

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Organizations Advocating for Virginia LGBTQ+ Youth Respond to Hanover County School Board's Proposed Restroom and Locker Room Policy**

*Hanover fails at every turn to create a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment for all of its students by proposing a policy that would place an undue burden on trans students to "earn" the right to use public school facilities*

**RICHMOND, VA** – Today a coalition of the Commonwealth's leading advocacy organizations for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) equality responded to Hanover County School Board's (HCSB) [Policy 7-1.7 Restroom and Locker Room policy](#). The policy would require, among other things, transgender students and their parents or guardians to submit written requests to the School Board to use the restrooms, locker rooms and changing rooms that align with their gender identity.

HCSB drafted Policy 7-1.7 in consultation with Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a conservative, Christian legal advocacy group. This is not the first time HCSB has engaged ADF. On March 8th, HCSB voted to allow ADF to review the board's equity policy. Hanover County is not the only school district ADF has involved itself in.

In 2020 the Virginia Department of Education released [model policies](#) regarding the treatment of transgender and non-binary students in Virginia public schools. All local school boards were required to adopt the policy as a baseline by the start of the 2021-2022 school year. Hanover County School Board adopted some requirements, but opted out of policies addressing access to bathrooms and locker rooms.

“The rights of transgender and non-binary students in Hanover County are not up for debate,” **said Narissa S. Rahaman, Executive Director of Equality Virginia**. “The Hanover County School Board's unnecessary and discriminatory policy will lead to more harm for transgender and non-binary students in Hanover public schools. The school board can send a message that they truly value and support transgender and non-binary students by ceasing engagement with Alliance Defending Freedom and rejecting the policy when they meet again in September.

“The proposed policy would create barriers for trans students who need support and protection,” **said Shannon McKay, President of He She Ze and We**. “Rather than working with He She Ze and We and our Hanover families, the Hanover County School Board crafted a horrible policy with a known anti-LGBTQ organization. Transgender youth deserve better than this.”

“The Hanover County NAACP continues to advocate for the full rights of all Hanover Students and teachers. Hanover has exhibited a pattern of refusing to be an inclusive community,” **said Pat Hunter-Jordan, President of Hanover County NAACP**. “In the 1950's schools were closed

rather than following the law to integrate. Rather than renaming schools to avoid further harm to students of color, we had to sue them for our rights. And yet, here we are again. Rather than allow our transgender student population their full rights, Hanover schools are wasting taxpayer money, once again in the court system. We will continue to advocate until Justice is served and until inclusivity and equity are a normal part of Hanover culture and tradition.”

“Trans and nonbinary students overwhelmingly experience hostile learning environments simply by walking through the doors of our schools,” **said Jamie Nolan, Co-Executive Director of Side By Side VA.** “This invasive and discriminatory policy would have Hanover double down by institutionalizing an environment that all students are not welcomed to learn and participate in. We know that access to a supportive and inclusive learning environment is a lifesaving measure for our trans and nonbinary young people, and the School Board must unequivocally dismiss this proposed policy.”

“This is not just about bathrooms or locker rooms. It's about the right of transgender students to exist in public spaces without having to justify or explain themselves,” **said Breanna Diaz, Policy & Legislative Counsel at the ACLU of Virginia.** “Yet, the Hanover County School Board’s proposed policy seeks to do just that by imposing an invasive policy that will deter youth from accessing school facilities. The school board must listen to Hanover families and oppose the proposed policy and immediately adopt a bathroom and locker room policy consistent with the Virginia Department of Education’s model policies.”

According to GLSEN’s 2019 National School Climate Survey, Virginia schools were not safe for most LGBTQ+ secondary school students. In addition, many LGBTQ+ students in Virginia did not have access to important school resources and were not protected by supportive and inclusive school policies.

School-based supports such as supportive and inclusive school policies, school personnel who are supportive of LGBTQ+ students, GSAs, and LGBTQ+-inclusive curriculum resources can positively affect school climate for LGBTQ+ students. Findings from GLSEN’s 2019 National School Climate Survey demonstrate that students attending schools with these resources and supports report more positive school experiences, including lower victimization and absenteeism and higher academic achievement.

*Equality Virginia is a 501(c)(3) organization working to build a fully inclusive Commonwealth by educating, empowering, and mobilizing Virginians to ensure all LGBTQ+ people are free to live, love, learn, and work.*

*He She Ze and We is a 501(c)3 non-profit that empowers families on the journey of gender identity through support, education, and advocacy.*

*The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Virginia is a private, non-profit organization that promotes civil liberties and civil rights for everyone in the Commonwealth through public education, litigation and advocacy with the goal of securing freedom and equality for all.*

*Hanover NAACP works to secure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights in order to eliminate race-based discrimination and ensure the health and well-being of all persons.*

*Side by Side is dedicated to creating supportive communities where Virginia’s LGBTQ+ youth can define themselves, belong, and flourish.*

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