

## **RE: HB 728: Employment Discrimination and Discriminatory Housing Practices – Time for Filing Complaints**

### **Position: Support**

HB 728 is a bill that would put into law something that I wish was in place when I needed it – more time to report discrimination in the workplace. With a previous employer, the environment was one of bullying, harassment, and little to no accountability for the people doing that. I was the only African American person in Office A and witnessed overt and covert racism thriving in that office, such as making racist statements under the guise of joking around and resolving issues only if white co-workers raised them.

[Please note: I am choosing not to name the company nor the offices because I have worked to put the situation behind me and be at peace, and I don't think that causing a scandal for that company would benefit anyone.]

As an African American woman, I know and experience racism just about everywhere I go, so its presence in that workplace was, sadly, not entirely a surprise. However, the most explosive incident was when I attempted to address certain office issues with my former director and, instead of having a professional conversation, this person maliciously criticized me both personally and professionally and was racist against me. Within one week of that incident, I reported that and other incidents to the Human Resources (HR) department of the parent company of this organization since Office A did not have its own HR department. I gave HR permission to investigate and, while I was legally protected from retaliation from my former boss, the work environment became increasing cold and hostile towards me, so I took a pay cut to leave that job as soon as I could secure a different position in another city of that parent company. I remained with the parent company because, at the time, I still believed its mission even though Office A was toxic.

Despite keeping in touch with HR, the investigation yielded no solutions for me. I even talked to the CEO directly multiple times in order to get some sort of recompense for the working conditions I was subjected to and make sure that organization made changes so no one else would have to go through what I went through. Sadly, my efforts didn't work and by the time that all played out, I could not even make a complaint to the MD Commission on Civil Rights under the present statute because it was past the six-month mark to make a complaint.

In addition to trying to work through internal mechanisms, this whole experience made me sick - literally. After I went to HR, I began having anxiety attacks until I left Office A. Shortly after I left that job, I started getting migraines daily with the worst of it being the time I had a migraine for over 20 days in a row. I saw many doctors to figure out the causes and heal from all of it, and it cost me thousands of dollars in co-pays for the doctors' visits. It took a long time for me to be well and begin stabilizing my health again. Had this proposed bill been in statute at the time, I would have had a few more months to have another chance at seeking justice for myself by making a complaint with the Commission.

While I am one person, this type of experience can be found in many people -all you have to do is ask around. Many of us just try to move on as best we can even as we still feel the effects of past employment discrimination. The ramifications of these experiences have ripple effects that last for years. I already spoke about health, and two other examples are the ability to acquire professional references and financial well-being.

I cannot utilize any former co-workers as job references, so that creates a barrier to having professional references who can directly vouch for my work. Fortunately, I have business partners from partner organizations who have helped me, but that isn't the case for everyone. As for finances, I took a significant pay cut to leave Office A quickly and I have yet to find work where my salary matches what my starting salary was at Office A. In fact, I have taken two pay cuts because one year after I secured the 2<sup>nd</sup> job with the parent company, the CEO moved my former director into a new position that was located in the same building I worked in and should have been in partnership with my 2<sup>nd</sup> position. Despite re-contacting HR and the CEO, nothing was done and I left that company all together. It took me time to find work and, presently, my salary is less than 1/3 of what I would be making this year in the 1<sup>st</sup> job if nothing had gone wrong.

I write all of this to show that changing this statute would be beneficial to many Marylanders. While my experience was with employment discrimination rather than housing discrimination, I can surely see how expanding the amount of time one can report discrimination in housing to 18 months would be just as reasonable as expanding the time to report employment discrimination. I sincerely hope you will support HB 728 so that more Marylanders have the opportunity to pursue justice after facing discrimination in employment and in housing. This bill won't solve everything, but it makes an equitable adjustment to MD law.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

Sincerely,  
Dana Davenport  
District 13