



Fact Sheet on Maryland House Bill 649:

A strong bill which steps up to protect the civil rights of all Maryland students

House Bill 649 ([HB 649](#)) “Advancing Equal Educational Opportunities for All Students in Maryland,” expands Maryland’s education anti-discrimination law and the agencies that enforce it at a critical time when students in Maryland and throughout the country are left unprotected by federal agencies obligated to uphold their rights.

For more than 6 decades the Office for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education (including its predecessor entity) and the Civil Rights Division in the U.S. Department of Justice enforced federal civil rights laws that protect students from discrimination. Today, both agencies have been decimated by the federal administration. The Office for Civil Rights, which once boasted a staff of around 1100, has been reduced to a couple of hundred staff members, who continue to be threatened with termination. 7 of its 12 regional civil rights enforcement offices have been shuttered and the administration has attempted to eliminate nearly all of the staff in the remaining 5 offices. Nearly 75% of all attorneys have been driven out the Civil Rights Division, and those numbers are even higher for those working specifically on education civil rights enforcement. At the same time, around 30,000 complaints of discrimination are pending and unresolved. Over the last year, both agencies have taken significant action to diminish the civil rights of Black Students and other students of color, while resolving barely any investigations to protect their civil rights. The federal civil rights enforcement infrastructure is failing students and school communities in Maryland and throughout the country—It is taking us backwards on the promise of educational equity.

The Lawyers’ Committee strongly supports HB 649 in Maryland, which would enshrine a new state education anti-discrimination law to protect students from preschool through postsecondary education from discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, age, and marital status. This vital legislation provides more robust civil rights enforcement for students, authorizing the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights to investigate and resolve complaints alleging discrimination by educational institutions. And it empowers students and families to better enforce their rights to be free from discrimination.

HB 649 is a strong bill which steps up to protect all Maryland students and fill the canyon left by an unavailable federal civil rights enforcement infrastructure. **The decimation of the federal enforcement infrastructure is unprecedented and could take years or even decades to rebuild.** It is essential today and for the future that all states take responsibility for protecting their students—this is a clear model of what states can do on their own, whether or not the federal government fulfils its obligations to the nation’s students. **States independently bear a responsibility to protect the civil rights of their students.** HB 649 pushes forward on strong protections that advance education civil rights.