

BRIAN E. FROSH
Attorney General



ELIZABETH HARRIS
Chief Deputy Attorney General

CAROLYN QUATTROCKI
Deputy Attorney General

FACSIMILE NO.

STATE OF MARYLAND
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

WRITER'S DIRECT DIAL NO.

February 25, 2020

To: The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee

From: The Office of the Attorney General

Re: HB 579 - Maryland Commission on Civil Rights – Civil Penalties (SUPPORT)

The Office of the Attorney General supports House Bill 579 which would increase the specified minimum and the maximum civil penalties that the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR) is authorized to seek if it finds that a respondent has engaged in a discriminatory act regarding public accommodations or specified actions of persons licensed or regulated by the Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation.

The Office of the Attorney General has a longstanding commitment to ending discrimination in Maryland. The adoption of HB 579 would help advance that goal. In fiscal year 2018, the MCCR received 81 complaints of discrimination in places of public accommodation, a relatively low figure. MCCR indicated that one of the major factors contributing to consistently low number of complaints is that the statute does not mandate any type of financial relief for the complainant. Although under current law MCCR can assess a civil penalty, those monies are deposited into the State's general fund.

House Bill 579 will incentivize compliance with the State's anti-discrimination laws for public accommodations by allowing MCCR to seek higher civil penalties and direct those monies to the victims of discrimination. House Bill 579 offers Marylanders an additional tool to protect against discrimination and to root out wrongdoing where it is taking place.

For these reasons, the Office of the Attorney General supports its passage and respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report.

cc: Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee