



HB0706 - Commission on LGBTQ Affairs - Established

Presented to the Hon. Shane Pendergrass and Members of the Health & Government Operations Committee
February 25, 2020 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee a favorable report on HB0706 – Commission on LGBTQ Affairs - Established**, sponsored by Delegate Lily Qi.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice for all Marylanders. We seek to protect the rights of youth to feel safe and occupy public spaces free of gender-based harassment or sexual orientation bias. We recognize that youth are better able to make informed and independent decisions about their own sexual and reproductive lives when free of discrimination and stereotypes. When families are unsupportive, youth often turn to the networks they build in their communities to find affirmation and support. In order to build a supportive community, the true needs of LGBTQ individuals should be assessed and addressed, which HB0706 aims to do.

In 2018, a needs assessment was published in Maryland showing the biggest concerns for LGBTQ individuals included public harassment, healthcare, education, reliable employment, domestic violence, and sexual assault.¹ This assessment was the first step in painting the cultural, societal, and political landscape of Maryland, and is helpful resource in arguing for the need of a statewide commission dedicated to addressing the longstanding issues of LGBTQ communities throughout our state.

Approximately 56% of respondents reported experiencing street harassment themselves, or have seen street harassment, with 27.4% reporting this harassment as a major issue affecting LGBTQ Marylanders. Harassment was also reported when using public facilities or filing reports with local law enforcement. The transgender community in particular has reported interactions with the Baltimore City Police Department as “degrading and dehumanizing.”

In the realm of healthcare, 36.1% of respondents identified the lack of an inclusive healthcare facility being another critical issue affecting LGBTQ Marylanders. More than a quarter reported addressing HIV/AIDS to be one of the biggest health concerns. Many individuals reported experiencing discrimination when seeking healthcare, especially when seeking transition-related care. Access to reproductive healthcare that addresses the unique challenges of LGBTQ individuals is extremely limited throughout our state.

The next largest area of concern was education. The 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) found that 11.2% of all Maryland high school students identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, with little available data on transgender and gender nonconforming individuals.² Unfortunately, the majority of Maryland LGBTQ

¹ Agostini, Saida M. (2018). Pushing Back: A Blueprint for Change. Lessons Learned from the 2016 Needs Assessment of LGBTQ Marylanders.

² Center for Disease Control. High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Maryland 2017 Results. Retrieved <https://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/app/Results.aspx?LID=MD>

students have heard anti-LGBTQ comments in their school, with 65% reporting mistreatment by peers and staff. Less than two-thirds of students could identify at least six LGBTQ supportive staff members.

Outside of education, LGBTQ individuals struggled finding reliable employment, with 45.4% reporting discrimination at the workplace. Transgender and LGBTQ people of color were the most vulnerable to workplace discrimination, with 27% of transgender individuals reporting that they were fired or not hired due to their perceived gender identity.

Finally, LGBTQ Marylanders identified sexual assault and domestic violence to be an urgent issue. Black women and transgender individuals are more prone to violence and criminalization by the police force. Approximately 38% of respondents have reported that they or someone they know were victims of sexual assault and domestic violence due to their LGBTQ identity.

Our organization supports inclusion of every individual regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Without a supportive network, LGBTQ individuals are left in a society that is constantly discriminating or hindering personal success in Maryland. This discrimination affects all ages of LGBTQ individuals, and we believe that having a LGBTQ commission that is codified in Maryland will be the first step in supporting LGBTQ communities throughout our state.

HB0706 seeks to establish an LGBTQ commission with a diverse background, to better serve the needs of LGBTQ Marylanders. As such, it will allow more LGBTQ people across our state to thrive and realize their educational and career goals. For these reasons, **NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges a favorable committee report on HB0706.** Thank you for your time and consideration.