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of Maryland**
MID-ATLANTIC REGION
אגודת ישראל במרילנד



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**STATEMENT TO THE
HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
HOUSE BILL 696**

**NONPUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS
DISCRIMINATION - PROHIBITION**

OPPOSE

FEBRUARY 28, 2017

Agudath Israel of Maryland speaks on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish communities across Maryland and on behalf of approximately 10,000 students attending 20 Jewish day schools in our great state.

Education is the key to our children's future and therefore rightfully held in the highest regard by our citizenry. By educating our children, we are giving them the most necessary and appropriate tools required to succeed in life. Among certain groups of our society, *where* one goes to acquire an education may be just as important as the education itself. To be able to learn and to flourish intellectually, the environment plays a crucial role. As such, a community whose members share a cultural and social bond and together adhere strictly to their cultural needs and goals, must educate their children within the atmosphere they feel is most suited for their success. It is upon this foundation that Jewish day schools operate within our state, as well as the hundreds of other faith-based nonpublic schools.

The nonpublic schools serve as a compliment to the wonderful public schools that are available in our state. Nonpublic school advocates support the continuous record setting funding of Maryland's education system, and applaud its great success and accomplishments educating its students. However, nonpublic schools serve as a vital option for those who choose an education provided within the religious or cultural community.

The nonpublic school community is grateful for the state aid that has been allocated over the last many years by the Maryland General Assembly to provide a small measure of support to these schools and to the families who choose them for their children. The requisite tuition is a great burden to the majority of the families who choose a nonpublic school, and the existence of these programs most often create the opportunity these children might otherwise not have. However, the families are willing to make sacrifices in order for their child to have an education that allows for them to maintain their cultural and religious identity.

House Bill 696 seeks to dissolve the identity of these schools. By making any available state funding hinge upon the dismantling of admission, retention, and employment policies that have been in existence since time immemorial, the foundations of parochial education are under serious and unprovoked threat. Aside from federally mandated anti-discrimination policies of race, color, and national origin, a number of the suggested anti-discrimination policies in HB 696 are incongruous with the religious community. Other items present insurmountable challenges that are not fiscally sustainable for the majority of nonpublic schools. Although many children with special needs are warmly accommodated in nonpublic schools, there is a limit in their ability to educate children with needs that involve more significant costs to provide. Public schools receive all of the necessary funding to educate special needs students; nonpublic schools are not entitled to that funding, thus creating an unsustainable burden.

We ask you to please consider the religious community and the 120,000 students that are educated within it, to maintain the previously accepted anti-discrimination language in the state budget that does not allow discrimination on the grounds of race, color, and national origin, and report unfavorably on House Bill 696. Thank you