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April 17, 2023

House Education Committee
Legislative Office Building Room 207
33 N. State Street
Concord, NH 03301

RE: SB 272 establishing a parents' bill of rights in education

Dear Chairman Ladd and Members of the House Education Committee:

Bi-State Primary Care Association (Bi-State) and our members respectfully request SB 272, establishing a parents' bill of rights in education, be recommended inexpedient to legislate. This bill will impede our community health center members' commitment to improving the health status of New Hampshire's citizens and puts the health and welfare of Granite State children at risk.

Established in 1986, Bi-State is a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)(3) charitable organization that advances access to comprehensive primary care and preventive services for all, with special emphasis on those most in need in New Hampshire and Vermont. Bi-State's membership includes all New Hampshire and Vermont Federally Qualified Health Centers, which collectively serve over 276,000 individuals, including approximately 40,000 school-age children (6-18).

New Hampshire's community health centers are leaders in tackling community need and have developed strong relationships with local partners, including community mental health centers and area schools. Many FQHCs provide on-site integrated health care, including behavioral health services, at local schools to make destigmatized primary care more accessible for area students and their families. Requiring educators to reveal a student's sexual orientation or gender identity to their parents violates the student's privacy and impedes the seamless continuum of care that exists in school-based programming, in which behavioral health counselors, teachers, parents, and school staff work together as a support team for the best interest of the student. It is critical for students to know that they can turn to their teachers, school staff, and counselors to be trusted adults, especially if they don't have a supportive adult in their home.

We believe that SB 272 raises a severe threat to the overall mental health of children and youth in the Granite State, at a time when our children are in a mental health crisis, and our state does not have enough therapists or inpatient psychiatric beds to support their critical and – in many cases – life-saving needs. We know that transgender and gender nonbinary adolescents in the United States are at increased risk for mental health issues, substance use, and suicide. According to the Trevor Project's 2021 National Survey on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) Youth Mental Health, a staggering 42% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past

year, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth.¹ It is our duty as adults, educators, and health care providers to protect LGBTQ youth in New Hampshire and ensure they have the ability to live their lives without fear, discrimination, and violence at school.

Bi-State and New Hampshire community health centers are concerned with the penalties associated with this proposed legislation and the impact it could have on mental health providers who are legally & ethically required to maintain confidentiality. For these reasons and more, Bi-State and our members respectfully urge the committee to recommend SB 272 inexpedient to legislate. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like additional information at kstoddard@bistatepca.org.

Sincerely,

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¹ Paley, Amit. "The Trevor Project National Survey." *Www.thetrevorproject.org*, 2021, www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/.