



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

HB0602

March 21, 2024

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Matters Committee
FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations
RE: House Bill 602 – Employment Discrimination – Sexual Orientation
POSITION: POSITION

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 602.

FOR YOUR ATTENTION:

My name is Alexis Blackmon, and I am the Director of the Mayor's Office of LGBTQ Affairs for Baltimore City. I am here to express my strong support for House Bill 602, which aims to amend certain provisions of law prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of sex and gender identity to include protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

As a black trans woman, I bring a unique perspective to this discussion, representing a community that has historically faced systemic discrimination and marginalization. I commend the General Assembly for considering legislation that recognizes the intersectionality of identities and addresses the pressing issue of employment discrimination based on sexual orientation.

This bill is a crucial step towards fostering inclusive and equitable workplaces. It not only prohibits discrimination in wages but also ensures that individuals are not deprived of employment opportunities based on their sexual orientation. The proposed amendments to Article – Labor and Employment Section 3–304 send a powerful message that Maryland values diversity, equity, and fairness in the workplace.

The definition of "providing less favorable employment opportunities" outlined in the bill is particularly significant. It acknowledges the various ways discrimination can manifest, such as limiting career tracks, withholding information about promotions, or denying employment opportunities based on sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity. These protections are essential for creating environments where everyone, regardless of their identity, can thrive and contribute to the best of their abilities.

The provisions in subsection (b) ensure that employers are held accountable for pay disparities and discriminatory practices. By prohibiting wage discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, this bill aligns with the principles of equal pay for equal work, a fundamental tenet of a just society.

Furthermore, the exceptions outlined in subsection (c) strike a balance by allowing for legitimate variations in wages based on factors such as seniority, merit, skills, and business necessity. Importantly, the bill empowers employees to challenge discriminatory practices by demonstrating that exceptions provided by employers are merely pretexts for discrimination.

In conclusion, House Bill 602 is a progressive and necessary piece of legislation that addresses the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals, especially those from the LGBTQ community. By extending protections against employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, Maryland has an opportunity to lead in creating workplaces that are inclusive, diverse, and just.

I urge each member of the General Assembly to support House Bill 602 and contribute to making Maryland a beacon of equality for all its residents.