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***Mahmoud v Taylor: Supreme Court Holds Parents with Religious Objections May Opt-Out of Lessons with LGBTQ+ Characters. Schools Have Continuing Duty to Foster Safe, Inclusive Learning Environments***

The U.S. Supreme Court’s decision today in [\*Mahmoud v. Taylor\*](#) is yet another devastating attack on our public schools and LGBTQ+ students. Importantly, the ruling centered on individual religious objections and does not prevent educators from continuing to create inclusive school environments for all children.

The Court held that a group of parents in Maryland are entitled to “opt-out” of particular lessons based on their religious objection to instruction that uses storybooks with LGBTQ+ characters and themes. The ruling only applies to the Maryland parties in that case which focused on a district policy prohibiting opt-outs on this topic. The Court did not prohibit the school district from offering inclusive curriculum. ELC urges Pennsylvania educators to resist any move away from inclusive practices. Our public education system must remain a place that embraces differences and provides opportunities for children to cultivate respect and understanding for all.

“This ruling does not restrict schools from offering books with LGBTQ+ characters or themes, nor does it prevent schools from embracing inclusive curricula that reflect the diversity of all students,” said Education Law Center Senior Attorney Kristina Moon. “These practices are still required to ensure all students’ success and help ward against a hostile environment where gay and transgender students are targets of bullying and harassment.”

Research shows that LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum is associated with reduced incidences of bullying and victimization, higher GPAs for LGBTQ+ students, and more positive school climates for everyone. LGBTQ-inclusive curricula are also shown to be beneficial to all youth. This research was highlighted in [an amicus brief](#) submitted to the Court by our partners at the Women’s Law Project and Community Justice Project on behalf of Education Law Center and others.

A blistering dissent by Justice Sotomayor rightfully criticized the majority opinion's "casting aside longstanding precedent" to "invent a constitutional right to avoid exposure to subtle themes contrary to the religious principles that parents wish to instill in their children." LGBTQ+ people exist and always will. We applaud the educators who use diverse books and lessons to reflect the diversity of our communities and engage all students in learning.

ELC will continue to fight to ensure our public schools offer children of all backgrounds a quality education in a welcoming environment and an opportunity to practice living in our multicultural society. Pennsylvania's constitution requires all children to have access to a comprehensive, effective and contemporary system of public education. This includes a safe learning environment and an inclusive curriculum that allows all children to see themselves and be seen.

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**The Education Law Center-PA (ELC)** is a nonprofit, legal advocacy organization with offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, dedicated to ensuring that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education. Through legal representation, impact litigation, community engagement, and policy advocacy, ELC advances the rights of underserved children, including children living in poverty, children of color, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children with disabilities, English learners, LGBTQ students, and children experiencing homelessness. For more information, visit [elc-pa.org](http://elc-pa.org) or [@edlawcenterpa](https://twitter.com/edlawcenterpa) on Twitter.