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Virginia General Assembly
House of Delegates
Education K-12 Subcommittee

January 31, 2024

Re: HRC Support for HB 536

Dear Chairwoman Simonds and Members of the Committee:

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBTQ+ citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. On behalf of HRC's more than three million members and supporters, many of whom live and attend school in Virginia, we thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in favor of HB 536 and urge you to swiftly pass this important legislation.

As state legislatures continue to whittle down education support systems for LGBTQ+ students across the country, we are glad to see the House of Delegates taking appropriate measures to expand the current anti-bullying law to include explicit protections for some of our most vulnerable children.

It should come as no surprise that LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to face bullying, violence, suicidality, and harassment simply because of who they are. Notably, LGBTQ+ youth are around twice as likely as their non-LGBTQ+ peers to say they have been excluded because they were different.¹ When asked to describe the most important problem affecting their lives, nearly a quarter of LGBTQ+ youth named school and bullying problems, second only to non-accepting families.² A recent study indicates that the majority of LGBTQ+ youth continue to experience negative, and at times hostile, school environments. These hostilities unfortunately extend to the online world. Just last year, around half of all LGBTQ+ youth reported having experienced cyberbullying because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.³

¹ Human Rights Campaign, *Growing Up LGBT in America*, HRC Youth Survey Report Key Findings, 16 https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/Growing-Up-LGBT-in-America_Report.pdf

² *Id.* at 2.

³ Human Rights Campaign, *LGBTQ+ Youth and the Internet*, <https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/LGBTQ-Youth-and-the-Internet-11.cleaned.pdf>



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Virginia's current anti-bullying laws do not enumerate sexual orientation and gender identity. Enumerated laws and policies – policies which explicitly list the characteristics or traits of students who may be victims of bullying and harassment – are a critical part of creating secure and affirming spaces for LGBTQ+ youth at school. The data is very clear: students who attend schools with enumerated policies report less bullying and a higher rate of intervention by teachers when the bullying occurs.⁴

We strongly support the advancement of HB 536, an inclusive anti-bullying law that is absolutely necessary to ensure that LGBTQ+ students feel secure and accepted in the classroom.

Sincerely,

Courtney C. Avant
Legislative Counsel
Human Rights Campaign

⁴ Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). *The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN. Available at http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2013%20National%20School%20Climate%20Survey%20Full%20Report_0.pdf