



## **LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY**

**Bill: HB577/SB1107 Department of Housing and Community Development - Homeless Shelter Licensing Program**

Organization: PFLAG Salisbury Inc., PO Box 5107, Salisbury Maryland 21802

Submitted by: Nicole Hollywood, Board Member

Position: **FAVORABLE**

### **SALISBURY PFLAG SUPPORT NON-DISCRIMINATION IN MARYLAND SHELTERS**

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of PFLAG Salisbury, the Salisbury, Maryland Chapter of PFLAG National, the nation's first and largest national organization dedicated to supporting, educating, and advocating for LGBTQIA+ people and their families.

Over 17% of sexual minority adults report that they have experienced homelessness in their lifetime, which is more than twice what has been found in a general population study according to the Williams Institute. When it comes to youth, the Trevor Project found that nearly 30% of LGBTQIA+ youth reported experiencing homelessness or housing instability at some point in their lives.

The past several years, there has been an increase in data collection from cities in all corners of the United States and many of these surveys and studies have observed and described the disparities experienced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in shelters and on the streets.

According to a Center for American Progress report, homelessness is the greatest predictor of involvement with the juvenile justice system, and 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQIA+. LGBTQIA+ youth usually face homelessness after fleeing abuse and lack of acceptance at home because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Once homeless and with few resources at hand, LGBTQIA+ youth are pushed towards criminalized behaviors such as drug sales, theft, or survival sex, which increase their risk of arrest and detainment. These alarming statistics remind us that LGBTQIA+ youth are at a higher risk of both homelessness and incarceration, and the many harms accompanying these situations.

PFLAG Salisbury serves the largest geographic area of any PFLAG chapter in Maryland. This area includes Dorchester, Wicomico, Worcester, and Somerset counties, a rural region significantly distanced from mainland Maryland, facing ever-growing disparities when it comes to resources for the LGBTQIA+ community. More specifically, PFLAG Salisbury operates in a part of the state where there is a severe shortage of affirming homeless shelters and no LGBTQIA+ dedicated shelters.

When word of this bill made headlines, two of the large r local shelters on Maryland’s Eastern Shore gave news interviews specifically about protecting their right to continue their egregious practices of discrimination and hostility to LGBTQIA+ persons. Concurrently, the rise of unhoused individuals on the Shore continues as reported in a September 2023 new story aired on WMDT 47- ABC. Accordingly, making Maryland’s shelters more inclusive is an urgent need and PFLAG Salisbury recommends a favorable report.

### **Appendix**

Williams Institute (2020). Homelessness Among LGBT Adults.

<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-homelessness-us/>

The Trevor Project (2022). Homelessness and Housing Instability Among LGBT Youth.

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/>

WMDT (2023). Homelessness Growing in Salisbury A Need for More Community Support.

<https://www.wmdt.com/2023/09/homelessness-growing-in-salisbury-a-need-for-more-community-support/>

Prison Policy Project (2019). LGBT Youth. [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2019/01/22/lgbtq\\_youth/](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2019/01/22/lgbtq_youth/)

Center for American Progress. (2007). LGBT Youth An Epidemic of Homelessness: Full Report.

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/566c7f0c2399a3bdabb57553/t/566cc0fb2399a3bdabb7de23/1449967867985/2007-NGLTF-NCH-LGBT-Youth\\_An-Epidemic-of-Homelessness-FULL-REPORT1.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/566c7f0c2399a3bdabb57553/t/566cc0fb2399a3bdabb7de23/1449967867985/2007-NGLTF-NCH-LGBT-Youth_An-Epidemic-of-Homelessness-FULL-REPORT1.pdf)