save lives.**

The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) provides excellent resources on how to be an ally to LGBTQIA+ youth. They define an ally to LGBTQIA+ youth as someone who supports, validates, and listens to young people in these communities. Beyond this, we believe an ally is someone who constantly seeks ways to improve school conditions for LGBTQIA+ youth by learning more about these communities and speaking up or acting when they recognize injustice. Want more tips for becoming an ally? Read what Ben Espejo from GLSEN has to say (<https://www.glsen.org/blog/dear-ally-listen>):

## 1 BE OPEN-MINDED


Sounds simple, right? But realize that as unique human beings, people have different experiences and different perspectives to bring to a conversation. A topic unfamiliar to you might come up; make sure you're listening! Be willing to hear about new identities, new experiences, and new topics. The people you're supporting will appreciate it.

## 2 SPEAK UP, NOT OVER

In any kind of safe space, everyone should be willing to listen (see Tip #1). However, for there to be a listener, there must also be a speaker! This could be an instructor, a student, or even a special guest. It could also be you! Sharing your experiences might help someone relate to you, or even open up new avenues for discussion.

However, in many safe spaces, people in marginalized groups (LGBT youth, for example, or people of color) finally get the chance to speak, both to find support and to help fix problems.

When you are speaking, be sure you are speaking from your own viewpoint, acknowledging that you might not fully understand what it means to identify a certain way. In safe spaces like Gay-Straight Alliances, while allies might know about queer identity, or even be queer themselves, no one can speak for queer youth like queer youth can.



# BEING AN ALLY TO LGBTQIA+ YOUTH

## 3 ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR PRIVILEGE

As mentioned in Tip #2, we might not be able to completely understand the experiences of others. This extends past safe spaces, and relates to something called privilege. Privilege is a part of someone's identity that grants them benefits in social, cultural, economic, and political settings. Those without certain privileges are treated unfairly in these settings.

For example, a man who is cisgender (which means to identify as/be comfortable with the gender assigned to you at birth) has "male privilege" over a cisgender woman. But privilege goes beyond gender. A cisgender white woman has white privilege over a cisgender black man, who has male privilege over a woman. This complexity of privilege is important to recognize.

## 4 LEARN FROM EVERY MOMENT

The world is always changing; words change, society changes, and sometimes people change. We are always finding new words that we use to identify ourselves! Don't assume you know everything there is to know. The best allies are the ones that evolve and become more accommodating as things change.

## 5 RESPECT THE PRIVACY OF OTHERS

A good ally keeps in mind that sometimes it is hard for a person to share their identity. When someone comes out to you, it is often a vulnerable moment for that person. Respect their privacy, and don't ask invasive questions. Let them come out at their own pace, if they choose to come out at all.

## 6 UNDERSTAND THAT NO ONE IS PERFECT

Everyone makes mistakes. Don't worry! This doesn't make you a bad ally! You might accidentally use the wrong pronouns for someone or you may use a term that might make someone uncomfortable. It's okay! Apologize, resolve to try harder, and move on! At the end of the day, we're all human. Just be the best ally you can be.





# MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES



LGBTQ+ folks have a long history of thriving and shining no matter what. Sometimes, building that resilience and fabulousness means taking care of your mental health. There are some important laws to know before connecting youth under the age of 16 to mental health resources:

In Maryland, children as young as 12 may access mental health services without a parent's consent--insofar as they are deemed emotionally mature enough by the provider. There are some caveats to this: children between 12-15 cannot make insurance claims (making them responsible for medical fees) nor obtain medication-based treatment without parental permission. It is also up to the mental health provider to decide if and when it is necessary to disclose a child's treatment status to their parent or caregiver. The decision to tell parents or caregivers is always made with the patient's best interest in mind and disclosure of treatment will typically not occur if it may harm the child in some way.

Social and emotional support is critical in helping LGBTQIA+ youth thrive in and out of school. Here are some resources that can help:

## CRISIS RESOURCES

**Mental health crisis hotline:** 988

**LGBTQ mental health crisis text line:** text LGBTQ to 741-741

**LGBTQ+ crisis hotline:** 1-866-488-7386

**Trevor Project hotline** (available 24/7 for LGBTQ+ youth): call 1-866-488-7386 or text "start" to 678-678

**Trans Lifeline** (available in Spanish or English): 877-565-8860

## SUPPORT GROUPS

### Chase Brexton

Chase Brexton provides healthcare services including therapy at various locations across the state of Maryland, designed for the LGBTQ+ community. Check out their LGBTQ+ youth and teen support groups. [www.chasebrexton.org/services/therapy](http://www.chasebrexton.org/services/therapy)

### PFLAG

Local PFLAG chapters around the country offer support groups to LGBTQ+ folks and their families. Find one near you! [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

### Q Chat Space

Q Chat Space is an online support community for LGBTQ+ teens. [www.qchatspace.org](http://www.qchatspace.org)

## RESOURCES IN BALTIMORE CITY

In addition to FreeState Justice, several other organizations in the area are dedicated to supporting the thriving of LGBTQIA+ youth in Baltimore City. These include:

[Pride Center of Maryland](#)

## MORE

### The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project has lots of online resources for LGBTQ+ youth struggling with coming out, acceptance, mental health, and more. [www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/](http://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/)

### The It Gets Better Project

Put some loving and positivity into your life. [www.itgetsbetter.org](http://www.itgetsbetter.org)

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MARYLAND'S LGBTQ ADVOCATES

For more questions and  
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resources, complete our  
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form:

