



Mission: *To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy* **Vision:** *Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities*

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 691
Legally Protected Health Care - Gender-Affirming Treatment
Before the House Health and Government Operations Committee
By: Maryland Public Health Association (MdpHA)
February 21, 2024**

Chair Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Vice-Chair Bonnie Cullison, and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of HB0691. HB0691 would add gender-affirming care to the definition of legally protected healthcare in Maryland. As a state that values equality and human rights, Maryland can ensure that transgender and gender non-conforming people have equitable access to the health care services they need to live healthy, fulfilling lives. This legislation would affirm the right of people to access medical services that align with their gender identity, free from stigma, discrimination, or barriers to care.

Twenty-two states so far have enacted bans on gender affirming care.¹ Our neighbors, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia, have either banned or proposed bans on gender affirming care. People seeking gender affirming care are vulnerable and need protection to ensure equitable access to health care. This is a matter of public health. Transgender individuals are six times more likely to experience a mood or anxiety disorder than the general population and are more than six times more likely to attempt suicide.² HB0691 would make Maryland a safe-haven by ensuring that access to gender affirming care is protected from out-of-state litigation, as eleven states and the District of Columbia have already done.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We respectfully urge the Committee to return a favorable report on HB0691.

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdpHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdpHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.

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¹ <https://www.hrc.org/resources/attacks-on-gender-affirming-care-by-state-map>

² <https://ysph.yale.edu/news-article/transgender-individuals-at-greater-risk-of-mental-health-problems/>