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**BILL:** House Bill 691 - Legally Protected Health Care - Gender-Affirming Treatment

**DATE:** February 21, 2024

**POSITION:** FAVORABLE

**COMMITTEE:** Health and Government Operations

Annapolis Pride's mission is to advocate for, empower, and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community in Anne Arundel County to live fully and authentically. Our vision is a safe, equitable, and anti-racist community where people of all identities thrive. As such, Annapolis Pride **supports** House Bill 691, which adds gender-affirming healthcare to the definition of "legally protected healthcare" in Maryland.

While a simple bill, House Bill 691 carries symbolic weight. It sends a clear message in state law that Maryland stands firmly in support of transgender and gender-expansive individuals and their right to access essential healthcare. This legislation is not about expanding access, but about safeguarding the access that already exists within our state.

Without this essential legislation, both individuals seeking and providers who offer gender-affirming care in Maryland could face extradition to other states that have outlawed such care. This risk of legal action in other jurisdictions could discourage individuals from seeking this necessary healthcare and deter providers from offering it, creating a significant barrier to access for transgender and gender-diverse individuals.

Including gender-affirming care within the definition of "legally protected health care" reinforces current medical standards and best practices endorsed by major medical associations, including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Both organizations recognize gender-affirming care as medically-necessary care that improves the physical and mental health of transgender and gender-diverse individuals. Studies have consistently found that gender-affirming care, including social transition, hormone therapy, and surgery, reduces risks of suicide ideation and improves overall mental well-being.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, Annapolis Pride respectfully requests a **favorable** committee report on House Bill 691.

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson D. Suicide-Related Outcomes Following Gender-Affirming Treatment: A Review. *Cureus*. 2023 Mar 20;15(3):e36425. doi: 10.7759/cureus.36425. PMID: 36950718; PMCID: PMC10027312.